

# Japan keen to deepen ties, says Abe

'Tokyo hopes to broaden relations with KL beyond economic and social fields'

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The scope of Japan-Malaysia cooperation is being extended beyond bilateral relations and towards working for peace and prosperity in the region and the world, says former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe (pic).

Japan, he said, was determined to continue to work hand in hand with Malaysia to strengthen the free and open international order.

"Japan and Malaysia, as strategic partners sharing strategic interests and fundamental values such as democracy and the rule of law, continue to broaden their scope of cooperation beyond economic and social fields," he told Bernama in a written interview ahead of his arrival here on Thursday night for a three-day official visit as the special envoy of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Going forward, Abe said, it would be meaningful for both countries to further promote security and maritime safety cooperation as well as capacity building for the realisation



of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" and the "Asean Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)" to secure peace and prosperity in the region and international community.

He said the Indo-Pacific region, where Japan and Malaysia are located, was facing serious chal-

lenges to its free and open international order based on the rule of law from attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force and economic coercion.

"Both Japan and Malaysia are democracies, trading countries and maritime nations.

"The existing international order, not the rule of force, is nothing less than a catalyst that enables the two countries to develop.

"I am convinced that maintaining and strengthening this order will bring peace and prosperity to the region," he said.

Abe, who was prime minister twice – for a total of nine years – and the longest-serving head of government in Japanese history, said Japan was promoting FOIP and would actively cooperate with its partners including Malaysia, which he described as "our running mate", to realise the AOIP that shared many fundamental principles.

He cited as an example the enhancement of the rule of law at

sea where Japan had supported capacity building of Malaysian coast guard officers since the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency was established in 2005.

"The coast guard officers benefited from this assistance and now serve as instructors to provide training to third countries. I am confident that Japan will continue to work with Malaysia in this field," he added.

Abe's visit to Malaysia coincides with the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Malaysia and the 40th anniversary of Malaysia's Japan-centric "Look East Policy" of emulating Japanese work ethic and managerial systems to improve its economic performance and productivity.

"I am making my first visit in seven years to Malaysia, as a special envoy of the Prime Minister. I visited Malaysia three times as the prime minister of Japan, and each time I had been amazed and aston-

ished by its remarkable economic growth," he said.

About 1,500 Japanese companies are operating in Malaysia.

Abe said that besides assisting the Malaysian government's Covid-19 response, Japan also supported smart city projects in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Baru and Kuching.

Describing the Look East Policy initiated by then prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as the foundation for such cordial bilateral relations, Abe said under this policy, more than 26,000 young Malaysians had studied and trained in Japan.

The Japanese government is also supporting the University of Tsukuba's opening of a branch campus in Malaysia, the first foreign campus of a Japanese university.

"I would like to take this opportunity to ask the younger generation and the rest of the Malaysian people to spur Japan-Malaysia relations, which have vast potential," he added.