

## **Prime Minister's proposed visit to Japan**

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will pay a four-day official visit to Japan from November 28, following an invitation extended by Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

On November 29, Ms Hasina will hold summit talks with Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan and sign a joint statement expected to be issued on Japan's cooperation to construct the long-awaited Padma Bridge in Bangladesh.

Before the official meeting, the Bangladesh PM will hold meetings with JICA president S. Ogata, Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) President Y Hayashi, Japan-Bangladesh Committee for Commercial Economic Cooperation (JBCCEC) and Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI).

The Prime Minister will visit Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Park and attend a reception to be arranged by Japan-Bangladesh Friendship Association and Hiroshima Peace and Culture Foundation on November 30. Sheikh Hasina will meet with Emperor Akhito of Japan on 1<sup>st</sup> December at the Imperial Palace and returns home on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

The visit is timely and is an important one since Japan is a significant development partner to Bangladesh since 1972. During the visit, it is reported that several agreements are likely to be concluded for Bangladesh projects.

### *State of Bilateral relations:*

Japan opened its Embassy in Dhaka in March, 1972 after according recognition to Bangladesh on 10th February, 1972. Soon after the opening of the Embassy the Japanese government sent Takashi Hayakawa to Bangladesh to assess the needs of the new nation, followed by a team of Japanese experts. Japan came forward with aid, trade and investment in Bangladesh.

Relationship with Japan has become one of the priorities of Bangladesh successive governments. The heads of government of Bangladesh, irrespective of their political affiliations, invariably visited Japan and met with Japanese leaders to strengthen relations in every possible sector.

It may be recalled that in October 1973, Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who visited Japan had laid the solid foundation of bilateral relations. In 1975 their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Japan visited Bangladesh.

Subsequently, all heads of government of Bangladesh visited Japan to strengthen bilateral relations. President Zia visited Japan in April, 1978, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 1997 and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in 2005.

Japanese assistance in Bangladesh continues to be multi-faceted, involving primarily in sectors, such as, infrastructure, energy, education, healthcare, human resource development, agriculture, and institutional capacity building. Japan also provides funds to NGOs for projects that are directed toward welfare of the poor.

Japan Bank for International Co-operation (JBIC), a conglomerate of Japan's Export-Import Bank and Japan's Official Aid Agency, is a key player in channeling development assistance to Bangladesh. Japan's official development assistance has three components—grant aid, technical co-operation and loans.

The Meghna Bridge was built at the cost of US\$7.9 billion with the Japanese assistance. This appears to be the single largest project with Japanese assistance anywhere in the world.

In 2009, Japan provided \$800,000 for technical assistance with regard to the construction of the 5.5 kilometre long Padma Bridge in the country and the Japan Bank of International Cooperation has committed to provide funds of about US\$ 300 million for the Padma Bridge.

Japan is keen to support power sector in Bangladesh after completion of formulating the ongoing comprehensive power development master plan for attaining stable power supply up to 2030. JICA is reportedly conducting the formulation of the master plan on the basis of diversification of fuel resources to be completed by the end of this year.. It is reported that necessary technology transfer from Japan would be carried out in the master plan.

Japan's contribution to humanitarian programs after each natural disaster in Bangladesh has always been substantial and often Japan is found as the largest donor.

In 2009, State Foreign Secretary of Japan Ms. Seiko Hashimoto visited Bangladesh and disclosed that Bangladesh was already included a part of the Japanese Prime Minister's flagship project, "Cool Earth Partnership" at a time when global climate change has had adverse effects on Bangladesh

Japan's International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has proposed to provide Tk.490 crore as budgetary support for next three years to cope with environment related disasters and will cancel a debt of Tk.700 crore from its Debt Cancellation Fund.

Japanese Ambassador Tamotsu Shinotsuka on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2009 reportedly stated that restoration of damaged embankments, dredging of rivers, construction of monorail network in Dhaka and development of renewable resources were some of the areas in which Japan could provide assistance to Bangladesh..

Bangladesh figured in the consideration of many Japanese investors for her strategic location in the mouth of the Bay of Bengal as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia Japanese investment in Bangladesh ranks 4<sup>th</sup> among the foreign investors in the country..

So far about 146 projects with 100 percent investment or joint venture between Bangladesh and Japanese companies have been registered with the BOI, having the figure amounting \$1,193.769 million. In 2009, Japanese telecom giant KDDI has forayed into Bangladesh market acquiring 50 per cent stakes of BracNet, a leading local ISP-internet service provider.

*Future direction: of relations:*

An important characteristic of Bangladesh's relationship with Japan is the way in which diversification of bilateral economic relationship may develop in which full potentials of cooperation are to be realised for mutual benefits in trade, business and infrastructure

During the visit, Bangladesh may request Japan, among others, to assist the country in the following ways:

- To invest in Bangladesh's priority sectors of development, especially in infrastructure projects
- To establish Bangladesh-Japanese Business Forum for opportunities in setting up joint ventures in private sectors
- To build partnership in tying up with Japanese industry in various fields including establishing outlets in Bangladesh for manufacturing parts of Japanese industries.
- To transfer technology and funds to exploit Bangladesh renewable energies, such as solar, tidal waves and winds.
- To help human resources development for earthquake disasters

Against this background, the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister will be a milestone in bilateral cooperation in diverse fields. Furthermore, both countries may cooperate in addressing regional and global challenges confronting them with pragmatism and imagination. It is clear that both countries can and should do more together. This is an aspiration that people of both countries share.

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