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DHAKA, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2000

Japan looks upon Bangladesh as model ODA recipient

Outgoing ambassador stresses industrialisation

Japan considers Bangladesh as a model recipient of overseas development assistance (ODA) and suggested it to pursue industrialisation as a 'national strategy' to meet the requirement of the coming century, says BSS.

Kazuyoshi Urabe, the outgoing Japanese ambassador to Bangladesh, in an interview with the agency has expressed the hope that Japan "will extend appropriate future assistance which may help solve issues Bangladesh will face in the next century, creating employment opportunities and increasing food production."

He underlined that Japan's assistance to Bangladesh, of course, "should contribute to strengthen the overall bilateral relations including private sector economic relations and human exchanges as well."

Urabe, who left Dhaka for Tokyo on Thursday to take up higher responsibilities at home, gave his opinion in reply to several queries by the news agency.

Although the ambassador gave Bangladesh high marks for its success in agriculture, he however opined that this (agriculture) is not "sufficient to provide enough employment opportunities." It will be necessary for Bangladesh to pursue industrialisation as a national strategy" to create job opportunities for the millions, he observed.

Bangladesh, whose industrial production constitutes only 18 per cent of the GNP, ranks lowest (ratio of industrialisation to GNP) among Asian countries except Cambodia.

The ambassador expressed his hope that the Bangladeshi

government would take all the measures and policies to encourage industrialisation". The measures should include policies to "attract export-oriented foreign investments as well as policies pursuing domestic financial reforms, which will transform domestic saving into domestic investment," he observed.

Ambassador Urabe mentioned that a recent comprehensive assessment of our ODA found Bangladesh as a "model case" and added that "we will now consider how effectively we can extend assistance to Bangladesh on the basis of the result of this assessment." He said that till last year, Japan extended to Bangladesh an assistance of approximately 971 billion yen (equivalent to about Tk 44,700 crore).

He said Japan's position is fourth in terms of investments outside the EPZ where 40 companies have put in 860 million US dollars. He said recently major Japanese companies such as YKK have decided to invest in Bangladesh. "Japanese investment in Bangladesh is expected to be revitalised with the recovery of the Japan's economy," the ambassador commented.

Urabe, who had highly appreciated the "remarkable success" of Bangladesh in increasing agricultural production to the level of self-sufficiency, however noted that "agriculture alone will not be sufficient to provide enough employment opportunities. Bangladesh must pursue industrialisation to provide jobs and meet the challenges," he said.

The Byrd amendment also makes it more difficult for exporters subject to an anti-dumping or anti-subsidy order to secure an undertaking with the US authorities, such as on minimum prices, the commission's statement said.

Replies to a question on the follow-up action of Prime Minister Mori's visit to Bangladesh in August, the ambassador said at least two seminars were held in Tokyo last month.

The Board of Investment (BOI) held the first seminar on November 10 while the second one, held on November 15 on natural gas, was attended by State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Prof Rafiqul Islam.

Besides, there have also been various "follow-ups in the areas of economy, development cooperation and human exchange," he added.

Japan is Bangladesh's number one donor.

The Byrd amendment was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on October 28 despite protests by the EU and other World Trade Organization members.

Brussels argues that the reimbursements are "an illegal response" because they provide a remedy not allowed under WTO rules. It also sees the legislation as "a clear incentive" for companies to lodge cases, leading to an increase in trade litigation.

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