

Japan: Shinzo Abe and leaders of ASEAN will discuss mid- and long-term strategies - China, disasters

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China, disasters key at ASEAN-Japan summit

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations will discuss mid- and long-term strategies to strengthen their ties during summit talks to be held Friday through Sunday in Tokyo.

During the weekend gathering, dubbed the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, the leaders are expected to compile strategies primarily in four areas: politics, economy, disaster prevention and healthcare, and personnel and cultural exchanges.

Another important agenda item for Japan is how it can deepen cooperation with ASEAN countries that also have territorial disputes with China to address such problems.

Ahead of the weekend talks, Abe and Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak met at the Prime Minister's Office on Thursday morning. Abe talked about China's newly established air defense identification zone over the East China Sea, which includes the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture, saying: "[China's move] is a unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force. I can't accept the move."

Abe also said: "China has hinted at the possibility of establishing an ADIZ over other airspace. It's likely to threaten the ASEAN region as well."

Najib reportedly expressed his understanding of Abe's remarks and said he will work to prevent tensions in the region from rising.

In the field of disaster prevention, Japan is likely to share its skills and technology for preventing and reducing the damage from natural disasters under a new framework, because natural disasters that inflict enormous damage are occurring more frequently in the region.

2013 marks the 40th year of dialogue between Tokyo and ASEAN, prompting them to hammer out concrete directions to strengthen their ties. This is the second time for Japan to host the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit; it previously did so in 2003.

On the sidelines of the summit talks, the prime minister is scheduled to hold bilateral meetings with leaders of nine member countries from Friday through Sunday, in addition to the talks with the Malaysian prime minister that were held on Thursday. Abe and Philippine President Benigno Aquino are expected to discuss Japan's help in recovering from the damage the Philippines suffered due to Typhoon Haiyan in November.

Aiming to draw on the rapid economic growth in the region, as well as hold China in check, Abe has stressed his stance of giving weight to relations with ASEAN members, a position clearly expressed

by his actions. The prime minister has visited all 10 ASEAN countries, starting with Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia in January. It is the first time for a Japanese prime minister to visit all ASEAN members in a year.

Abe also attended an ASEAN summit held in Brunei in October. A diplomatic source said 2013 has been memorable for the ASEAN-Japan relationship.

The region is having an increasing impact on Japan's economy as well. In a speech Abe made on the ASEAN-Japan relationship in Singapore in July, he said both Japan's imports from and exports to ASEAN members have doubled over the past decade. The prime minister compared relations between Japan and ASEAN members to an airplane, saying, "Japan and ASEAN are like twin engines on the right and left wings."

Yuka Kumakura, *Japan News* Staff Writer, December 13, 2013

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* <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0000866242>