

JAPAN

From Tokyo with commitments

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A DAY before Pakistani President Parvez Musharraf arrived Tokyo on a four-day official visit with the aim of attracting more Japanese assistance for his troubled country, Japan's influential daily, The Asahi Shimbun, in an editorial gave a clear indication of Tokyo's standing concerning Islamabad's request by urging the government not to forget about the importance of keeping pressure on Pakistan over two important issues - signing the Comprehensive Nuclear Test ban Treaty (CTBT) and installing a democratically elected government in the country. The Pakistani leader's visit to Japan, despite its economic nature and coloring as well as outwardly warm reception given to the visiting dignitary, all along followed the line showed by one of Japan's principal dailies. In all meetings and discussions that the Pakistani leadership held with its Japanese counterparts in Tokyo, both of the issues did receive equal importance in par with the crucial subject of rewarding a new important American ally.

Right from the day of his arrival, which virtually went unnoticed by the Japanese media except the Asahi editorial, President Musharraf didn't hide the true intention of his visit. Pakistan needs Japan's economic assistance to overcome current economic difficulties that the country is facing. The Pakistani leadership made it clear that helping the country to overcome hardship is equally important as fighting terrorism in the battlefields of Afghanistan; and Japan, being an important player in the Western alliance to counter terrorist threats, has indeed an obligation to extend helping hands in other areas of that same struggle. But the timing of such a visit probably runs counter to the harsh reali-

ties that Japan is presently compelled to deal with, and as a result the commitments from Tokyo seems to be far shorter to the expectation of the visiting dignitary.

President Musharraf's first meeting in Tokyo was with the Japanese Economy, Trade and Industry Minister, Takeo Hiranuma. Mentioning about approximately \$2.5 billion worth of losses that Pakistan had to endure as a result of sluggish export and investment since the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, the Pakistani leader asked for Japanese support in country's effort to rebuild the economy by initiating programs that would facilitate skill development through providing training to people involved in small and medium-sized businesses. Praising Pakistan's initiatives in overcoming economic difficulties, Mr. Hiranuma replied that Japan is already supporting Pakistan in skill development projects of personnel by sending experts and hinted that Tokyo would consider further assistance in that particular field.

Later in a meeting with the leaders of Japan's three ruling coalition parties, President Musharraf said Pakistan aims to become a moderate and peaceful Islamic country by restraining radical form of the religion and asked for more economic assistance from Japan. Party leaders, on the other hand, urged the visiting president to ensure an early signing of the CTBT, of which President Musharraf gave a vague reply by saying that he understands the sentiment of the Japanese people who were greatly harmed by atomic bombings and mentioned that Pakistan alone cannot go ahead with the signing of the CTBT. But at the same time he also tried to please his hosts by saying that his country needs time before taking a final decision on signing the treaty.

The issue surrounding the signing of the

CTBT has become a Japanese obsession since the very early days the treaty was open for signature. As the only country in the world to suffer the devastation of atomic bombing, turning the world free of nuclear arsenal has become one of Japan's main foreign policy initiatives. There is also significant public pressure from various non-governmental bodies to ensure that the policy of nuclear disarmament is strictly pursued. This led to Tokyo's imposition of economic sanctions against New Delhi and Islamabad in 1998 after two South Asian neighbors conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests in May that year.

Japanese Foreign Minister, Yoriko Kawaguchi, was more blunt on nuclear disarmament issue when she met Pakistani Foreign Minister Addul Sattar for bilateral discussions in Tokyo. Kawaguchi urged her Pakistani counterpart to push for nuclear arms reduction by signing the CTBT and stressed that Japan's recent decision to lift the economic sanctions in the wake of recent developments surrounding Afghanistan by no way means abandoning her country's long pursued policy of nuclear arms reduction and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. She also called on Pakistan to take specific measures to ease tensions with India.

