

Bangladesh Prime Minister's Visit Special

Japan holds a special place in our hearts

SHEIKH HASINA
PRIME MINISTER OF BANGLADESH



I'm again in Tokyo to embolden the existing bilateral ties between my country, Bangladesh, and Japan as our countries celebrate the 51st anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. I express my gratitude to Their Majesties Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako and my thanks to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida for the invitation. I also pay homage to former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was a great friend of Bangladesh. Japan was among those few countries that gave early recognition to Bangladesh on Feb. 10, 1972, less than two months after it achieved independence. Even during our liberation war in 1971, Japan provided much needed support and assistance, which we have never forgotten nor shall ever forget. Most unforgettable was the charitable gesture of Japanese schoolchildren who saved and donated their tiffin (snack) money to help victims of the cyclone and the war that ravaged our country. Since then, Japan has

remained our time-tested friend. Japan is a country very close to my heart, just as it is to my family and our people. My sister Sheikh Rehana is especially attached to Japan as she accompanied our father, the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and our youngest brother, Sheikh Russel, on their first visit to Japan in October 1973. My father was captivated by the country's development and wanted to follow Japan as a model. He was also inspired by the design of the Japanese flag. Both flags are rectangular with red circles at the center against backgrounds of bottle green for Bangladesh and white for Japan. On their return, they spoke frequently of their memorable experiences of Japan. Those remained in our memory, haunting us even more so now as tragically, all our family members other than Rehana and myself, were brutally assassinated just 22 months after that historic visit. Japan is our trusted development partner. Bangladesh has received steadfast support for its development and has remained the recipient of the largest amount of official development assistance from Japan since our independence. Japanese investment has been growing consistently in Bangladesh. In the recent ODA loan package, Japan has provided \$2.67 billion in

soft loans to Bangladesh, more than any other country. Our two-way bilateral trade surpassed \$4 billion for the first time in the 2021-2022 fiscal year. Additionally, Japan is implementing some of the major infrastructure projects of Bangladesh, including the mass rapid transit train line in Dhaka, the deep-sea port at Matarbari, the third terminal at Dhaka Airport and a special economic zone in Araihaaz. While assisting in our development efforts, some Japanese technical experts working on the MRT line were tragically killed by terrorists in Dhaka in July 2016. This remains one of the darkest episodes in Bangladesh's history. I recall their sacrifice with much sorrow, and once again extend my deepest condolences to their families. In spite of this tragic occurrence, our Japanese friends did not withdraw from the project, but instead diligently carried on with their work. With Japanese financial and technical assistance, the Dhaka MRT Line-6, first of its kind in the country, was inaugurated in December. Despite challenges, Bangladesh has come a long way in attaining socioeconomic progress over the last 14 years of my tenure. Our country is no longer poverty-stricken. Rather, it is now considered a development miracle in which per capita income has grown more than five times in a decade and a half. Indeed, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in human development, food security, women's empowerment, poverty reduction and infrastructure development. In fact, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh's economy was growing at an average of over 6.5% for about a decade and 8.15% from 2018 to 2019. Although the pandemic severely affected our economy, we faced the impact by striking a balance between people's lives and livelihoods. Sadly, just as we were recovering from the pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war and subsequent sanctions and countersanc-

tions struck a blow to our development gains. It has also led to abnormal price hikes for fuel, food and other commodities, as well as supply chain disruptions that have thrust countries like ours into dire straits. Moreover, the adverse impacts of climate change have also been troubling us in reaching our desired goals. Late last year, nearly a third of Bangladesh was hit by cyclone Sitrang that claimed many lives while damaging crops, homes and fish farms. In May and June 2022, a devastating flood inundated Bangladesh's northern and northeastern regions, causing many casualties. Our resilient people have adapted to live with such calamities. Despite all hazards, Bangladesh's economy has been resilient and remained an attractive destination for foreign direct investment. This is because of our liberal policies and laws, which are favorable and encouraging to investment. These include fiscal policies related to FDI, tax benefits, incentives for exports and a young, competitive labor force. An attractive initiative that is becoming popular among investors, both domestic and especially foreign, has been the establishing of 100 special economic zones. Interestingly, Bangladesh has been fortunate in having a very strategic geographical location. It connects the Indian subcontinent to the west with Southeast Asia to the east. With its own domestic market of nearly 170 million people, Bangladesh sits on a consumer base of 3 billion. It is, therefore, growing gradually into the business and economic hub of the South Asian region. Bangladesh would be too happy to see more Japanese invest in Bangladesh for the mutual benefit of both our countries. In the past six years, Bangladesh has, however, been facing the dilemma of taking care of about 1.1 million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals. In the face of a genocidal pogrom, these people known as the Rohingya were allowed to take refuge



