



HAPPY BIRTHDAY JAPANESE EMPEROR

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Emperor for People

FROM PAGE 1

Emperor Emeritus Akihito reigned for 30 years, and throughout this period, was widely praised for being an emperor for the people. Even though his father, Hirohito, led Japan through World War II, Akihito is a pacifist, and takes great pride in the fact that not a single Japanese soldier was killed in war or armed conflict during his reign.

Members of the Japanese Imperial Family are usually tied down by both restrictions of tradition and also the constitution, but Akihito made it a point to break these rules and stand directly alongside the people of Japan. In 2011, an earthquake with a whopping magnitude of nine, as well as a devastating tsunami, hit northern Japan. Akihito became the first Japanese emperor in existence to address the public directly on television, and to personally meet the people affected, at an evacuation centre. Akihito and Michiko knelt down and talked to the people there, an act that was unheard of for the Japanese Imperial Family.

The soft and kind reputation of Emperor Emeritus Akihito has set the standards quite high for the new Emperor Naruhito, with the people of Japan wondering if he will follow in his father's pacifist footsteps. In many ways, Emperor Naruhito is quite different from past Emperors, due to his more modern outlook. His father gave him the opportunity to chase his dreams when he was young, and pursue the kind of education he wanted. His undergraduate days were spent at Tokyo's Gakushuin University, a prestigious institution where he gained a degree in History. He continued his studies on the history of transport on the River Thames at Oxford University's Merton College, from 1983 to 1985. He mentioned in his 1993 memoir, "The Thames and I", that his days at Oxford were the happiest times of his life. Even though he was Crown Prince and was well aware that he would ascend the throne at some point, he never gave up on his passion in the study of waterways. Thus, he became honorary president of the United Nations' Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, between 2007 and 2015.

Emperor Naruhito is known for his devotion towards his family, especially his wife, Empress Masako. Empress Masako also studied at Oxford University and is a former diplomat as she had worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She was diagnosed with a stress-related disorder in 2004 because of pressure from Imperial tradition to give birth to a son. For quite some time, no male heir had been born to the family to succeed the throne, since Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako have just one daughter, Princess Aiko. According to Japan's Imperial Household Law of 1947, only men can ascend the throne, which meant there was a succession line crisis. In 2004, the then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi proposed a revision of the law to allow women to inherit the throne so as to let Princess Aiko someday ascend the throne. However, all of these plans were scrapped as soon as Princess Aiko's male cousin, Prince Hisahito, was born in 2006. However, up until the birth of Prince Hisahito, Emperor Naruhito stood by Empress Masako as a strong pillar of support throughout her stress disorder.

A unique aspect of throne accession in the Japanese Imperial Family, compared to monarchies around the world, is that there is no crown for the Emperor. The accession ceremony of Emperor Naruhito involved rituals of Shinto religion, with the Emperor receiving the Imperial Treasures to symbolise him being "crowned" Emperor. According to Shinto religion, these Treasures have been handed down to the Imperial Family from the gods themselves. They are quite mysterious objects, with nobody in

Japan fully sure of their whereabouts or origin. In fact, they are kept in such secrecy that replicas are used during the accession, while the real objects are spread out all over the country in different shrines. The first Imperial Treasure is the Yata no Kagami (eight-sided mirror), which is said to symbolise the divine power of the Emperor. The second Imperial Treasure is the Kusanagi no Tsurugi (grass-cutting sword), which represents the bravery of the Emperor. The third and last Treasure is the Yasakani no Magatama (a curved bead), which is made of green jade and symbolises the benevolence of the Emperor.

During the accession ceremony, Emperor Naruhito delivered his first

speech to the public of Japan as the new emperor of the new era. In his speech, he recognised the gravity of his duties as emperor and said he will "bear in mind the path trodden by past emperors". He also mentioned, "I sincerely hope for the happiness of the people and further progress of the country, and for world peace." His words imply that he will most probably adhere to the peaceful route that his father, Emperor Emeritus Akihito, had taken in his rule. Even though his birthday celebration events have been cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak risks, this day is still an auspicious day of hope for both Emperor Naruhito, and the people of the land of the rising sun.

Bangladesh: A perfect destination for Japanese firms

FROM PAGE 4

Predictability and visibility of key policies around any specific sector is crucial. Businesses make investments with certain core assumptions based on current policies and potential future scenarios. But if these policies are changed regularly with limited or no regulatory impact assessment; it can lead to unintended consequences for affected businesses. Citing an example, tobacco sector taxation - which generates the largest source of revenue for the country - has experienced abrupt changes that have negatively impacted the business and fallen short of meeting the targeted objectives of the policy.

It is key that the industry works

with Government on a long-term policy framework with inputs from the sector given its global and local expertise. This will ensure that the industry generates a consistent flow of revenue without sudden changes. Planned, long-term and balanced tax policies best meet government objectives to raise stable tax revenues.

The JTI Foundation has been supporting several community investment projects in Bangladesh since 2015/16, in collaboration with a number of internationally leading aid and development organizations. The Foundation's focus here is in the area of disaster resilience, mainly through improved water access, sanitation and hygiene in urban slums and among low income

"Bangladesh is the top choice for Japanese companies seeking to expand business in Asia and Oceania in the next two years due to its high business potential and profitability. However, there is a challenge for the investors in starting a business in Bangladesh due to long documentation related processes."

communities impacting thousands of lives positively.