At the bilateral meeting between the visiting Pakistani President and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, the Japanese leader outlined the need for Pakistan's return to a democratically elected government and offered his country's assistance in the election process. He also expressed Tokyo's willingness in considering debt relief measures for Pakistan, an issue that the Pakistani side put high priority on. Pakistan owes foreign lenders about \$40 billion and the fiscal strain of servicing this massive debt has further deteriorated nation's economy, which is in a virtual mess.

Musharraf has already been rewarded quite lavishly for his bold decision to join the anti-terrorist campaign. Japan and key Western donors poured in emergency aid to pull Pakistan back from an economic brink. Japan has pledged \$300 million over two years period and the bilateral discussion saw no other specific new financial commitment from Tokyo.

The debt relief measures, modality of which is yet to be finalized, would most likely help Pakistan easing the economic pressure amid serious financial difficulties. As the two sides have agreed to reinforce bilateral dialogue in economic field, Japan is likely to resume new yen loans to Pakistan that remained suspended till now despite Tokyo's decision to lift economic sanctions. At a joint press conference at prime minister's official residence, as a gesture to please his host the Pakistani leader expressed his desire to hold elections in the country without specifying what role he himself would be playing in the post-election scenario.

President Musharraf also spoke at a gathering of Japanese business leaders and urged them to invest in Pakistan. But Japanese business community's response on Islamabad's offers was much less enthusiastic. It would probably take much longer for Pakistan to clear the tainted image of the country being a fertile breeding ground of Islamic fundamentalism. As long as that image hangs on, foreign investors, including those from Japan, will continue to express their skepticism in getting involved in any business dealings. This was probably a realization that the Pakistani delegation could sense at the end of the four-day official visit.

WORKING WOMEN

Solving Asia's economic woes

SINGAPORE'S economic planners should be happy to know that Prapaporn Rojanarowan is contemplating returning to the city-state's workforce after spending nearly two and a half years at home taking care of her children.

"I chose to take the time off to take care of my kids. But when my son is older, I'll be ready to go back to work," said the mother of two one afternoon, while her three-year-old daughter angled for her attention.

And if more women follow Prapaporn, a Thai native with a degree in electrical engineering, Asian countries looking to boost domestic consumption in order to wean themselves off export-dependent growth could start seeing results, analysts say. That's because getting more women to work gives consumption a kick-

start. It also boosts potential economic growth because unpaid work at home isn't counted in a country's gross domestic product, and leads to other flow-on economic benefits.

A housewife who trades in her apron for a briefcase, hires a cleaner and orders take-out for dinner, contributes to the economy not only through her work and income, but also through the money she spends on the cleaner and the take-out food. "If you follow the cliché that women make up 50 percent of the population here, then of course your economy will grow as more women join the formal and informal economies... And what does the region have but population?" said Shireen Lateef, a strategist at the Asian Development Bank in Manila who specialises in gender issues.

Besides fueling consumption,

there are many other positives from women working, said Ian Chambers, the director for East Asian branch of the International Labour Organisation in Bangkok. Among the biggest were that more working women meant more entrepreneurs -- and Chambers said studies showed female entrepreneurs tend to be more tenacious and successful.

A report by U.S. consultancy group McKinsey & Co. in January showed South Korea, one of Asia's most developed countries, had the lowest percentage of college-educated women in the workforce among members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, based on a 1998 survey.

Only 54 percent of college-educated women in South Korea between the ages of 24 and 64

work, compared with 92 percent in Sweden, 82 percent in the U.S., and 76 percent in Turkey. "That's not surprising given that in Korea, women are expected to marry, have children, and then stay at home to raise their children," said Clifford Tan, an economist at Salomon Smith Barney in Singapore and author of a recent report about the ways that Asia could increase its domestic consumption.

