

Cultural and Economic Ties to Grow

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Japanese government itself also finances technical training courses for overseas people, and Bangladesh benefits from that too.

One of the black spots in Bangladesh-Japan economic relations was the explosion at the Ghorassal ammonia plant which left nine dead and scores injured. A Bangladesh government inquiry commission report said the explosion occurred due to negligence, and painted a disturbing picture of circumvention of regulations by both the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation and Kafco Investment Corp, the Japanese company engaged in constructing the ammonia plant. However, Ito does not think the incident will affect economic relations between

non-government organisations.

"The Bangladesh government draws up its Five Year Plan and Annual Development Programme, and identifies its priority projects. We then review the list of projects the Dhaka government presents to us. If we find the projects feasible and beneficial for the socio-economic development of Bangladesh, then we provide the funds through government ministries or organisations involved in the projects", Ito explained at length.

At the present moment, Japan is involved in some major projects, which include the Jamuna Fertiliser Factory which should be completed this year or early next year. Apart from that, an irrigation project in Narayanganj and improvement in Dhaka city's storm water drainage system are being carried out with

That commitment, one assumes, will have to wait until the World Bank completes its feasibility study on the proposed bridge, and makes its recommendations. Until that happens, the modality of Japanese involvement in the project is unlikely to be worked out.

While economic and technical cooperation between Dhaka and Tokyo surge ahead, people-to-people contact between Bangladesh and Japan through cultural exchanges is still lagging behind.

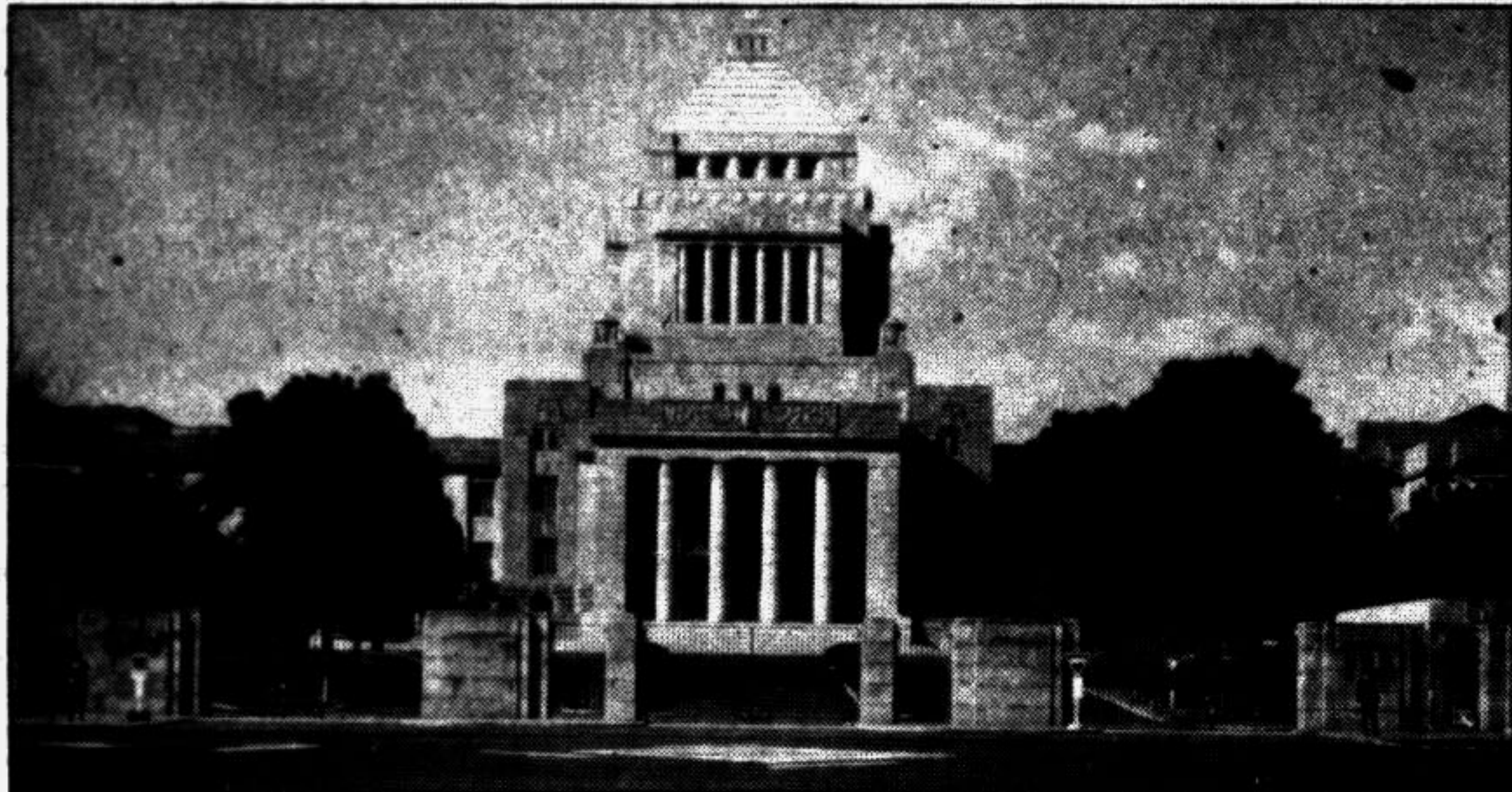
"Cultural exchange is one area which we would like to develop", Ito said firmly. "We already have some cultural and academic exchange programmes, like scholarships for Bangladeshis to go and study at Japanese colleges and universities. There is also a youth exchange programme, through