Since the acquisition, Japan Tobacco International (JTI) in Bangladesh is further working on focused and scalable projects aimed at helping people get access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in areas and households that are most in need. All of Japan Tobacco International's community investment programs aim to improve the quality of life of people in a demonstrative way, with a special focus on social inclusion."

Besides, in November 2018, Honda inaugurated its lone manufacturing plant at Munshiganj, which it set up with the state-owned Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation for Tk 230 crore.

If the amount of Japan-sponsored investment through Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) in different projects is included, the amount is even bigger.

So far, the Japanese government has committed USD 12 billion as ODA and has already released USD 7 billion of the sum.

Many Japanese companies, especially the consumer and food processing companies, have been conducting feasibility studies in Bangladesh to grab the consumer market of 170 million, country representative of Jetro said.

For example, Bangladesh is a very big market for diapers as the demand for the product is growing with urbanisation.

Although some local companies are manufacturing diapers, 60 percent of the demand is still met through imports, he said. The problems listed by the Japanese companies in Bangladesh include inadequate logistics and infrastructure, difficulty in quality control and shortage of skilled manpower.

Shah Muhammad Ashequr Rahman, head of finance and commercial of Bangladesh Honda Private Limited (BHL), told The Daily Star that BHL has plans to expand business in future.

Now BHL manufactures five models locally at its plant and in future and it may introduce new manufacturing process in line with technology transfer.

According to him Honda is the largest two-wheeler manufacturer in the world and it is seeing good prospects in Bangladesh market.

Recently Hiroshi Honda, a general manager of Hitachi Home Electronics Asia, said Hitachi, a Japanese multinational conglomerate company headquartered in Tokyo, is keen to enhance their market share in Bangladesh by providing high quality and environmentally friendly products.

"Hitachi has plans to increase investments in Bangladesh and provide the next generation of advanced technology products," Honda said.

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DNA is special

AFTER PAGE 2

In the last 46 years, Japan has helped to construct 134 large and medium bridges on highways including Bangabandhu Bridge and over 400 bridges in rural areas. The Local Government and Engineering Department either constructed or upgraded about 3,500 kilometres of rural roads including culverts and bridges with Japanese grants and loans.

Japan has helped 35 lakh people in Chattogram and Khulna get access to safe water, supplied 262 environment-friendly collection vehicles for Dhaka and Chattogram cities, and also funded Bangladesh's campaign to be a polio-free country. The World Health Organization declared Bangladesh polio-free in 2014.

It has disbursed Tk 493 crore among more

than 400 small and medium entrepreneurs and given financial support to 1.75 lakh small and marginalised farmers, provided technical support to 70,000 teachers and financial support for 300 newly constructed community clinics where 18 lakh people have received primary health care.

"Japan is the highest overseas development assistance provider to Bangladesh since the latter's independence," said Prof Barakat, also a noted economist.

He said Japan provides Bangladesh grants, technical cooperation and loans. For the first 110 years, whatever money Japan gave to Bangladesh was in the form of grants and majority of technical assistance it provided for the first 10 years was also grants, he said.

"They provide us loans with the lowest 'real interest rate' among all other lenders," he told *The Daily Star* on February 18.

Unlike many other lenders, Japan never interferes in Bangladesh's fiscal or monetary policies. He said, "Interfering in our macroeconomic policy is like interfering with our sovereignty."

Besides, Bangladesh's relations with Japan took a favorable turn in unusual circumstances in the '70s.

A hijacked Japanese airliner landed in Dhaka in October 1977, creating a crisis in Japan. The Japanese hostages were released through the skillful handling of Bangladesh government leaders, which impressed the government of Japan.

JAPAN NEVER ABANDONED BANGLADESH Japan never abandoned Bangladesh and the situation after the attack at Holey Artisan Bakery on July 1, 2016, is a testament to that fact.

After the militant attack, many of the foreign-

aided projects in Bangladesh fell into uncertainty. Projects funded by Japan, which lost seven of its nationals in the attack, also faced uncertainty as most of the Japanese citizens had left Bangladesh then.

"But they returned following the government's assurance of the highest security. They [Japanese officials] planned differently, reinforced their deployment and completed the project within the deadline," said Abu Saleh Md Nuruzzaman, director of the Kanchpur, Meghna and Gumti 2nd Bridge Construction and Existing Bridges Rehabilitation Project on Dhaka-Chattogram Highway.

Under the project, three new bridges were constructed and three old bridges on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway were repaired. The project was financed by Japan and implemented by Japanese firms.

Although the project was halted by around six months after the attack, the project works were completed within the deadline - December last year - and saved around Tk 1,400 crore, Nuruzzaman said.

After the Rana Plaza collapse in Savar on April 24, 2013, which claimed the lives of more than 1,100 people and left around 2,500 others injured, Bangladesh's garments sector fell into big trouble.

At that time, the Japanese government had taken an initiative to retrofit Bangladesh's vulnerable garment factory buildings in order to make those jolt-resistant and safe for workers.

(The report was prepared based on information collected from JICA, Bangladesh Embassy in Tokyo, write-ups of Barrister Harun Ur Rashid and articles in *The New York Times*.)