

Loan plan for new Philippines patrol ships unveiled

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MANILA – Prime Minister Shinzo Abe unveiled a plan at a meeting Saturday with Philippine President Benigno Aquino to provide Manila with 10 coast guard patrol ships through a yen loan to help it counter an increasingly assertive China.

In addition, to help achieve peace on Mindanao, where the Philippines' largest Muslim rebel group is in conflict with the government, Abe revealed a new official development assistance package aimed at building schools and clinics, and at developing personnel for an autonomous political entity to be established.

"Relations between Japan and the Philippines are rooted in their long-term friendly history and exchanges," Abe said in a joint news conference with Aquino after the summit in Manila, pledging to further strengthen bilateral ties through new Japanese assistance.

Tokyo's response to Manila's request for patrol ships to beef up its coast guard comes as the Philippines and China quarrel over territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Japan meanwhile is trying to check China's activities in the East China Sea, where Tokyo and Beijing are involved in the Senkaku Islands dispute, by confirming Japan-Philippines cooperation in safeguarding maritime rights and interests.

In the talks, Abe also explained the debate rating in Japan on constitutional revision and whether Japan should be able to engage in collective self-defense, a gesture reflecting concern in other Asian countries over his government's purported tilt to the right on defense and wartime history issues. Collective defense is banned under the government's current interpretation of the war-renouncing Constitution that was drafted after it lost World War II.

Abe claimed such principles as pacifism, the sovereignty of the people and respect for basic human rights would be the precondition for revision, adding that discussions are "deepening" on what kind of constitution best suits modern Japan.

The ban on collective self-defense is being considered "from the viewpoint of ensuring safety for Japan and contributing to the Japan-U.S. alliance, and regional peace and stability," Abe was quoted as telling Aquino.

At a separate news conference before leaving Manila, Abe said he talked about the same issues with the leaders of Malaysia and Singapore before coming to the Philippines.

Abe added that he intends to carefully explain his government's stance to avoid a "misunderstanding" in the region and said Japan is simply trying to do some of what "almost all the other countries can naturally do."

At the joint news conference after the summit, Aquino said he and Abe agreed to strengthen maritime cooperation, saying with China in mind that Japan and the Philippines "pledged to cooperate in advancing our common advocacy for responsible action from international players."

"We believe that this can be done by upholding the rule of law in international affairs and by finding just and peaceful solutions to our territorial disputes and maritime concerns," he added.

In the summit, Abe made a package of proposals in the areas of the economy and people-to-people exchanges, such as developing metropolitan infrastructure, accepting Filipino nurses and caregivers, and increasing flights between the two countries, according to a Japanese official.

Abe also announced a ¥10 billion "standby loan" for the Philippines for use after disasters and conveyed Japan's readiness to strengthen their "strategic partnership" in light of shared "strategic interests" and fundamental values.

www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/28/national/loan-plan-for-new-philippines-patrol-ships-unveiled/#.UfXnbFPZRGE