A Hopeful Future for Asia

40th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

Veena Yoshino

This year marks the 40th year of the ASEAN-Japan friendship and cooperation and in celebration, a series of events are taking place in Japan. The most recent commemorative event was the ASEAN Festival held on October 5 and 6 in Yamashita Park at Yokohama City sponsored by the Japan ASEAN Center. The festival’s attractions included ASEAN foods and goods, performances by artists of ASEAN countries, culinary demonstrations by ASEAN chefs, and a number of live performances. The actual number of guests was about 100,000,
which far exceeded the expected turnout. Other planned events include seminars to promote Muslim tourism from ASEAN, career development support for ASEAN students in Japan, and the ASEAN Dream Plan Presentation.

With a total of 10 member nations, ASEAN has become one of the most powerful regional alliances in the world. The 1967 founding countries of ASEAN were Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Singapore. Brunei was the sixth member to join in 1984, followed by Viet Nam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. The relationship between Japan and ASEAN began at the ASEAN Synthetic Rubber Forum in 1973 where Japan discussed rubber export problems with ASEAN countries (five countries at that time). The discussion was positive and extremely successful. The formal relationship between ASEAN and Japan started when former Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda attended the 1977 ASEAN-Japan summit meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Fukuda set the base of the relationship and created a historic milestone with his new foreign policy toward Southeast Asia. The Fukuda Doctrine as it later became known still places great emphasis on frank conversation. Since the beginning, the relationships between Japan and ASEAN members have been strengthening and as a result, the region has seen a huge growth in economic, social and political spheres.

Japan’s cooperation in technical fields as well as in exchanges of culture and education has also been important. Furthermore, in the past 10 years especially, investment and tourism interchanges have shown great increase in activity. Japanese culture, from pop music, anime and manga to Japanese traditional sports (nihon budo), has been explosively popular in ASEAN countries. For example, if you say the word ‘manga’ outside Japan, it’s an internationally understood lingua franca referring to Japanese manga. Also, translated manga publications are on the increase in Southeast Asia. The relationship between each country’s citizens...
is the ASEAN-Japan partnership’s biggest investment. Japan’s major exchange program, JENESYS Programme (Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for student and youth) invites approximately 6,000 youths each year from overseas including ASEAN countries to foster understanding and friendship. Past examples of JENESYS program projects include the exchange between youth soccer players of Japan and five ASEAN countries in 2009. As this was the Japan-Mekong exchange year, soccer players of the U-15 national teams from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Viet Nam and Thailand came to Japan to participate in joint practices and friendly matches.

After taking up office in January 2013, Prime Minister Abe visited three Southeast Asian countries, Thailand, Viet Nam and Indonesia for the first time. After the summit meeting, he announced the five diplomatic principals (see p.9) for ASEAN countries, and stated that as partners of equal basis, Japan and ASEAN will continue to move forward together. He also stated that one of the main aims is “to carry out more active exchanges of young people responsible for the future” and to invite Asian youth, including those from ASEAN countries, to Japan through the ‘JENESYS 2.0 Programme’—implemented at a scale of 30,000 participants. With a view toward revitalization of the Japanese economy, JENESYS 2.0 aims to foster appreciation of Japan in Asian youth, including those from ASEAN countries, as well as stimulate an increase in foreign visitors and promote international understanding of Japanese values and the strength and attractiveness of Japanese brands including Cool Japan. Participants will visit various regions in Japan and will study and gain understanding about regional culture. Furthermore, they will experience the high level of technology of Japanese industry and understand the strengths of ‘made in Japan’ products. They will take this knowledge back to their home countries, which are expected to propel the creation of new industries. Exchange between young generations from ASEAN countries that will support the future, is an undertaking that is directed at a mutually beneficial relationship between Japan and ASEAN.

The Japan-ASEAN relationship, which began 40 years ago at the Synthetic Rubber Forum, is one of the most important relationships that both Japan and ASEAN currently have and is expected to contribute to the development of each country and the prosperity of Asia as a whole.

Mr. Dananjaya Axioma (Director of the Tourism & Exchange Division at the ASEAN-Japan Center) really empathizes with this relationship. “ASEAN has great potential; each of the countries are doing very well, not just economically but socially as well, and we see the growth in people. It is true that Japan has some of the best technology in the world but ASEAN has a huge amount of natural resources. Currently, the ASEAN-Japan relationship, I think, is most important to Japan as well as to ASEAN.”
Feature 40th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

Prime Minister Abe Visits the ten ASEAN Countries

Only approximately one year in office, Prime Minister Abe has visited all ten member countries of ASEAN to further strengthen ties with them. He will welcome all ASEAN leaders to Tokyo on December during the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit.

Viet Nam, President Truong Tan Sang

Myanmar, President Thein Sein

Indonesia, President Dr. H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono

Philippines, President Aquino

Thailand, Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra

Singapore, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

Brunei, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah

Malaysia, Prime Minister Najib Razak

Cambodia, Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Samdech Hun Sen

Laos, President H.E. Mr. Choummaly Sayasone
From the perspective of moving forward as an equal partner with ASEAN countries, Prime Minister Abe announced the ‘Five Principles of Japan's ASEAN Diplomacy’ in January 2013. These principles are described below:

1. Firstly, to protect and promote together with ASEAN member states universal values, such as freedom, democracy and basic human rights.

2. Secondly, to ensure in cooperation with ASEAN member states that the free and open seas, which are the most vital common asset, are governed by laws and rules and not by force, and to welcome the United States' rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region.

3. Thirdly, to further promote trade and investment, including flows of goods, money, people and services, through various economic partnership networks, for Japan's economic revitalization and prosperity of both Japan and ASEAN member states.

4. Fourthly, to protect and nurture Asia's diverse cultural heritages and traditions.

5. And fifthly, to promote exchanges among the young generations to further foster mutual understanding.