‘People-to-people exchange between Nepal and Japan will further increase’

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono is arriving in Kathmandu today on a two-day official visit at the invitation of Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali. Kono’s visit comes less than two months after Gyawali’s trip to Tokyo and is the first visit to Nepal by the top Japanese diplomat in seven years. Ahead of his visit, Kono talked about his trip and the relationship between the two countries.

You are the first Foreign Minister of Japan to visit Nepal since 2012. What is the main purpose of your visit?

The reason behind my Nepal visit is to consolidate the friendship between both nations through economic cooperation in various sectors such as economic development, stability of democratic nations, and growth of our good relations. Nepal is not only a good friend of ours but also an important country for the stability and prosperity of the international community.

Last November, Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Gyawali visited Japan. This time I came here at the invitation of Minister Gyawali. Apart from meeting with Minister Gyawali and other top officials of the Government of Nepal, I am scheduled to visit Chitwan National Park and to visit cultural heritage sites in Kathmandu Valley.

Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Japan in 1956, we have been maintaining our official friendship through economic cooperation, cultural exchange, tourism, and personal visits. In addition, our two countries have always supported each other during difficult times. Nepal people living in Japan visited affected areas of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, and the ills earthquake in 2015 saw the two countries of the world stand together and encouraged the quake-affected people with finely cooked Dal Bhat and warm Nepali coffee.

Likewise, Japan provided assistance to Nepal during the 2015 earthquake by sending emergency crews and relief materials as well as cooperating in the rescue work. At schools, residential issues to make Nepal a strong nation to withstand natural disasters. Furthermore, the relationship between Nepal and Japan is based on mutual respect and understanding, which is the key to the development of the two nations.

I take advantage of my visit this time, and would like to further enhance cooperation between Nepal and Japan for national stability and development.

In the future, what are the sectors you think will have the potential for broader development in Japan-Nepal relations?

People-to-people exchange between the two countries has been increasing every passing year. In 2012, over 57,000 Japanese nationals visited Nepal, while the number of Nepali visitors to Japan has reached over 26,000.

I feel that people-to-people exchange between the two countries will further increase after the conclusion of Direct Flights between the two nations in the near future with the renewal of Air Service Agreement in June 2012. It also drew my attention that during Minister Gyawali’s Jap visit last year, there was overwhelming participation of people in the Nepal Investment Seminar which was held in Tokyo. This shows that Japanese companies have great interest in Nepal. I hope that through these types of seminars and the high-level meetings exchange of the two countries, Japanese companies will expand their business and investment in Nepal, and the relationship between the two nations will be further enhanced.

For the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, Tokyo city of Japan and Kathmandu city of Nepal are planning to be host town for the Olympics and Paralympics. I strongly believe that through these host towns, the exchanges between athletes and local people of the two countries will further strengthen.

Besides these exchanges, I also expect relations between the two countries in the tourism sector to expand. Nepal has numerous beautiful mountain and historical heritage sites. Lured by the beauty of Nepal, many Japanese are visiting the country and involved in trekking activities. Like mentioned earlier, I am confident that many Japanese tourists will come to Nepal. If direct flights are to be operated, Japan is willing to help Nepal in its tourism development.

Japan has been extending support to Nepal’s development as a friend for a long time. Japan has been assisting Nepal in agriculture, health care, education, transportation, electricity, and many other areas. Nepal is striving to consolidate democracy and become a middle-income country after successfully holding elections based on the new constitution following the devastating earthquake in 2015.

Regarding Nepal’s campaign of ‘Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepal’ (Samriddhi Nepal), Japan will continue to support Nepal in the key areas: (1) Poverty reduction and improvement of quality of life; (2) Enhancement of governance and development of efficient systems; (3) Poverty reduction and improvement of quality of life; (4) Reconstruction and development of basic framework of democracy. In addition, agriculture is Nepal’s key sector as around 80 percent of its population is engaged in agriculture. At the current stage, the relationship between Nepal and Japan is very close and I strongly hope that Japan’s support will further strengthen Nepal’s economic development and Japan-Nepal relations.

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