

Japan's support for Bangladesh will continue

Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono, who arrives in Dhaka today for a brief but important day-long visit to Bangladesh, talked to The Daily Star's Diplomatic Correspondent Rezaul Karim on a wide range of issues, including bilateral development cooperation, Japanese investment in Bangladesh, infrastructure development, and a power generation project. He also talks about the ongoing Rohingya crisis. The exclusive interview was based on a set of questions sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo through the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh ahead of his visit. Following are excerpts from the interview.

The Daily Star (TDS): What is the state of progress in the Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project and the Matarbari Ultra Super Critical Coal-Fired Power Project, both financed by Japanese ODA, as well as the prospects for their completion? It appears that Japanese assistance for developing infrastructure in Bangladesh has been delayed since the terrorist attack occurred in Dhaka in July 2016. What are the prospects for assistance from Japan going forward? Also, what support is Japan providing in the special economic zones in Bangladesh for Japanese companies?

Taro Kono (TK): Japan and Bangladesh celebrate the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations this year, supported by the amicable bilateral relations as well as bonds between our people. The friendship between the two countries began with the Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's visit to Japan back in 1973, who is the founding father of Bangladesh, with a special interest in the Japanese way of life, together with a profound knowledge of Japanese traditions and culture. Prime Minister Rahman made significant contributions to strengthening the Japan-Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh has been witnessing remarkable development under the superb leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Prime Minister Rahman and heir to his legacy. It is my great pleasure to visit Bangladesh as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan in this most memorable year.



Taro Kono

As one of the main development partners to Bangladesh, Japan is providing assistance for the fight against poverty, the development of infrastructure, and measures to help overcome vulnerability to natural disasters. In particular, under "The Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B) Initiative" agreed to at the bilateral summit meeting in 2014, we are accelerating cooperation aimed at the development of quality infrastructure, the investment environment, and strengthening regional connectivity.

The ongoing Matarbari Ultra Super Critical

Coal-Fired Power Project, the Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project, as well as the Foreign Direct Investment Promotion Project are all important to the BIG-B Initiative, and will greatly contribute to the social and economic development of Bangladesh.

Under the Matarbari Ultra Super Critical Coal-Fired Power Project, two 600 MW-class power generation stations will be built with the aim of generating 7,865GWh of electricity per year by 2026. The Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project will establish an urban rail network that aims to eliminate traffic congestion by providing transportation to more than 570,000 urban residents every day by 2024. Both projects are under contract to Japanese corporations, which are utilising high-quality technology in their work. The Government of Japan will extend its cooperation to ensure their early completion. In addition, Japan is advancing cooperation in the special economic zones for Japanese businesses under the Foreign Direct Investment Promotion Project of Bangladesh, which is supported by Japan. It is expected that Japanese direct investment in Bangladesh as well as the number of Japanese companies operating there will grow further.

It is extremely regrettable that the precious lives of many people, including Japanese nationals engaged in international cooperation projects, were lost in the terrorist attack in Dhaka in July 2016. I would like to once again resolutely condemn despicable acts of terror, but, at the same time, I

appreciate the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh to ensure the security of foreign nationals, including those from Japan, under a strict counterterrorism policy. Japan will continue to actively provide assistance to Bangladesh, while carrying on the will of the victims and securing the safety of the personnel engaged in international cooperation projects.

The future of "Golden Bengal" is full of hope. The potential for cooperation between our two nations towards the achievement of a free and open Indo-Pacific is growing. I intend to take the lead personally, and strive to further develop our bilateral relations, based on our comprehensive partnership.

TDS: How is the Government of Japan responding in light of the state of affairs in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar? What kind of support can Japan provide to Bangladesh in dealing with this problem?

TK: The Government of Japan strongly condemns the August 25 attack in the northern Rakhine State, Myanmar, carried out by armed groups against the security forces, and the acts of violence against civilians. We are also deeply concerned over the local human rights and humanitarian situation after the attack, allegations of the murder of many citizens, and the outflow of more than 600,000 displaced people to Bangladesh.

We highly value the response by the Government of Bangladesh under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to accept them and treat the newly displaced people with the utmost care from a

humanitarian perspective. We also welcome the consultations taking place between Bangladesh and Myanmar regarding border security and the issue of displacement of people. The encouragement of the international community towards the progress of the consultations is crucial.

Under the difficult circumstances, the Government of Japan intends to firmly support the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh. We extended emergency assistance of USD 5 million for the provision of shelters and daily necessities, including water, and sanitary items, and for child protection, etc. In addition to this, we will extend an assistance of USD 18.6 million to the priority areas for displaced people such as foods through international organisations.

The Government of Myanmar has stated that it will advance 1) humanitarian assistance, 2) the return and resettlement of displaced people and reconstruction, and 3) measures for regional development and the easing of tensions between communities. They also showed their intention to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission chaired by Kofi Annan. The steady implementation of these efforts is important for resolving this problem, and the Government of Japan will provide support for resolution of this problem.

Japan will continue to consider any and all means of support, in order to fundamentally resolve this grave and complex issue, through close collaboration with Bangladesh.

WORLD DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR ROAD TRAFFIC VICTIMS Making our roads safer

SADRUL HASAN MAZUMDER

THE World Health Organization's (WHO) data shows that 1.25 million people are killed and as many as 50 million people are injured in road crashes every year. Road crash ranked as the 11th leading cause of death, accounting for 2.1 percent of all deaths globally. Around 90 percent of the 1.25 million deaths caused by road crashes each year occur in developing countries. Road injuries are the leading cause of death among people aged between 15 and 29, and the ninth leading cause of death overall, according to the WHO statistics.

