

welcome Shinzō Abe Prime Minister of Japan



Long live Bangladesh-Japan Friendship

The Daily Star

Special Supplement

Saturday, September 6, 2014

Abe visit for advancing comprehensive partnership

REZAUL KARIM

TODAY an opportunity has come - apparently it is knocking at Bangladesh's door - to build a strategic partnership with Japan, a country which is again looking at Asean and South Asian countries as investment destinations. The visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his visit will discuss these plans at a meeting with his Bangladeshi counterpart, Sheikh Hasina scheduled to be held at the Prime Minister's Office at 4pm today.

We understand the visit is taking place when Japanese investment in China dropped by 45 percent over the last 11 months. Japanese companies invest over US\$ 5 billion a year in China which has come down to half. It seems Bangladesh does not want to miss this opportunity this time as there is possibility that Vietnam, Myanmar, India and other destinations might snatch the opportunity if Bangladesh fails to fulfill Japanese investors' expectations in terms of investment facilities.

The less than 24-hour visit is taking place at the invitation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This visit is also taking place after fourteen years since the visit of the then Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori in the year 2000. Most interesting feature of the visit is that the size of trade delegation which will accompany Shinzo Abe. The trade delegation, as informed by the Foreign Ministry, is a 50-member team while the total entourage member is about 150. This indicates that Japan has taken the visit very seriously.

Diplomatic sources said Japan will support the creation of an industrial area in Bangladesh near the Bay of Bengal, providing some 600 billion yen (\$5.7 billion) in official development assistance over the next four to five years. The undertaking will focus on the region linking the capital of Dhaka with Matarbari near the major port city of

Chittagong, featuring a series of infrastructure projects and a special economic zone for Japanese companies. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his visit will discuss these plans at a meeting with his Bangladeshi counterpart, Sheikh Hasina scheduled to be held at the Prime Minister's Office at 4pm today.

According to Nikkei Asian Review Japan's plans to set up the special economic zone in the Dhaka area will be solidified as early as this fiscal year. The Japanese government is expected to provide some 40 billion yen in support. A 15 billion yen fund will be set up by next fiscal year, and a special-purpose company will be established to build an industrial park.

Tokyo will help with infrastructure construction and corporate financing as well. Japan will also offer yen loans for building railways and expressways between cities and assist in constructing urban infrastructure in Dhaka and Chittagong. The area around a coal-fired power plant in Matarbari will be a priority for development as well.

With a population of 160 million and its gross domestic product growing at a 6% plus annual clip, Bangladesh is an attractive potential market for Japanese companies. As we mentioned, Japanese



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina & Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during the former's visit to Japan in May 2014.

investment to China has dropped by nearly 45 percent in the last 11 months, which Bangladesh considers as a huge change as well as an opportunity.

Ahead of Abe's visit to Dhaka, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali on Thursday said investment issues including Japanese assistance in ensuring energy security and infrastructure development would dominate Bangladesh-Japan summit meeting. "We're giving highest importance to (Japanese) investment issues," he told a press conference and said the visit would play a very significant role in continuing Japanese assistance towards Bangladesh's socioeconomic develop-

ment. "This visit can be considered as a milestone in terms of two countries relations."

Diplomatic sources said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will visit Sri Lanka after Bangladesh to strengthen security and economic ties as well as help Japanese businesses tap growing demand for infrastructure in the countries. Abe, during Hasina's visit, announced his commitment to provide up to 600 billion Yen of additional assistance, mainly Yen loans, including the 35th yen loan package totaling 120 billion Yen, to Bangladesh over the next four to five years from 2014, taking fully into account the proper and smooth implementation of

projects.

With the economic assistance programmes, Japan aims to seek support from Bangladesh for Tokyo's bid for a nonpermanent seat in the UN Security Council (UNSC) election next year. A highly placed source told The Daily Star that the Japanese Prime Minister Abe will discuss Japan's candidacy on the UNSC for the 2016-2017 with Hasina. Only one member state from the Asia-Pacific region can win each election.

Bangladesh's support is crucial for Japan as Dhaka has also been expressing its interest in contesting for the nonpermanent seat and campaigning since 2002. According to a recent report of Kyodo News Agency of Japan, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is likely to announce the withdrawal of her country's candidacy for the 2016-2017 non-permanent seat on the UNSC. At a news conference hosted by the Japan National Press Club during her trip, Hasina hinted Bangladesh would withdraw its candidacy before the council election in 2015, saying, "For a trusted friend, Bangladesh is ready to make any sacrifice. Definitely, we will get some good news during Abe's visit," she said.

During Hasina's visit to Japan on May 25-28, Hasina and Abe shared the impor-

tance of an early reform of the United Nations Security Council so as to reflect contemporary geo-political realities. Prime Minister Hasina reaffirmed Bangladesh's support for Japan's aspiration to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

Soon after independence, Japan's recognition of Bangladesh as a sovereign state came on February 10, 1972. We remember Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Japan in October 1973 and laid the solid foundation of bilateral relations. The visit of Bangabandhu to Japan cemented the foundation of our bilateral relations. Then the subsequent visit of the then Crown Prince and Crown Princess to Bangladesh in February 1975, also added huge momentum to the bilateral relations, friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent official visit to Japan from May 25 to 28, 2014, at the invitation of the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, recognized the long-standing relations between the two countries based on shared values of peace, democracy, human rights and rule of law. The two Prime Ministers affirmed their commitment to further strengthen bilateral cooperation by elevating the friendly relationship to a new partnership. The two Prime Ministers thus launched the "Japan-Bangladesh Comprehensive Partnership". Both the Prime Ministers also decided to detail the modalities at the earliest.

Since the independence of Bangladesh, Japan has been an active partner in boosting economic and social development. As of now, Japan and Bangladesh have maintained friendly relations through economic and technical cooperation, cultural exchanges and mutual visits. Its assistance comes regularly as grant, aid, technical assistance and soft loan. The total grants and aid reached \$11 billion last year.

The writer is Diplomatic Correspondent of The Daily Star.



Innovation that excites

THE NISSAN PATROL NISSAN'S FLAGSHIP SUV



PATROL

Capacity: 5.6 L

FROM READY STOCK; AVAILABLE COLORS:



BLACK OBSIDIAN



PEARL WHITE

THE ALL-NEW SYLPHY MOST INNOVATIVE SYLPHY EVER



SYLPHY

Capacity: 1.6 L

FROM READY STOCK; AVAILABLE COLORS:



RADIANT RED



WHITE PEARL



DEEP IRIS GRAY



BLACK STAR

Test Drive is available on Friday & Saturday | Price includes 4 free after sales service | Flexible Auto Loan facility is available*

*Conditions apply

PACIFIC MOTORS LTD.

Dhaka: 206/1-207/1, Bir Uttam Mir Shawkat Sarak, Tejgaon, Dhaka- 1208, Bangladesh; Mobile: 01198 023026, 01199 800103, 01199 800107

Chittagong: 334, SK. Mujib Road, Agrabad, Chittagong- 4100, Bangladesh; Mobile: 01199 700453, 01199 700103

f Nissan Bangladesh