And South Korea isn't alone. According to the McKinsey report, 98 percent of college-educated men in Japan work compared with 68 percent of women. In the Philippines, it's 83 percent of college-educated men and 47 percent of women. It can also be difficult to gather information on just how many women are working, especially in less developed countries. "It's hard to get accurate statistics because in somewhere like Indonesia you might have a farmer with a wife who works at home and later goes out into the field to work with him," said Dr. Lorraine Corner, the economic adviser in Asia for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Bangkok. "And it's also contingent on cultural factors, whether it's acceptable for women to work. In these surveys,

it's usually the head of the household who is asked, and that's usually a man who may or may not want to say his wife or other females in his household are working."

Experts also say women bore the brunt of the layoffs during the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, and probably again during the economic slowdown which started last year.

Despite all these obstacles, the outlook for women seeking employment is brightening. "I guess the single descriptive word would be growing. The participation rates in all the Asian countries has been rising," said Chambers.

While trying to change Asian attitudes towards women is a long process, experts say it is happening, helped by cheap loans that compel investment in education and training for women. There is also a growing recognition among families in countries such as Thailand and the Philippines that women, especially those who work overseas, are more likely to send money home -- and therefore investing in their education could pay off. Indeed, Prapaporn notes that she's quite unusual among her friends back in Thailand.

Reuters Features

ASIAN BRIEF

Cambodian rebels charged with terrorism

Twenty people, including a US citizen belonging to the Cambodian Freedom Fighter, appeared before the Phnom Penh Municipality Court in February charged with terrorism and forming an illegal armed group following a series of grenade attacks in Pnom Penh last year.

The US citizen was named as 38-year-old Gilbit Sao Chum. Another four were being tried in absentia. Vietnamese Embassy in April, the Cambodian Foreign Ministry in July and the headquarters of the royalist FUNINCEC party in August.

Indonesian troops kill rebel commander

Indonesian troops have killed the military commander of Aceh separatist rebels during a gunfight in February in the troubled province.

Abdullah Syafii was shot dead during a raid on a hideout of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM).

Earlier this year Abdullah Syafii was invited for talks with the province's governor, Abdullah Puteh, in the latest attempt to end the intractable 25-year-old revolt which has claimed an estimated 10,000 lives.

Habibie returns to Indonesia as witness

Former Indonesian President B.J. Habibie arrived in February from Germany where he is now residing, in response to summons from the prosecutor's office as a witness in a suspected embezzlement case. The Indonesian Attorney-General's office has said it has summoned Habibie for questioning as a witness in the alleged embezzlement of US\$3.8m, in state funds intended for the poor, while he was president in 1999. House Speaker Akbar Tanjung has been declared a suspect in the case, alongside the former head of the national Logistic Agency (Bulog), Rahardi Ramelan. The Speaker, who heads Golkar, is suspected of embezzling 40bn rupiah when he was state secretary to Habibie in 1999.

ASEAN agrees to beef up anti-terrorism network

Six of the 10 member nations of ASEAN have agreed in February to consolidate gathering and exchange of intelligence on threats to national and regional security posed by terrorism-related activities and transnational crimes.

Defence Minister Najib Razak, said the mechanism for the intelligence exchange would also cover sensitive information elicited from questioning of individuals with terrorist links.

Ministry staff to be sent to UNIM

Defence Ministry staff and Royal Military College students will be sent to the local campus of the University of Nottingham (Unim) Malaysia when it opens its doors in 2005. Tertiary qualifications obtained at the local campus would be 60 per cent cheaper than Britain. The Armed Forces Superannuation Fund, through its subsidiary Boustead Holdings Berhad, is a major shareholder of the university. The other shareholders are the university of Nottingham, UK, and YTL Corporation Berhad. The Ministry would send its staff to the university and provide learning opportunities for those leaving the service to seek another career. Construction on the first phase of the Unim, costing RM60m, begins this month and is scheduled to be completed by late 2004.

Construction of RM800M Sabah Naval Base begins

Construction of the RM800m naval base in Teluk Sepanggar in Sabah begins this month after all the people residing in the area have been relocated. Defence Ministry Secretary-General Hashim Meon, who told AD&D. "Construction of the houses where the people will be relocated is progressing well and we hope that when it is completed the affected 430 people from five settlements will be able to shift at once.