

JAPAN AND SOUTH ASIA YOUTH FORUM 2004

PREFACE

At the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, delegates from all South Asian countries visited Tokyo for participating in the conference of Japan and South Asia Youth Forum from 26th September to 28th September in 2004. The general theme of this conference is “Promoting Exchange between Japan and South Asia” under the scopes for construction of new partnership between them.

This Forum has been initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan since 1983. The purposes of this annual forum are to promote the mutual understanding in the aspects of cultural, religious, economic, political, and international relations. This year, there were 39 participants from South Asian countries (India 11, Sri Lanka 5, Nepal 4, Pakistan 9, Bangladesh 7, Bhutan 2, Maldives 1) while there were 46 participants from Japan. The Youth Forum participants included students, journalists, public officers, researchers, volunteers, engineers, academics and professionals.

The delegates were divided into three groups aiming to discuss and generate proposals on three separate groups A, B and C on the sub themes of International relations, Security & Society, Economics and Sports, Culture & Arts, respectively. Their view, proposals and the action plans are as follows:

Group A: International Relations, Security and Society

Group A proposes that Japan and South Asia build better relationship in terms of security not only bilaterally but also regionally through ways such as holding more talks at various levels constructively and having Japan take the role as a neutral facilitator in the regional conflicts. Disarmament is another area where both sides should cooperate together considering the fact that Japan stands unique as the only nation attacked by the nuclear bombs. The delegates insist that Japan and South Asia collaborate to make the United Nations work better, especially regarding the current reform of the United Nations. In seeking Japan/South Asia partnership, it is proposed that both sides share the experiences of United Nations Peace Keeping Operations (PKOs). Other fields of potential cooperation include journalism, environment, human rights, and cultural exchange. Finally, Group A concludes the action plan by emphasizing that education is vital in that the lack of education may well be the fundamental cause of the problems.

Security

Japan and South Asia need to develop a better partnership. Human security issues must also be addressed. Various definitions and forms of terrorism exist, and delegates differed in defining terrorism. There was an agreement, however, in combating international terrorism that kills the innocent. Japan can work with organizations like SAARC to combat terrorism. The delegates agree to the need for intelligence sharing, joint patrolling to check the illegal spread of weapons and to control international crimes such as the trafficking of the human beings and the drugs/narcotics trade. The necessity of tackling Kashmir issue peacefully is agreed, and Japan should take a positive role in the regional conflicts as Japan has been doing in the Sri Lanka peace building process.

Disarmament

The issue of disarmament and small arms trade is of burning concern for Asia. Japan, having suffered the devastating effects of nuclear attack, can sensitize South Asia to the reality and horror of nuclear proliferation.

The problem identified with having nuclear arms is that it increases the chances of escalation of a minor conflict into a nuclear one, as well as, that of nuclear weapon technology transfer and threat. Certain delegates view its deterrent value with skepticism as its presence spurs proliferation and creates an atmosphere of fear and mistrust.

Both states must bear in mind that any releases of radioactive energy can have tremendous repercussion in terms of human life and the environment. International humanitarian law, as well as the international Court of Justice, has established the illegality of any weapon that does not distinguish between combatant and non-combatant life. The proposals to deal with this global concern are as follows:

- Prevent development, production and stockpiling of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)
- Reduce military budget and use the funds instead on human security.
- Have South Asian Verification and Monitoring.
- Establish joint patrol on routes known for arms trafficking.
- Have Nuclear Confidence Building Measures
- Support existing mechanisms on disarmament and make CTBT more equitable.
- Campaign for a South Asia Nuclear Free Zone.
- Have more people of South Asia visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and get the message from these cities prevail.

United Nations

United Nations (UN) stands significant as the only source of legitimacy in the international arena. Therefore, the delegates insist that Japan and South Asia cooperate to make the UN work better. The fields of our interest include the reform of the UN Security Council and the mutual cooperation of the two sides to run the PKOs.

