

Fortieth Anniversary of Japan-Bangladesh diplomatic relations

## Centuries-old ties

MUHAMMAD ABDUL MAZID

**T**HIS year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Japan. The past forty years have witnessed the steady growth of close cooperation between the two countries. Although bilateral diplomatic interactions began relatively recent, the historical and cultural connections between the two nations are centuries old.

During the Bangladesh War of liberation in 1971 the Japanese people extended immense support. Japan was the first among industrialised nations to recognise Bangladesh and established diplomatic relations on February 10, 1972. Since then, it has been consistently participating in the development process of Bangladesh. The people of Japan also have strong affinity towards Bangladesh.

Despite the changes in Bangladeshi domestic politics and diplomatic stance, and though our relations with other countries and regions changed dramatically depending on international politics and fluctuating economic relations, Japan consistently maintained very significant, effective and stable relations characterised by mutual trust and cordial friendship and was actively committed to Bangladesh's efforts in development.

The foundation of this bondage between the two nations is established on four commonalities -- food habit as they are fond of rice and fish, religious connection as Buddhism migrated to Japan from this land, anthropological affinity as they look alike in physical appearance, and natural harmony as both land have mountains and sea, rivers and greenery.

The mutual understanding and cordial relations between the people of Bangladesh and Japan has a historical background. According to Professor Tsuyoshi Nara, one of the earliest evidence of close contacts between the two peoples goes back to around four hundred years when Japanese artists carried back a widely

used colour from Bengal to Japan -- it is still known as *Bengaru* (Bengal) colour.

Close contacts between these two nations go back to the early years of the twentieth century when Rabindranath Tagore -- who visited Japan six times -- Tenshin Okakura, a distinguished Japanese fine arts scholar, and Taikan Yokoyama, a Japanese master of painting, profoundly affected and influenced each other's works through their friendship. During the twentieth century

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only, Bengali and Japanese writers in Asia got Nobel prize in literature -- one is a Bangalee, Rabindranath Tagore in 1913 and two others are Japanese Yansunary Kawabata in 1968 and Kenjabyure Oe in 1994.

Close political relations between the two countries were cemented in the perspective of the anti-British Revolutionary Movement, particularly through Rash Behari Bose, a Bengali revolutionary leader. Japan became the main centre of the Bengali revolutionaries in exile. General Tojo, the then prime minister of Japan, supported the cause of Indian independence. Japan gave active support in the matter of creation of "Azad Hind Foj" (AHF) by Rash Behari Bose and with the taking over of the post of Commander in Chief of AHF by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

An event of the World War II attracted the respectful attention of the Japanese people towards the Bengalis, when Dr. Justice Radha Binode Paul, a judge of the International Military Court (Tokyo 1946-48), did not consider Japan

guilty of war crimes. This historical verdict of Justice Paul brought a sense of relief, courage and strength in the minds of the Japanese people.

As Tagore, Bose and Paul were Bengalees, the Japanese people have had special regard, respect and fellow-feeling for the people of Bengal. After the recovery from Second World War Japanese economic assistance and investment first came to the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) before any other part of India. In 1971, the Japanese people and the govern-

ment were very sympathetic and helpful during the freedom struggle of Bangladesh, though at that time Japan was an ally of the USA. Immediately after the recognition, Japan dispatched an economic mission to Bangladesh under the leadership of Takeshi Hayakawa to help in rebuilding and rehabilitating the war-ravaged economy.

Japanese overseas development assistance (ODA) for Bangladesh has been less conditional, and favourable to the attainment of self-reliance, poverty alleviation and development of infrastructure. Japan's ODA to Bangladesh reveals a vivid picture of Japanese participation in the development process of Bangladesh. ODA to Bangladesh was initially more in the form of food aid, commodity aid and project aid. Among the 20 major international donors providing economic assistance to Bangladesh, Japan stands just after International Development Association (IDA), but is the largest bilateral development partner of Bangladesh.

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and economic cooperation between these two Asian countries have been growing stronger and stronger. Since 1985, Bangladesh has ranked first as the recipient of Japan's grant aid (roughly 10% of Japan's total grant aid) with a moderate rate of increase annually.

Bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and Japan has also been enhanced in other areas, especially in trade and investment. Japan has been one of major destinations for Bangladeshi goods. In recent years, shoes, prawns, garments and leather goods are major export products to Japan. Bangladesh is trying diversify export and develop more export-oriented industries. These measures will open up a new window of opportunities for trade and investment between two friendly countries.

