

## **Japan to provide patrol boats to Philippines via development aid**

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan is considering providing patrol vessels to the Philippines through a development aid program to help the Southeast Asian country improve its maritime security capabilities, senior government officials said Friday.

After receiving an official request from the Philippines, Japan is ready to work out the specifics, including how many and what kind of vessels will be provided, the officials said.

In late February, Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba said Japan is ready to provide patrol boats to coastal developing countries in an attempt to improve the security of international sea lanes and help them combat pirates and terrorism.

The provision, using Japan's official development assistance, has been under consideration since the government eased the principles on arms exports in December.

The government is planning to send a team of experts to the Philippines in the foreseeable future to find out its needs and maintenance capabilities for such vessels, the officials said on condition of anonymity.

Last September, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and Philippine President Benigno Aquino agreed to strengthen cooperation in ensuring maritime security, as China's assertiveness in their neighboring waters has been growing in recent years.

Depending on the needs of the Philippines, Japan will decide

whether the planned provision is to be financed under a grant aid or a yen loan program, the officials said.

Since the relaxation of Japan's so-called "three principles" on arms exports, the government had once considered providing patrol boats to Yemen. But the officials said the consideration is now suspended because of Yemen's political turmoil.

It was controversial when Japan decided to provide three patrol boats to Indonesia in 2006, which was the first time for Tokyo to commit armored equipment to another country as part of its official development assistance.

At the time, the government had to release a special statement saying the provision was intended to contribute to Indonesia's peace and nonmilitary purposes, as the boats, equipped with bulletproof glass and heavily armored, were regarded as falling within the scope of the three principles.

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