Looking at Japan's excessive contribution to the UN budget, the participants realize UN should represent the world fairly. The South Asian countries can support Japan as long as Japan acts from the Asian viewpoint.

It was proposed that Japan and South Asian countries share the PKO training or the actual PKO. This shared experience would contribute not only to the local peace building but also to the mutual understanding and friendship.

Miscellaneous Cooperation

The group proposes the establishment of a permanent forum, composed of South Asian countries, and Japan as a facilitator. The forum will discuss less controversial but important transnational issues. These issues may well include poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, underground international networks of narcotics and weaponry, human trafficking, maritime issues, and human rights. The forum can be comprised of professionals, academics, public officers with the ability to influence state policies, and possibly the alumni of Japan South Asia Youth Forum. Japan can raise issues of discussion previously neglected by South Asian countries.

In journalism the lack of coverage of one another, dependence on foreign networks for Japanese news, sensationalism, and the lack of Asian consciousness are problematic. Proposed solutions include the exchange of journalists and the encouragement of international collaborations between news agencies. The shared vision is a proactive journalism, with the ability to set agendas and to break stereotypes.

Japan can share its past experiences of pollution and solutions. ODA and private investments should ensure sustainable development, and encourage the implementation of environmental protection up to par with Japan.

Not only can Japan help South Asia deal with its social problems, South Asia can also help Japan deal with its problems such as the aging society, social security burden for the next generation given the low birth rate, and the increasing suicide rate. Japan should continue to develop volunteer programs in South Asia for the Japanese elderly, which would foster new perspectives and make them feel useful past retirement. In exchange, Japan should make it easier for South Asian workers to work in Japan, which will abate South Asia's unemployment, while decreasing Japan's social security and tax burdens.

Education

Education is the most effective tool for eradicating the menace of terrorism, poverty, etc. For the disarmament also, education is vital to create healthy and balanced public opinion. Various levels of education were discussed including pre-primary, primary and higher level. Education on health, reproductive health and cultures were emphasized.

A larger portion of the annual budget of the South Asian countries should be allocated to the education sector, to rectify the grievances of poverty-driven societies. Japan may use its ODA to channel investments and government expenditures of the South Asian countries to education. A Japanese model of primary education, Terakoya, is much appreciated in the areas without educational facilities. Suggestion for establishing Terokoya was considered.

The EFA (Education For All) project initiated by UNESCO in 2000 was also discussed. Due to lacking facilities in schools and colleges, the drop out rate is increasing and this is one of the areas considered for Japanese contribution for channeling the ODA and assisting in education sector. Japan may use its diplomatic channels to convince the governments in South Asia to focus on the vulnerable, like educating more and more women.

Finally, the effective means for implementing the policies for education may be through building institutions or associations of education between the two countries, mutually exchanging teachers, or establishing area study centers for South Asia in Japan and vice versa.

Group B: Economy and Development Areas in South Asia

The group had participants from Japan and South Asia economies, discussing the important issues relating to economy, development, trade, peace, harmony and friendship between Japan and South Asia. In the discussions, there was a lot of knowledge dissemination about each country in terms of trade (exports and imports), Official Development Assistance (ODA), foreign entertainment, agriculture, etc. In South Asian economies with respect to Japan, the group also discussed some common problems prevailing in South Asia like poverty, unemployment, corruption, population growth and politics. Recommendations were based on knowledge sharing and individual experiences of the economies; and building the individual strengths of the South Asian countries as the primary focus of Japan –South Asia partnership.

Looking at the individual South Asia economies with respect to Japan, we identified the following four critical areas:

1. Trade, Bilateral Relations and Investments:

Japan looks at South Asia as an important trading partner. Japan is the fifth largest investor in Pakistan. Bilateral trade between Pakistan and Japan amounts to US \$964.15 million annually. Over the years Indo-Japan trade has slopped from a high of US \$4.6 billion (2000) to US \$3.94 billion (2003) level. Bangladesh's export to Japan amounted to be around \$112.35 million and Japan's export to Bangladesh was \$427.38 million (2002). Sri Lanka's export for Japan have been reported at \$US 1.26 million and import from Japan was at \$US 3.25 million (2002).

