KOKORO TO KOKORO NO KANKEI: MALAYSIA’S RESPONSE TO THE AFTERMATH OF THE JAPANESE EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI

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Introduction

An earthquake of magnitude nine on the Richter scale accompanied by a tsunami of gigantic proportions struck the Tohoku region due to a radiation leak at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011. Suffice to say, huge losses of property as well as thousands of lives were lost. An estimated 1.2 million household experienced loss of electricity while 1.4 million homes encountered a disruption of water supply, 20,000 people died or disappeared, and the destruction area was in excess of 600 sq km. Residents were ordered to relocate with the Japanese government providing 2,500 evacuation centers for the victims including in schools and public halls. What was Malaysia’s response after the disaster since Japan is always described as a very close friend? This article analyzes the reaction of the government and people of Malaysia after the tragedy as proof of Japan’s influence to Malaysia and vice-versa as a friend in need and hence a friend indeed, friends in happier times or times of hardship, this special bond which can be termed a heart-to-heart relationship (kokoro to kokoro no kankei).

This article is divided into three parts: the first is to analyze the responses from Malaysia, particularly at the government and societal level. Second is to evaluate the reaction and responses of the Japanese after receiving aid, and third to assess why kokoro to kokoro no kankei is important in bilateral relations. Researchers argue that the long term relationship in terms of economy, politics and social relations between the two countries is a major factor as to why Malaysians were willing to lend a hand to the people of Japan. Besides, Japan is considered very close to Malaysians considering the very many aspects of life from home appliances extending to the influence of Japanese soft power in the form of anime series amongst other things. Such feelings are translated into the general willingness of Malaysians as a whole to lend every assistance from financial and humanitarian aid to prove the existance of kokoro to kokoro no kankei.

1 The authors thank the Japan Foundation Research Grant for sponsoring this research.
2 “BSMM Serah Baki Dana Tabung Bencana Jepun”, Harian Metro, 21 May 2012.