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe shake hands during a meeting in May 2019. EMBASSY OF BANGLADESH

on humanitarian grounds in Bangladesh. Their overdue presence has seriously been affecting the lives and livelihoods of the local communities. Now they are becoming a security threat to Bangladesh and to the entire region. Japan, with its benign influence in the region, could mediate and help return these Rohingyas back to their homes in Myanmar. Bangladesh and Japan are both peace-loving nations collaborating in international forums to promote global peace, stability, sustainable development, progress and prosperity. I firmly believe that our cooperation and friendship shall continue to grow and prosper forever and ever. Alongside cherishing my father's legacy

of having a soft spot for Japan, I have great respect for its miraculous development. Therefore, time and again, I come to Japan to learn from its invaluable experiences. These encourage me to apply and devote myself in body and spirit to building Bangladesh in the image of this great country. And, as I now feel that our two countries' relations have been cemented to an enviable level, I believe it is time to move on from our comprehensive partnership to a strategic partnership. *This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.*



Dhaka's metro rail line was built with assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency and began operation in 2022. DHAKA MASS TRANSIT COMPANY LIMITED

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Bangladesh Prime Minister's Visit Special

Unwavering cooperation spans many years

SHAHABUDDIN AHMED
AMBASSADOR OF BANGLADESH



A bond of mutual goodwill and friendship characterizes Bangladesh-Japan relations. Japan was the first OECD member and among the first few countries that recognized Bangladesh soon after our independence. Fifty-one years ago, on Feb. 10, 1972, our two countries established diplomatic relations.

Bangladesh acknowledged that recognition by Japan, and the Father of the Nation of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was quick to extend his hands

of friendship. As prime minister, Bangabandhu paid an official weeklong visit to Japan on Oct. 18, 1973, and laid down the rock-solid foundation for advancing relations between our two countries. Our enduring friendship has further widened and deepened in recent years under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the able daughter of Bangabandhu. The prime minister visited Japan in 1997, 2010, 2014, 2016 and 2019, and her current official visit to Japan will further deepen the bilateral relations.

I take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude and thanks to the government and friendly people of Japan for their steadfast support to Bangladesh over the years. I also pay our humble respect to their majesties the emperor and empress, and members of the imperial household,

for being valued patrons of our friendly relations.

Today, Japan is Bangladesh's single largest bilateral development partner, supporting major infrastructure projects in the country. Japan's overall development assistance stands at about \$30.11 billion. Japan is also one of our top export destinations in Asia, where bilateral trade surpassed \$4 billion for the first time during fiscal 2021-2022. Bangladesh aims for a paradigm shift from aid to trade to bring in more investment through our economic relations. To this end, together with economic cooperation, Bangladesh is working with Japan to augment business and investment as well as explore other areas, such as human resources development.

Bangladesh and Japan have been cooperating on bilateral, regional and interna-

tional issues of common concern over the years. Our relationship took an upward trajectory in 2014 following back-to-back visits by our prime minister to Japan and by then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Bangladesh as the two countries forged stronger engagement under a comprehensive partnership. The official visits by our prime minister to Japan in 2016 and 2019 further bolstered Bangladesh-Japan relations. Last year, our countries celebrated the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations.

The comprehensive partnership evolved over the years with strong commitments from Japan to provide development assistance, increase trade and investment, as well as expand multifaceted cooperation in other areas, most notably human resources development. Technical assistance can now flow into other areas, such as improvement in customs, trade and industries, information and communication technology, high-tech products, electronics and high-end consumer products, deep-sea exploration, including fishing and mining, renewable and clean energy, direct air connectivity, promotion of tourism and cultural exchanges, and more. Our countries have been working closely in this regard and are expecting to conclude a new framework for future cooperation during the prime minister's visit.

Japan has been engaging in large infrastructure and development projects in Bangladesh since the early days of our independence. The Japan International Cooperation Agency and its dedicated people, including volunteers sent under the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers program, served as a critical enabler of our development pursuits as they worked not only in infrastructure, energy, fertilizer and other large projects, but also in grassroots education, agriculture and health care to improve the lives of our people.

The Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority and Japan's Sumitomo Corp. have



Work crews from both countries display Japanese and Bangladeshi flags on the Japan Bangladesh Friendship bridge near Dhaka. EMBASSY OF BANGLADESH

jointly developed the Bangladesh Special Economic Zone Ltd. on 1,000 acres (404.7 hectares) of land in Araihaaz, Narayanganj, which is close to Dhaka. The first phase of 500 acres has already been completed and was inaugurated by our prime minister in December. Alongside this special Japanese economic zone, I would also welcome Japan to invest in other economic zones, high-tech parks and tourism parks in Bangladesh.

A range of Japanese companies are engaged in trading, manufacturing and implementing infrastructure projects. All major Japanese general trading companies have a presence in Bangladesh. Since 2010, the number of Japanese companies in Bangladesh has tripled to 350. Small and midsize businesses, buoyed by recent positive surveys by the Japan External Trade Organization and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, are increasingly exploring Bangladesh for opportunities in the information technology, logistics, manufacturing and other service sectors. Both our governments, along with the private sector, are working together through the Japan-Bangladesh Public Private Joint Economic Dialogue to attract Japanese investment and facilitate Japanese companies in Bangladesh. The fifth meeting of this forum was held on April 11. Since its inception in 2014, this forum has helped to carry out policy reforms and resolve regulatory issues in more than 25 areas. We expect more new investments from Japanese companies in the coming

years that will lead to expansion of trade and promote economic diversification and generate employment.

There is a close affinity between the people of Japan and Bangladesh. Our countries and people stand by each other in difficult times. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan supported Bangladesh's efforts in combating the pandemic through budget support loans and vaccine provision.

Bangladesh mourned the great loss of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8, 2022. Our prime minister expressed her deepest condolences, while the Cabinet and parliament adopted condolence motions recalling his invaluable contributions toward strengthening Bangladesh-Japan relations. The Honorable Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen attended the state funeral on Sept. 27 last year.

Bangabandhu was an ardent admirer of Japan's development model. Our founding father wanted to build "Sonar Bangla" (Golden Bengal) following the exemplary development of Japan, which turned into a developed country after World War II. The vision of our prime minister to build a knowledge-based modern and technologically developed smart Bangladesh under Vision 2041 also emanates from the basic principle of the Father of the Nation. I am confident that in this journey toward the future, we will be receiving continuous cooperation from our long-standing friend, Japan, with even more engaging and fruitful partnerships in the future.

Looking ahead to ever-stronger bilateral ties

FUMIYA KOKUBU
CHAIRMAN, JAPAN-BANGLADESH COMMITTEE FOR COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION



On behalf of the Japan-Bangladesh Committee for Commercial and Economic Cooperation, it is my great honor and pleasure to send a message on the occasion of the official visit to

Japan by Her Excellency Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina.

Since the JBCCEC's establishment in 1980, we have been contributing to the development of bilateral economic relations in cooperation with the Federation of

Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Underpinned by political stability, Bangladesh has shown sustainable growth, with one of the fastest growing economies in the world, while interest from global investors has increased substantially. With a solid macroeconomic framework in place, the government has implemented public infrastructure projects, while living standards are continuing to improve and poverty is decreasing. These factors have contributed to Bangladesh's graduation from least-developed country status, which is scheduled for 2026. Please allow me to offer my sincere congratulations on this achievement.

We would especially like to express our deepest appreciation to the government of Bangladesh for measures such as proactively inviting investment from Japan, setting up special economic zones and pro-

viding investment incentives to Japanese businesses.

In recent years, the number of Japanese companies operating in Bangladesh has exceeded 350. In addition to the industrial park in the Araihaaz Special Economic Zone and the mass rapid transit system in Dhaka, which opened last year, a series of large-scale projects is being implemented with cooperation between the public and private sectors, including integrated industrial port development in Matarbari.

We strongly believe that the Bangladesh-Japan Public Private Joint Economic Dialogue in particular has contributed to the recent improvement of the business environment in Bangladesh. We have high expectations for this year's PPED meeting to be held in Tokyo.

In closing, we look forward to further strengthening the friendship and partnership between our two nations.

BCCIJ is proud to welcome H.E. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Japan

2022 marks the 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS between Japan and Bangladesh.

We would like to express our profound gratitude to Her Excellency Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her strong leadership and successful decision-making despite the economic hardship caused by COVID-19. Bangladesh has a strong track record of growth and development, even in times of elevated global uncertainty.

The dream and vision of a 'Golden Bengal' born from the father of the nation is now being realized.

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