

Japan seeks to be regional hub

Economic blueprint with a long-term vision under study

By KWAN WENG KIN
JAPAN CORRESPONDENT

TOKYO: Japan will be transformed into a major regional hub if the incoming government led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) adopts an economic blueprint aimed at revitalising the country.

It will be a hub not only for goods and services, but also for human resources, tourism, trade and investments.

The blueprint for this economic vision was submitted to Prime Minister-elect Yukio Hatoyama on Thursday by Mr Nobuo Ishihara, a former deputy chief Cabinet secretary who has served under seven previous administrations.

Mr Hatoyama, whose DPJ scored a landslide win in the Aug 30 general election, will be sworn in as prime minister next Wednesday.

Mr Ishihara, 82, is understood to have advised him to adopt the "economic hub vision" as the centrepiece of the new government's policies.

A study group comprising mostly DPJ politicians - some of them potential ministers in the new Cabinet - has held brainstorming sessions since the end of last year.

Speaking at the group's meeting here on Wednesday, Mr Ishihara described the vision as "epoch-making".

"It will be very good for the image of the new government if it

can accomplish what previous administrations had not been able to do," he told the group.

Japan has lacked a clear long-term economic vision as previous administrations devoted most of their energies to economic stimulus measures to prop up the ailing economy.

Mr Ishihara has also told Mr Hatoyama that since the implementation of the vision will involve the entire bureaucracy, it could be the first project to be tackled by the proposed National Strategy Bureau, which will oversee all major policy-planning in the new government.

Mr Ishihara, also a former top bureaucrat, is well-respected in Japanese political circles because of his impartiality and his wealth of experience in government administration.

But the economic hub vision would probably not have come this far without the efforts of Mr Koji Suzuki, 52, who describes himself as a "total project producer".

Since 1983, Mr Suzuki has worked on various business projects for clients that involved not only planning, but also dealing with Japanese and foreign government authorities, including in Singapore, Hong Kong and the former Soviet Union.

"There is a lot of official red tape in Japan, whether in the private sector or the government. To ensure that any project can succeed, it is necessary to break down these barriers," he said.

Many obstacles to doing business still remain in Japan. For instance, Japanese airports and harbours have failed to become hubs like their rivals in the region due to inflexible labour practices that oppose 24-hour operations, lack of coordination among govern-

ment agencies, and problems in the distribution industry.

From his previous work with port authorities and companies in the region, Mr Suzuki hatched the economic hub vision several years ago and has since been seeking support for his ideas from the DPJ.

He saw the birth of the new administration as a golden opportunity to make the vision a reality and roped in Mr Ishihara, an associate of over 20 years' standing, to help push it.

"It was fortunate that we and the DPJ politicians both shared the recognition that this was the right time to move," said Mr Suzuki.

The participation of foreign companies and governments in the region will be needed to implement the vision.

For instance, the know-how accumulated by Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea, all of which have successfully turned airports and harbours into regional hubs, will benefit the Japanese.

Japan is also keen to draw more foreign investments from countries in the region, not just by facilitating business activity here but also by making it easier for foreigners to live in this country.

As the world economy recovers, foreign investors are expected to step up activity here.

The China Investment Corporation (CIC), China's sovereign wealth fund, told the influential Asahi Shimbun daily last month that it expects to increase overseas investment by around 10 times this year. CIC president Gao Xiqing also told the paper that it was actively looking into new investments in Japanese companies and properties.

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「The Straits Times」シンガポール発信の世界紙(欧米、中国 500 万人購読)
9 月 12 日掲載の記事

記者 Mr. Kwan Weng Kin

和訳 概要:

日本はリージョナル・ハブを模索する。
———— 長期ビジョンのある経済の青写真を研究中

もしも民主党(DPJ)によって率いられる次期政府が、国を再活性化するための経済の青写真(下記のスタディ・グループによるハブ化ビジョン)を採用するなら、日本はメジャーなリージョナル・ハブ(主要な域内ハブ)に生まれ変わるだろう。それは、モノやサービスのハブに止まらず、人的資源、観光、貿易、投資のためのハブでもある。

この経済ビジョンの青写真は、この木曜日に石原信雄氏(過去 7 代の政権を支えた元副内閣官房長官)によって、鳩山由紀夫 次期首相に提出された。

鳩山氏(彼の率いる民主党は 8 月 30 日の総選挙で大差の勝利を得点した)は、今週水曜日に首相に就任する。

石原氏(82)は、新政府の政策の中核として「経済ハブ・ビジョン」を採用するよう、その鳩山氏に進言したと理解される。

主に民主党の政治家より成るスタディ・グループ(彼らの何人かは新内閣の大臣と目されている)は、昨年末よりブレインストーミング・セッションを続けてきた。

先の水曜日(9月9日)の同グループ会合で、石原氏は、このビジョンを「画期的である」と述べた。「これまでの政権ができなかったことを達成できるなら、新政府のイメージには非常に良くなるだろう」と、彼はグループに言った。

これまでの政権が病んだ経済を支援するための景気刺激策に傾注していたために、日本は明確な長期の経済ビジョンを欠いてきた。

石原氏は鳩山氏に向けて、ビジョンの実現は官僚体制全体に関わるので、新政権の主要な政策立案を監督する「国家戦略局」が取り組むべき最初のプロジェクトにすべきだ、とも進言した。

元トップ官僚である石原氏は、政府運営における、彼の公平さと経験の豊かさにより、日本の政界で大変尊敬されている。

しかしこの「経済ハブ・ビジョン」は、総合プロジェクト・プロデューサー、鈴木浩二氏の努力なくしては、この長い道のりをここまで来ることは出来なかつただろう。

1983 年以来、鈴木氏は計画のみならず、日本政府や海外政府当局(シンガポール、香港、旧ソヴィエト等)との交渉をも伴った、様々な事業プロジェクトに携わってきた。

日本には、民間・政府を問わず、タテ割りで閉じた慣行がある。どんなプロジェクトも、成功させるためには、これらのカベを壊すことが必要だ、と彼は言う。

日本には、ビジネスを行うにあたっての多くの障害が残っている。例えば、日本の空港・港湾は、24時間体制に反対する柔軟性のない労働慣行や、政府機関の間での調整の不足、流通・物流産業における問題等によって、域内の日本のライバル国のようなハブになれなかった。

彼の、(アジア)域内の港湾局や港湾会社との先行研究から、鈴木氏は、数年前に経済ハブ・ビジョンを打ち立て、以来、彼のアイデアへの民主党のサポートを模索してきた。

彼は、新政権の誕生を、このビジョンを実現させるまたとないチャンスであるとみなして、これを推すために20年来の共同者である石原氏と連携した。

「私たちと民主党の政治家がともに、今こそ行動する時だという認識を共有できたのは幸いだ」と、鈴木氏は言った。

ビジョンの実行には、(アジア)域内の海外企業や政府の参加が必要となるだろう。例えば、シンガポール、香港、韓国など、首尾よく空港・港湾を域内のハブとさせた国々が蓄積するノウハウは、日本人の利益となるだろう。

日本はまた、ビジネス活動の促進だけでなく、外国人が住みやすくすることによって、域内の国々から、より多くの海外直接投資を得ることを切望している。

世界経済が回復すれば、海外からの投資が積極化することが期待される。

中国政府系投資ファンド CIC (China Investment Corporation) は、今年の対外直接投資を約10倍に増やす考えであると、先月、大手メディア朝日新聞に述べた。CICの高西慶 Gao Xiqing 代表は同紙に、日本の企業や不動産への新規投資を積極的に目指したい、とも述べた。

和訳作成: 村松

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