The UN World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/5, observed every third Sunday in November, is a major advocacy day for road traffic injury prevention. This year's theme—"reduce road fatalities AND serious injuries by 50 percent"—has been framed in line with the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–20 and has reaffirmed the importance of drawing urgent measures to reduce the prevalence of road crash.

The Chair of the UN Road Safety Collaboration, Dr Etienne Krug, in his official statement on World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, said, "We once again turn our thoughts to the millions who have lost loved ones on the world's roads this year. Every day the media bring us news of tragic events, behind each of which are a grieving family and friends, whose lives are forever changed. It is indeed a time to remember and to acknowledge that much more must be done—and now—to avoid such tragic loss of life... The best way to honour the memory of those who have suffered on the world's roads would be for governments to fulfil the commitments they made at the start of the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020 before it is too late."

WHO statistics show that more than 90

percent of road traffic deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, and road traffic injury death rates are highest in the African region. According to WHO, "even within high-income countries, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be involved in road traffic crashes." People aged between 15 and 44 years account for 48 percent of global road traffic deaths. Males are more likely to be involved in road traffic crashes than females. About three quarters (73 percent) of all road traffic deaths occur among young males under the age of 25 who are almost three times as likely to be killed in a road crash as young females.

Speeding, impaired driving (due to alcohol/drugs/fatigue), not wearing seat belts or helmets, and texting are some of the factors that lead to road crash. WHO statistics also show that an increase of 1km/h in mean vehicle speed results in an increase of three percent in the incidence of crashes resulting in injury and an increase of four to five percent in the incidence of fatal crashes.

Unsafe road infrastructure has been found to be an important contributing factor to road crash and the design of roads has a considerable impact on safety. Ideally, roads should be designed keeping in mind the safety of all road users. This would mean ensuring that there are adequate facilities for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists. Footpaths, cycling lanes, safe crossing points, and other traffic calming measures are critical to reducing the risk of injury among road users.

Dr Md Shamsul Hoque, Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, is a road safety expert. During his research, he found that many road crashes took place due to infrastructural issues rather than vehicular speed, etc.

A BRAC study shows that even though road crashes mostly happen on highways, the actual spots on these highways where the bulk of the crashes occur are bus



The mangled remains of a passenger bus and truck after they collided on the Dhaka-Tangail highway at Ichail of Mirzapur, leaving five people dead and 15 others injured.

PHOTO: STAR

stands (41 percent), road intersection points (17.8 percent) and marketplaces (28 percent). The study also found that majority of the road crashes occur in crowded spots or intersections rather than isolated stretches on highways—contrary to popular belief. This is a reminder that enforcement of traffic laws and vigilance of traffic police are the need of the hour.

Safe vehicles play a critical role in averting road crashes and reducing the likelihood of serious injury. Dr Md Shamsul Hoque in his

research study shows that faulty design of vehicles alone contributed greatly to the increase in road crash fatalities. BRAC has taken into consideration a set of recommendations to enhance the capacity of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA)—the lone institute in charge of ensuring fitness of vehicles and certifying their credentials.

The first one hour after a road crash—globally known as the "golden hour"—is crucial. This is when early medical

care might prevent fatalities or dire consequences from an injury. Sadly, however, both private and public health service providers in South Asia, including Bangladesh, have historically been negligent about providing emergency medical services to road accident victims. Furthermore, Good Samaritans are usually fearful of legal consequences, harassment, etc.

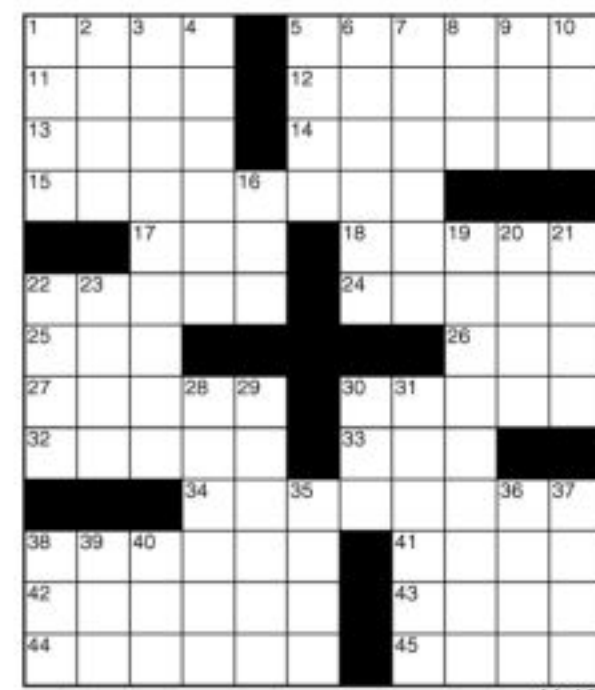
Road crash fatalities are not just an inevitable concomitant of development; these fatalities can be prevented and minimised through judicious and timely action. WHO states, "Governments need to take action to address road safety in a holistic manner. This requires involvement of multiple sectors such as transport, police, health, education, and actions that address the safety of roads, vehicles, and road users. Effective interventions include designing safer infrastructure and incorporating road safety features into land-use and transport planning, improving the safety features of vehicles, improving post-crash care for victims of road crashes, setting and enforcing laws relating to key risks, and raising public awareness."

SDG 11.2 calls to "provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons" by 2030. The aspiration set by the SDGs now requires the Bangladesh government to intensify its efforts in coordinating road safety actions—be it legislative reforms or ensuring effective enforcement of existing laws and policies.

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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