Japan strongly supports Bangladesh in poverty reduction with a view to attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To achieve that, Bangladesh must (i) expand and stabilise its basis of growth driven by the private sector, (ii) expand social development, and (iii) improve governance. In particular, Japan believes that it is necessary to provide cooperation bearing in mind the perspective of human security while promoting social development. Japan considers that bilateral relations are of vital importance in view of the changes in the international community after the end of the Cold War because of three aspects -- globalisation, promotion of economic partnerships and growing interest in development issues.

Bangladesh and Japan have shared views on many key international issues and work closely for promoting global peace and stability. Both the countries have made important contributions to the UN peace keeping operations. The relations with Japan are of priority for Bangladesh and both countries are already engaged to exploit the high potential for further deepening and widening cooperation.

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## Domestic violence flashing warning signal

*Social sensitisation, implementation of laws are essential*

**A**baseline survey conducted across the country has revealed that 49 percent of women are subjected to physical violence and 42 percent to sexual violence -- often during or following physical violence -- by their husbands. Many women found this violence to be normal, while others thought it might bring disrepute to the family, leading to very few women seeking social help or legal recourse.

Several issues must be addressed here. First and foremost is that of awareness. Women and men alike must be made to understand that violence, whether or not it is between spouses, is not normal, that violence is a crime with severe legal consequences. Similarly, sexual violence is as grave an offence, if not worse, regardless of whether it is perpetrated between marital partners. Marital rape is a crime and it must be recognised as such in our laws.

Awareness is necessary not only among victims and perpetrators but also the greater society -- family, neighbours, friends -- anyone who may be witness to such violence and whose duty it is not to overlook it as a private, domestic matter but to report it as a serious crime. Social duty extends to after the event, when the survivors of violence must be provided with social and psychological support and counselling to help them deal with the trauma and lead normal, healthy lives.

Finally, the path to legal recourse must be accessible for all. Laws are not enough, they must be strictly implemented, including the Domestic Violence Act 2010. There should be no hassle in filing a police case. The police and judiciary must be prompt, fair and severe. The focus of the media should be on the offence and the perpetrators, not the victims. The burden of crimes which are in any case under-reported due to reasons of fear, shame and lack of faith in the legal system should not be put on the victims. By creating awareness and providing legal, social and moral support, families, society and the legal system must empower the victims, helping them to break free of the chains of abusive relationships.

## Master syndrome of the police

*Inculcate attitudinal change*

**T**HIS time the victim of police excesses is a young man who happens to be a grandson of the first prime minister of the country. Not for a moment are we suggesting that people connected to high ups should be above the law. By the same token no one can be below the law either.

While we see no reason why one's pedigree should stand as a shield against police taking action for violation of the law, the question is was he guilty of any? And even if he was, was the treatment meted out to him that required hospitalization, justified? Such attitude of the police reinforces public perception of it being masters and not servants of the people.

From the reports available we have not found any acts of commission by the victim except, "misbehaving with the police at the police station" according to them. From what we have learned so far, he incurred the wrath of so-called lawmen after he identified himself as the nephew of a former state minister for home.

The treatment meted out to the young man is an everyday occurrence in this country. And we would like to reiterate what the mother of the victim told the press that if one with such a strong political connection can suffer such physical abuse and indignity at the hands of the law enforcing agencies then woe betide the linkless common man.

Many incidents of such excesses do not get reported at all, and, unlike this incident because of the media coverage, cannot draw the attention of the country's judiciary. The High Court should be complimented for taking cognisance of the matter and for directing that various actions be taken against the errant policemen. We note too that the police authorities have formed a two-member probe body of their own to investigate the incident.

We feel that there must be complete attitudinal change in the police. They must understand that they are the servants of the people, not their masters, and behave

SHADA ISLAM

**B**ELIEVE it or not, the world is fascinated by Pakistan. This may come as a surprise to many in the country who believe that Pakistan is the victim of an evil western/Indian/Jewish conspiracy to destroy the state and undermine its values.

But in fact the opposite is true: Pakistan, with its multiple facets, stark contrasts and colourful, complex realities intrigues and fascinates the rest of the world. Admittedly, the interest Pakistan generates is not always on a par with the largely positive global focus on China's turbo-charged economy or India's status as a rising power.

The world media and analysts follow the twists and turns of China's upward trajectory in open-mouthed wonder. The China obsession is not surprising: as the West grapples with multiple crises -- financial, political, social -- China marches to a different, self-confident and upbeat tune.

