

Japan is a trusted friend of Bangladesh

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THE foreign relations synopsis prepared and handled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan lists two political goals in the country's relationship with Bangladesh. One is to gain support in Japan's bid to join the United Nations Security Council and another is to secure markets for its finished products. It is the first goal that is believed to be the reason why Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe is visiting Bangladesh. He is hoping to obtain Bangladesh's commitment to vote for his country so that it will win the UN slot.

It is said that Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during her visit to Japan last May had hinted that she should be able to give her counterpart some good news when he visits Bangladesh. The diplomatic observers are convinced that Bangladesh is inclined to support the Japanese candidacy and that is what Prime Minister Abe is going to hear when he is in Dhaka.

If that happens, it will be Bangladesh's opportunity to show its gratitude to a trusted and tested friend which has been amongst the first countries to recognize its independence. Japan also has been one of the largest donor countries and a significant source of development aid to Bangladesh. By 2004, Japan had become Bangladesh's fourth-largest source of foreign direct investment, behind the United States, United Kingdom, and Malaysia.

There are more reasons why Bangladesh owes it to Japan. The Japanese Embassy figures as at December 2013 show that the trade relations between the two countries have made significant progress in last five years. Export to Japan rose by 2.5 times between 2009 and 2013. The apparel export to Japan from Bangladesh has multiplied by as many as 20 times and the number of Japanese companies doing business in Bangladesh grew by 2.47 times. Japan is Bangladesh's 11th-largest export market; imports from Bangladesh make up 26% of all Japanese imports from the least developed countries, second only to those from Cambodia.

What are the odds facing Bangladesh if it takes the Japanese side in the UN election? The most recent visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Japan is an indication that even of India does not go all out for the Japanese cause in the United Nations; it will not at least ruffle feathers with it either. India is eyeing a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and US President Barack Obama's assurance to back the country on this issue. India has nothing to lose if Japan wins in its UN bid.

How is Bangladesh going to deal with China, which has every reason to resist Japan's accession to the Security Council? Since 2012, China and Japan have been drawn into a bitter conflict over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which continues to be a thorn in their side. Bangladesh Prime minister visited China June this year and said in a press conference after her return that she thought after Japan her visit to China was also very successful. During that visit, Dhaka and Beijing have signed six instruments for execution of different projects. Both sides have agreed for Chinese support for five more projects at a total cost of USD5 billion. One would expect that Bangladesh must have broached the Japanese issue with the Chinese leaders and got their buy in already since the Prime Minister visited China after she visited Japan.

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Dhaka-Tokyo relations to be strengthened

SHAHNOOR WAHID

THE people of Bangladesh heartily welcome Prime Minister of Japan His Excellency Shinzo Abe to their beloved country. Japan is known to them as a good and trusted friend and they respect the long-standing relations based on shared values of peace, democracy, human rights and rule of law. Therefore, it is only natural that they will expect further strengthening of the bilateral relations and widening of the horizon of friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

Japan has been a dependable partner since the birth of Bangladesh in the development of various vital sectors. In fact, Japanese assistance in Bangladesh has been multifaceted, encompassing sectors like infrastructure (roads, bridges, railway), energy, health, IT, climate-related projects, river-management and so on. During the visit of Shinzo Abe it is expected that details of significant economic and technical cooperation in priority sectors will be at the top of the agenda.

It may be mentioned here that during the visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Japan, the government of Shinzo Abe pledged an assistance of US\$5.7 billion to be spread over the next 4 to 5 years. Bangladesh will receive support from Japan for the development of its power sector, among other areas, for attaining uninterrupted electricity supply for the next 15 years. It will be done under a master plan which JICA is conducting on the basis of diversification of fuel resources.

Talks are likely to bring up the issues of formation of Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt; construction of Ganges Barrage, multi-modal tunnel under the river Jamuna, dedicated railway bridge over the river Jamuna, multi-modal Dhaka Eastern Bypass and ecological restoration of the four rivers around Dhaka.

It may be recalled here that during the recent Japan visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina the two prime ministers launched the 'Japan - Bangladesh Comprehensive Partnership'. Some of the key points of the partnership joint statement, that concern Bangladesh, are discussed below.

The two prime ministers decided that Japan and Bangladesh would initiate and carry forward policy dialogue so as to deepen their cooperation in the context of evolving global security environment.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina endorsed Japan's increasing efforts to contribute actively in securing regional and global peace, stability and prosperity. She expressed her support and appreciation for Japan's policy of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" based on the princi-

ple of international cooperation. Prime Minister Abe appreciated the expression of Bangladesh's support.

The two prime ministers acknowledged the importance of integrated approaches to protection, promotion and development of marine natural resources in the adjoining oceans and seas in accordance with international law.

They also shared the importance of an early reform of the United Nations Security Council taking into consideration existing geo-political realities. The joint statement says that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reaffirmed Bangladesh's support for Japan's aspiration to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

The two prime ministers shared their determination to give impetus to economic development and poverty reduction in Bangladesh. In this regard, they welcomed the signing of the Exchange of Notes concerning the 35th yen loan package projects totaling 120 billion yen which was pledged by Japan's Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida during his visit to Bangladesh in March 2014.

As far as regional cooperation is concerned the two prime ministers also agreed on a number of issues, such as, imperatives of discussing and promoting wider regional development, "including fostering regional connectivity, developing economic infrastructure for industrial growth and improving investment environment to attract foreign businesses, including from Japan, while enhancing social development contributing to the improvement of lives and livelihoods of people. In this context, Prime Minister Abe 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 in about 4 or 5 years from 2014, taking fully into account the proper and smooth implementation of projects."

The other significant area of cooperation identified in the joint statement is strengthening the capacity to face various challenges in the areas of climate change and disaster risk reduction.

The two prime ministers agreed on expansion of overall bilateral economic relations and the launch of "Joint Bangladesh-Japan Public-Private Economic Dialogue". In this connection, Prime Minister Abe underscored the importance of an improvement of investment environment in Bangladesh, including infrastructure development, stable energy supply, development of industrial park(s) and accelerated processing of permits, licenses, etc. in order to further facilitate and promote Japanese investment in Bangladesh.

The two prime ministers reaffirmed

the importance of peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sought Japan's cooperation for capacity building in nuclear safety and security. Introduction of Japan's high level medical expertise and technology for the development of medical and health sector in Bangladesh also received due attention.

It is during this visit Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina extended her invitation to Prime Minister Abe to visit Bangladesh as soon as possible at a mutually convenient time. Prime Minister Abe accepted the invitation with deep appreciation.

The writer is Special Supplements Editor, The Daily Star.

Heartiest Felicitations

To

His Excellency

Mr. Shinzō Abe

Prime Minister of Japan



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Shinzō Abe
Honorable Prime Minister of Japan

歓迎

Navana Limited Proudly Welcomes The Honorable Prime Minister of Japan Mr. Shinzō Abe to Bangladesh

Over the years Japan has been a major benefactor of our beloved motherland. We hope that this visit will further strengthen the bond between Bangladesh and Japan.

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