But the question of Bangladeshis illegally working in Japan and getting deported remains a thorny one.

"There is no way for ordinary people to go over to Japan and work, unless they are recruited by Japanese companies needing foreign technical people for jobs or on-the-job training. At present, there is some scope for Japanese companies recruiting limited number of overseas people for training and work", Ito said, adding, "I think most Western countries, including the United States, are very cautious about allowing foreigners to come and work in their countries. In Japan we have the problem of many illegal workers, and that is why we are trying to stem the flow".

But culture remains the most effective and long-lasting method of building bridges be-

Culture remains the most effective method of building long-lasting bridges between peoples of various nations ... and the Japanese are not oblivious to the fact



Tokyo's parliament building : Democratic base of economic miracle

Japanese technical and financial assistance.

"We have already completed half the work in setting up a digital telephone exchange for Dhaka, and the rest will be undertaken sometime in the near future", Ito pointed out.

But such positive actions do not apply, as yet, to the multi-million dollar Jamuna Multi Purpose Bridge Project, which is as important to Bangladesh politically as it is economically essential for the north-west districts of the country.

"We are one of the potential donors to the Jamuna Bridge Project, but there has not been any official decision yet", Ito said. "When prime minister Kaifu came here last year, he gave a positive response to the project, but there is no formal commitment as yet".

which young people from this country visit Japan for a few weeks, look at Japanese life, exchange views and establish contacts. We are in the process of starting another such programme this year, which was decided following prime minister Kaifu's visit".

Apart from government scholarships, Bangladeshi students can also apply directly to Japanese universities for admission. This year, 54 students have succeeded in obtaining Japanese university scholarships. Although these were private, individual efforts whose success depended on whether their academic records were competitive with other applicants, the staff at the embassy's cultural section played a vital role by providing information and advice.

tween peoples of different nations. The Japanese, who have one of the richest cultural heritages in the world, is not oblivious to the fact.

"A big Japanese cultural event was planned for Dhaka last year. There would have been a couple of seminars, a theatre troupe was supposed to come, and many other programmes were planned. But that event had to be cancelled because of the political upheavals of last year. We would like to develop this kind of cultural interactions in the future", Ito said. "We also supply short video films on Japanese culture, technology and other aspects of life in Japan to Bangladesh Television. In addition to Oshin, of course!"

the two countries.

"No, I don't think there will be any adverse effect on bilateral business relations because of Ghorassal. It was an accident, due to technical reasons. Chemical industries, unfortunately, are rather risky", he said.

Japan's policy on development aid is based, judging by the manner of its disbursement, on according the recipient government maximum latitude on deciding its own priorities. Most of the money is given on a government-to-government basis, and very little is channeled through



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