The interest in India is similarly understandable given the country's new global assertiveness -- and optimistic economic prospects. The current international scrutiny of Pakistan is due to different reasons. Yes, there are concerns about Pakistan's links with terrorists, fears that the nuclear arsenal could fall into Taliban hands and the general rise of intolerance and extremism across the country. In addition, tense relations with India and Afghanistan prompt fear.

But as illustrated by the countless books and articles written about Pakistan and Pakistanis, the worldwide consensus appears to be that despite the squabbling politicians, a ruthless army, immoral security forces and fierce militants, the people of Pakistan are what make the country special -- and intriguing.

Whatever the problem, no matter how acute the crisis, Pakistan and

Pakistanis muddle through. Of course, that's not how a country becomes an object of worldwide admiration -- or joins the G20 group of emerging nations.

But it does mean that even as they lash out against Pakistan's two-faced military and political leaders, American and European policymakers raise their hats to the resilient, strong and upbeat spirit of the people of Pakistan. That's the message I have received over the

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years from the likes of the late Richard Holbrooke and others.

Member of European Parliament Sajjad Karim, who is also founder and chairman of the assembly's Friends of Pakistan Group, says that Pakistan is lucky to have a vibrant civil society which has "developed by default." He told this correspondent recently: "Because the state has failed the people, the people have decided not to fail the state." He added that one of the most promising -- though difficult to quantify -- features that Pakistan has is the sense that, when seemingly insurmountable challenges to the country rear their head, "a glimmer of hope invariably appears, not from government structures or authoritative bodies but from the people."

"Individuals or civil groups provide the glimmer of hope that allows the country to pull itself out of adversity," he insists. Karim is not alone in admiring the resilience of Pakistan's

civil society. After having worked almost exclusively with state institutions in the past, the US and the EU are also turning their focus on civil society groups to nurse the country back to health.

The general impression appears to be that while many in Pakistan are unable or unwilling to rock the boat and have decided to stay silent in the face of repression and oppression, there are others who are ready to stand up and be counted.

This is the case for the many hard-working human rights activists who stand firm in the face of attacks on minorities, women and children. The international press writes about such people regularly as it did about the Ghairat Brigade rock band which so successfully mocked the seemingly conservative morals of many Pakistanis.

The decision by Samaa TV to fire Maya Khan for her unforgivable witch-hunt of couples seeking some much-needed private romantic downtime also secured worldwide attention.

(Actually I would also like others in her posse of self-appointed vigilantes to be taken to task.)

There is interest of course in the latest mass rallies organised by Imran Khan and the sulks of both the president and the prime minister as well as the strutting of the army and security chieftains. But while these men and women come and go, the

people of Pakistan are increasingly being viewed as the country's main asset -- whether living at home or abroad.

The truth is that while China and India have been successful in establishing strong ties with their diaspora communities, Pakistan maintains an awkward love-hate relationship with its brothers and sisters abroad. This correspondent fought for many years to secure Pakistani passports for her children. The request was initially refused because their father is Spanish -- although Pervez Musharraf did introduce legislation which allows them to be recognised as non-resident Pakistanis.

Sajjad Karim is angry that Pakistan is considering legislation that would ban Pakistanis with dual nationalities from standing for office in Pakistan.

"It is quite clear, looking at China and India, that the diaspora has had a huge role in their economic revivals," he says. In each of these cases, the countries reached out to their respective diasporas and helped bring them into the fold. In the same way, Pakistan needs to harness the resources and energy of its citizens abroad as a starting point for its own revival, he says.

I have attended many lunches and dinners where visiting Pakistani leaders waft in and out, begging bowls in hand, asking for contributions from "loyal" Pakistanis living abroad to bring prosperity to the motherland. The truth is that many members of the diaspora are working very hard to ensure the development of their country of birth.

But to partially quote the late Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, most would rather eat grass than trust a Pakistani politician with their hard-earned euros and dollars.

The writer is Dawn's correspondent in Brussels. © Dawn. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement with Asia News Network.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 14

**1804** Karadjdije leads the First Serbian Uprising against the Ottoman Empire.

**1945** President Franklin D. Roosevelt meets with King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia aboard the USS Quincy, officially starting the U.S.-Saudi diplomatic relationship.

**1989** Iranian leader Ruhollah Khomeini issues a fatwa encouraging Muslims to kill the author of *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie.

**2011** As a part of Arab spring, the 20112012 Bahraini uprising, a series of demonstrations, amounting to a sustained campaign of civil resistance, in the Persian Gulf country of Bahrain begins.