

Japanese PM Koizumi Told DIPLOMACY:

## "Buds of Reform Will Be Nurtured Into a Large Tree"

Question : Your Excellency Junichiro Koizumi, Prime Minister of Japan, what major problems are you facing in Japan today?

Answer : In order to ensure the security of Japanese society and for the economy to prosper, peace and prosperity of the world is essential. The basis for Japan's foreign policy is strengthening the Japan-United States alliance relationship and international cooperation with neighboring countries, including the Republic of Korea (ROK) and China.

Based on this basic understanding, Japan, on its own initiative is addressing a variety of issues, including North Korea, humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Iraq, countering international terrorism, prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, maintenance of the international free trade system, and realization of both environmental protection and economic development.

Since I assumed the office of Prime Minister three years ago under my policy of "Without reform, there will be no growth," I have tackled a series of economic and social structural reforms in Japan. The Japanese economy is steadily moving towards recovery. I am pressing forward with reforms to ensure that the "buds of reform" will be nurtured into a "large tree" and that such results permeate through the rural areas of Japan and the small and medium enterprises.

Q : What is the prospect of relations between Japan and Korea?

A : Given all that, Japan shares with the Republic of Korea (ROK): geographic proximity, historical links, common basic values and socioeconomic systems, coupled with alliance arrangements with the United States of America to name but a few. The ROK is a partner of utmost importance not only in the Northeast Asian region, but in the international community overall. Relations between two countries are in tremendously good shape.

On July 21 and 22, I visited Jeju Island, where, in a relaxed atmosphere, I held summit talks with President Roh Moo-hyun of the Republic of Korea. In those talks, we frankly shared opinions on the measures we could take to deepen mutual understanding and exchange between the people of our two countries.

In particular, given that next year will mark the 40th Anniversary of the Normalization of Relations between Japan and the ROK, a variety of exchange programs are planned for the "Year 2005 of Friendship between Japan-ROK."

At the summit, we discussed that 2005 should therefore provide plentiful opportunities to further promote mutual understanding and friendship at every level of society, including among the younger generation. We talked about the promotion of exchange in all areas including sports, arts and culture.

The catch phrase for "Japan-ROK Friendship Year" is "Together! Toward the Future, Into the World" It is in that spirit that we are seeking to move Japan-ROK relations forward.

On the occasion of the summit meeting, I also announced that, timed to coincide with the 2005 World Exposition in Aichi, for a half year period from March to September, visa requirements for ROK citizens will be temporarily waived. Based on the results of the limited period test, consideration would be given to the permanent waiving of visa requirements.

In addition, President Roh affirmed that in order to further vitalize economic activities by minimizing the barriers to the movement of people, goods, and capital between our two countries, all efforts would be made towards the conclusion of Japan-ROK free trade agreement negotiations by the end of next year.

I agreed with President Roh that we would continue to hold summit level meetings. A summit meeting would take place in Japan before the end of the year in an equally candid atmosphere. I am intent on making all efforts to ensure that the people of Japan and the ROK can, while being mindful of past history, look to the future and create Japan-ROK relations that can contribute to our mutual benefit and to the peace and prosperity of the international community as a whole.

Q: What is the best way to resolve the nuclear problem in North Korea?

A: With regard to the North Korea nuclear issue, Japan's fundamental aim is to peacefully and diplomatically resolve the issue through the process of the Six-Party Talks. For this, it is imperative that North Korea should dismantle all its nuclear programs completely under international verification. Japan shares this aim with both the ROK and the U.S. Japan is cooperating closely with these two countries on specific measures to achieve this.

In the third round of Six-Party Talks held at the end of June in Beijing, substantive discussion took place on the nuclear issue. A specific idea for the first step of nuclear dismantlement was proposed by North Korea.

This marked a degree of progress in creating a beneficial platform for future discussion. Based on the Japan-North Korea Summit Meeting that took place in May, I believe that Japan was also able to contribute to progress the discussions.

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that there are significant differences in the various stances of the countries involved. For example, North Korea still refuses to acknowledge the existence of a uranium enrichment program. For North Korea, it is not by owning nuclear weapons, but rather by giving them up and becoming a responsible member of the international community that would enable them to enjoy maximum benefits.

I pressed this point directly to Chairman of the National Defense Commission, Kim Jong-il, during the summit meeting in May. The upcoming Six-Party Talks, specifically the fourth round of talks, is scheduled by the end of September. Also, in working group meetings scheduled prior to that, Japan will cooperate with other participating countries to urge the North Korean side to take positive measures towards a resolution of issues is further strengthened.

Q: What is the best way to solve the Iraqi problem?

A: I believe that the reconstruction of Iraq must be undertaken by the Iraqi people themselves. The international community must provide concerted assistance to help the Iraqis in their efforts.

Japan has called for the strengthening of international cooperation in Iraq's reconstruction and made diplomatic efforts, including the dispatch of special envoys to countries concerned and also to the United Nations, in addition to efforts for concerted assistance with Germany, France and Arab countries. Japan welcomes the unanimous adoption of the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1546 and also the successful transfer of sovereignty to the interim government of Iraq.

In promoting humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Iraq, Japan is promoting both personnel contribution through the dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and economic cooperation utilizing Official Development Assistance (ODA), as the two wheels of a cart.

The deployment comprises all three defense forces ground, air and maritime including the ground SDF dispatched to Samawah, who are engaged in humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in the areas of water supply and medical services. In terms of economic cooperation, Japan announced a financial assistance package totaling up to US\$5 billion at the International Donors' Conference on Reconstruction of Iraq held in Madrid in October 2003. The package comprises of a US\$1.5 billion in grant aid assistance (emphasis on rebuilding the basis of daily life of the Iraqi people, such as power generation, education, water and sanitation, health and employment, and also on improving security), and also up to US\$3.5 billion, mainly in yen loans, in order to assist with medium term reconstruction needs by the year 2007. Assistance already implemented or decided upon amounts to a total of approximately US\$1.15 billion.

Although one cannot predict the security situation in Iraq, it is important to promote reconstruction in order to improve security and advance the political process. I will continue to call for a leading role of the United Nations in assisting the political process. I also plan to host the meeting of the Donors' Committee of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) in Japan in October and further enhance the international cooperation structure.