

# 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 Matbarhat 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 projects 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 1971, 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 contribution to strengthening the Japan-Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh has been witnessing remarkable development under the expert 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 Way 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 Matbarhat Ultra Super Critical

Coal-Fired Power Project, the Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project, as well as the Frontier District 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 Matbarhat Ultra Super Critical Coal-Fired Power Project, two 500 MW-class power generation stations will be built with the aim of generating 2,865GWh of electricity per year by 2020. 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 170,000 urban residents every day by 2021. Both projects are under contract to Japanese corporations which are utilizing high-quality technology in this work. The Government of Japan will assist in cooperation to ensure their early completion. In addition, Japan is providing 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 citizens engaged in international cooperation projects, were lost in the terrorist attack in Dhaka in July 2016. I would like to meet again resolutely condemn the heinous act 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 non-discrimination policy. Japan will continue to actively provide assistance to Bangladesh, while carrying on the will of the victims and ensuring the safety of the government engaged in international cooperation projects.

The future of "Golden Bengal" is full of hope. The potential for cooperation between our two nations through 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 complementary 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 900,000 displaced people to Bangladesh.

We highly value the response by the Government of Bangladesh under the leadership of Hon. the 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 shelter and daily necessities, including water and sanitary items, and for child protection, etc. In addition to this, we will extend an assistance of USD 10.0 million to the priority areas for displaced people such as health through international organizations.

The Government of Myanmar has stated that it will advance 1) humanitarian assistance, 2) the return and resettlement of displaced people and communities, 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.