



HAPPY BIRTHDAY JAPANESE EMPEROR

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DNA is special

A unique Bangladesh-Japan relationship tested with time and trouble, only to stand apart

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Ever since Bangladesh achieved independence, Japan has been standing by the country through thick and thin like a trusted friend.

Japan was among the countries that first recognised Bangladesh within two months of its victory on December 16, 1971. Its embassy opened in Dhaka in March 1972. It soon sent Takashi Hayakawa, the then parliamentarian and president of Japan Bangladesh Friendship Association, to visit a war-torn Bangladesh to assess the need for Japanese assistance.

Then in 1974, Japan committed to the Official Development Assistance (ODA) loan and established the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) office in Dhaka. Bangladesh has seen exponential growth since its independence, and the ties with Japan have remained as strong as ever.

Since Bangladesh's independence, over 100 loan projects and more than 150 grand aid projects involving tens of thousands of crores of taka have been signed, with over 20 technical cooperation projects ongoing every year. From investing in infrastructure and energy to supplying safe water and public health services, Japan has been playing a significant role in Bangladesh's development.

Currently, many investment projects are being implemented with Japanese funds and more than 300 Japanese



Bangabandhu with Japanese Premier Kakuei Tanaka while visiting Japan in 1973.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

companies are now involved in different government and private ventures.

But why is Japan so supportive towards Bangladesh? To understand the bond between the two countries with around 5,000 kilometres of distance between them, one has to go back 70 years.

A Bengali judge, born in Kushtia district of the then East Bengal in 1880s, played a crucial role in the love and respect Japanese people have for

Bangladesh in the present day.

"There is history behind it but there is no written record. The role of Judge Radhabinod Pal is very significant here," said Prof Abul Barakat, chairman of the Department of Japanese Studies at Dhaka University.

Radhabinod Pal was an Indian jurist, who was one of the three Asian judges appointed to the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, popularly

known as the "Tokyo Trials" of Japanese war crimes committed during the Second World War.

Among all the judges of the tribunal, he was the only one who submitted a judgment which insisted all defendants were not guilty. While he fully acknowledged Japan's war atrocities — including the Nanjing massacre — the judge said they were covered in the Class B and Class C trials, according to a *New*

York Times report published in 2007.

Judge Pal also described the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States as the worst atrocities of the war, comparable to Nazi crimes.

And that's why the judge garnered the respect of the Japanese people.

While visiting India in 2007, the then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had paid tributes to Judge Pal in a speech to the Indian Parliament in New Delhi and then travelled to Kolkata to meet the judge's son who was living there.

"Justice Pal is highly respected even today by many Japanese people for the noble spirit of courage he exhibited during the International Military Tribunal for the Far East," the *New York Times* report cited Abe as saying at the Indian Parliament.

"Had Radhabinod Pal not given such a verdict, the history of Japan could have been different," Prof Barakat said.

During the Liberation War, the then Japanese Emperor helped Bangladesh in different ways and even after independence, Japan never voted against Bangladesh's interest in any international forum including the United Nations, he said.

"I think this is their [Japanese] way of showing gratitude towards Judge Radhabinod," he said.

HOW JAPAN HAS CONTINUED TO HELP BANGLADESH

In the last six years, Japan committed Tk 83,327 crore to different projects and it has been increasing every year. And the interest rate of Japanese loans (0.9 percent to be repaid in 30 years with a grace period of 10 years) is the lowest rate Bangladesh gets from any multi-lateral and bilateral partner.

The ongoing projects include Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project, under which construction of the country's first metro rail is going on; 1,200 MW Matarbari Ultra Super Critical Coal Fired Power Project; Safe Motherhood Promotion Project; establishment of Clearing House for Integrating Transport Ticketing System in Dhaka city area; and many others.

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20/2 Rasulbagh,
Mohakhali, Dhaka 🏠
snz.cruz@gmail.com ✉
www.santacruz.com.bd 🌐
02-9830626, 02-9830677 📞