As on date, Japan Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Singapore and Mexico but not with South Asia trading partners. Japan presently ranks fourth in foreign direct investments in India, behind the United States, Mauritius and United Kingdom (2003). Japan's total direct investment in Pakistan amounted to US \$9.3 million in FY 2004. Japanese investment to Bangladesh went down approx. US \$357 million) by 20.8% (FY2002) comparing to last fiscal year, Japan is in the process of engaging with ASEAN for a FTA, where a target year 2012 has been mentioned. For Japan - USA, China and Korea are the top three trade partners. Japan made a major revision in their Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) scheme in 2001 and further revised it in 2003, extending duty free and quota free treatment to a substantial number of industrial products and agricultural products form Bangladesh and the LDCs.

2. Technical Collaborations:

Japan has been helping India since 1958 through its ODA programme. ODA is provided to infrastructural sectors like telecommunication, power and transport. Japan's assistance under ODA since fiscal 1990-91 to 2001-02 cumulates at ¥ 977.14 bn. Pakistan is the 7th largest recipient of Japanese ODA in terms of total volume of ODA. In total ODA inflow from multilateral agencies, Japanese contribution is between 45% to 47%. ODA Loans (Yen Loans) to Sri Lanka amounts to Yen 23,476 million. In terms of value Bangladesh and the rest of South Asian countries are lagging far behind than India and Pakistan in exploring the export opportunities of the Japanese market. South Asia may seek help from the government of Japan in up gradation of technology (agricultural Equipments, manufacturing machineries etc.) and human skills.

3. Common Problems

Poverty, unemployment, population growth, corruption and political instability are the to be explored. For example, India's software exports to Japan are only US \$250 million. Japan's investments in Indian IT industry are also a fraction of what is possible. The future therefore, is to effectively collaborate in both hardware & software to deepen the IT networks for a New Age Partnership. In fact Japanese common problems facing South Asian economies. South Asia is also facing serious challenges from the Chinese exporters. For instance, while in apparels Bangladesh has a huge market. Bangladesh can try to Capture the lower end of the market and avoid the Chinese threat. Similarly Pakistan's yarn and textile industry is particularly growing and has achieved global recognition in the area, yet is not producing high value added products. This can be an important area of interest for the Japanese investors.

4. Upcoming Sectors for Japan –South Asia Partnership:

Japan has limited trade relations in certain areas like "Information Technology"(IT) that are yet hardware and Indian software companies can collaborate in this rapidly changing sector. This can have a spread effect in the remaining countries of South Asia.

In the area of biotechnology, South Asia receives assistance from EU and United States

but Japanese collaboration is required for further development so as to strengthen Japan – South Asia partnership.

After having looked at the key areas of Japan and South Asian economic co-operation, ODA along with FDI emerged as the principal actors in influencing development in the South Asian region.

Policy Recommendations

The efficient utilization of ODA is a key to success in the entire South Asia region for achieving sustainable development goals and poverty reduction. Strengthening co-operation between recipient countries, Japan and NGOs along with FDI from private sector are required for marching towards the development of South Asia. Local community participation in recipient countries in decision-making process facilitated by the political decision making actors will reflect the voices of the local people, ensuring ODA as the key issue in the action plan.

Suggestions for South Asian Governments

The recipient countries should increase their capacity to utilize ODA. It is notable that the South Asian countries are not poor in resources, but due to the lack of Absorptive capacity, technical skills and underdeveloped infrastructure are unable to utilize their potential.

While conducting any ODA funded projects, reducing elements of corruption through a check by third party can improve the delivery services and cost effectiveness.

SAARC should be made more effective not only to increase the cooperation among the member countries but also between Japan and South Asian countries.

