

Interview with Japanese FM: 'We support Pakistan's counter-terror efforts'

Japan highly acknowledges Pakistan's serious efforts in the fight against terrorism, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono — who is in Pakistan to hold talks with the country's civil and military leadership — told *Dawn* in an exclusive interview on Wednesday.

He said that Japan is ready to cooperate closely with Pakistan for stability and development of the region, and that Pakistan plays a prominent role for regional stability and is vitally important to the stability and prosperity of the international community.

Dawn: This is the first Japanese foreign minister's visit after Katsuya Okada visited in 2009. What is the significance of your visit to Pakistan and how do you find Pakistan's importance and role in terms of peace and security in this region?

Taro Kono: It gives me great pleasure to come to Pakistan, a longtime friend of Japan, which I selected as the first country to visit in 2018.

Last year, Japan and Pakistan together celebrated the 65th anniversary of [their] diplomatic relations. This multi-layered friendship, ranging from economic relations to people-to-people exchanges and more, has great potential for further development.

Both countries have stood by each other whenever either faces hardships. When the Great East Japan earthquake inflicted unprecedented damage in 2011, the Pakistani community in Japan hurried to the stricken area, offered warm Pakistani food, and kept up the sufferers' spirits.

In the event of the 2005 earthquake and the 2010 floods in Pakistan, Japanese stayed close to the Pakistani people by sending disaster relief teams and providing emergency relief supplies. Indeed, our friendship derives from mutual respect and compassion.

Pakistan, with its geopolitical significance, plays a prominent role for regional stability, and is vitally important to the stability and prosperity of the international community. Japan is ready to cooperate closely with Pakistan for stability and development of the region.

I thus decided to visit Pakistan and consolidate our already excellent bilateral relations, by sharing views

on regional as well as global issues, advancing cooperation in public safety and counter-terrorism and cementing economic ties.

D: Since the government and military leaderships have been making serious efforts to eliminate terrorism, the security situation in Pakistan has considerably improved. What impact do you think this will have on Japanese investments in Pakistan?

TK: Japan highly acknowledges Pakistan's serious efforts in the fight against terrorism. I express my sincere condolences to the victims of terrorism in Pakistan. Terrorism cannot be justified by any reason and Japan is resolved to condemn all acts of terrorism.

Japan has firmly supported the efforts of the government of Pakistan and its people standing against terrorism. In this respect, Japan has been providing Pakistan with assistance such as provision of airport security equipment, projects in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) for border security, and so forth.

Japan will continue to work with Pakistan with an emphasis on cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism.

I am hoping that the improved security situation of this country will have a positive impact on the Japanese business.

Recently, a seminar on trade and investment opportunity in Pakistan was organised by the

Embassy of Pakistan in Japan. The seminar attracted many more businesspeople than the fixed capacity for the venue of 100 people, which was a manifestation of the keen interest of the Japanese in doing business with Pakistan.

I look forward to seeing more of those seminars and business exchanges. I truly hope to see deeper and stronger Japan-Pakistan economic relationship in the future.

D: Multilateral donors including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank say GDP growth for Pakistan is expected to be 5.5 per cent in 2018. Is Japan satisfied with the economic performance of Pakistan and what measures it thinks Pakistan should take to sustain and further improve the economic growth?

TK: Pakistan, with a population of more than 200 million, including a significant number of young people, has great potential. Abundant English-educated human resources are also its strength.

Meanwhile, Pakistan still needs to keep addressing challenges including stable energy supply and security improvement.

Japan strongly supports the economic reforms, security improvement and export promotion that are currently conducted by the government led by Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi.

These policies help Pakistan address its challenges and develop its strength. My message for this visit is

that Japan will continue to cooperate with the government of Pakistan and to support its efforts.

Pakistan's economy has shown an upward trend in recent years, with projected GDP growth rate of over 5pc in 2018.

I am pleased to hear that the number of Japanese companies, including those in automobiles and housewares, are planning to increase their investments into Pakistan. The government of Japan will firmly support their business activities so that our economic ties will further strengthen.

< Export promotion, through fostering competitive industries, is indispensable for sustaining Pakistan's current economic growth. With the aim of encouraging Pakistan's export industries, Japan is ready to cooperate in support measures for high-value-added manufacturing. >

D: It is said that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative will be a game changer. What are your views about the prospects of CPEC? Since the initiative basically involves infrastructure development, what role can Japanese companies play in that context?

TK: As a long-term friend of Pakistan, Japan supports and wishes to contribute to the development of Pakistan. With regard to CPEC, I believe that it should serve stability and prosperity in the region.

Concerning the infrastructure building, Japan particularly promotes quality infrastructure development based on global standards such as openness and transparency, economic efficiency, and financial viability of the recipient country. Japan wishes to work with Pakistan for its development, bearing in mind this kind of initiative.

Read: 'Japan is not against CPEC'

For instance, Japan has contributed to improving the road traffic network in Pakistan through various projects including development of the Indus Highway and the Kohat Tunnel. Moreover, the construction of the Ghazi-Barotha Hydropower Project and the strengthening of national transmission lines and grid stations which were supported by Japan have achieved the increase in electric supply capacity.

The government of Japan, with the cooperation of the government of Pakistan, will continue to extend quality infrastructure development, which will reinvigorate Pakistan's economic infrastructure and social foundations — leading to more Japanese businesses with investment forthcoming to Pakistan.