Local governments should be empowered to mobilize the ODA to identify the key area in the ODA's grass root assistance program.

Japan-South Asia and third Party consultants should get involved in the entire process of planning, implementing and evaluating of the ODA funded projects.

For FDI, barrier like communication and language should be reduced.

Suggestions for Japanese Government

Japanese ODA should be continued in the area of capacity building, both institutional

and individual, human development and socio-economic transformation.

People to people contact/dialogue between South Asia and Japan will promote exchange of ideas and technical skills by sharing experiences and lessons learned.

Sharing information among implementing agencies such as JICA, JBIC and JETRO will go further in facilitating timely decisions.

Japan Fund in SAARC can be utilized effectively to enhance the contribution in grass root assistance program of ODA.

Stress should be given on effective dissemination of information on ODA in the Japan society.

Public –private partnership can be induced including Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) for working in South Asia to provide contributions for instance for Japan Platform in response to the need of joining Corporate Social Responsibility(CSR)2006.

For FDI, barrier like communication and language should be reduced.

Group C: Promoting Exchange through Culture, Sports, and Arts

Group C at the South Asian Invitation Programme comprised of professionals and students from varied fields. The ideas under discussion were the different ways, which can be used to promote exchange among the South Asian countries and Japan keeping Culture, Sports, and Arts as the focal points.

Participants of this group identified that though Asia is the most populous continent having a profusion of ethnic groups, religious and cultures with the same basic values, there exist grave misconceptions due to a lack of regular communication flow between them.

With this in mind, the delegates felt a strong need for a common platform to facilitate better exchange between these countries. As mentioned earlier, Group C focused on the following four key areas:

Religion:

South Asia has extremely diverse religions. These diversities have been perceived negatively and have often been used against each other, leading to social conflict. In order to overcome these conflicts, the following were suggested:

- To create literature that provides first hand information and insights about these religions.

- To showcase the different religious festivals, traditions, and customs through interactive forums and photo exhibitions in order to create a greater understanding and appreciation of the same.

Culture:

South Asia and Japanese people have developed stereotypical perceptions of each other based on misinformation projected in the Western Media. In order to overcome these misconceptions, the following were suggested:

- To have an annual exposition of South Asia and Japan, showcasing areas such as food, literature, fashion, films, and the performing arts.

- To introduce culture studies as part of the elementary school curriculum.

- To create a website as an interactive forum for networking.

- To enhance the participation of regional organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

To promote tourism.

To improve the role of media in promoting culture.

Sports:

Sports are one area that transcends all boundaries – political and geographical. It not only promotes team spirit, but also helps us develop an ability to appreciate, respect, and learn from the skills of others. The participants suggested the following to tap the potential for exchange in this area:

To promote traditional sports.

To generate funds and facilities.

To conduct exchange programmes and training camps.

To create a website as an interactive forum for networking.

Arts:

South Asia countries and Japan have always had a great interest in the Arts (both performing and fine arts) and have contributed a great deal towards it. However, unlike in the West, they have not been able to present themselves to the world. The following ideas were suggested by the participants to improve this situation:

To build a multi-performance company with South Asia and Japanese performers including musicians, dancers, actors, and designers.

To arrange training workshops conducting educational programmes.

To bring performances outside prosceniums to open public spaces such as shopping malls, restaurants, and parks.

To create a website as an interactive forum for networking.

Thus, the group agreed that in order to create a continuous dialogue and exchange of ideas, it was essential that the youth, social organizations, and the government work together towards the implementation of the following summarized steps:

1. To promote exchange at an elementary school level.
2. To promote exchange at a professional level.
3. To create an interactive website.
4. To encourage the participation of regional organizations and NGOs.
5. To enhance interconnectivity and the role of the domestic mass media.

In conclusion, the group decided that it is essential to experience the various cultural

diversities first hand so as to understand them better and thereby going by the saying-

“Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember, involve and I will understand.”