

## Bangladesh-Japan Relations

Bangladesh-Japan bilateral relations emanate from the unwavering Japanese support for the cause of an independent Bangladesh. Japan recognized independent Bangladesh on 10 February 1972, the first OECD country to recognize, and hence the two countries established diplomatic relations. The politicians led by Takashi Hayakawa, intellectuals led by Professor Tsuoshi Nara and similar-minded journalists and the common mass mobilized the public opinion for the cause of Bangladesh and took part in extending support and relief to Bangladesh. The school children collected their tiffin (snacks) money to help the distressed children of Bangladesh. The people of Bangladesh nurture enduring gratitude for all Japanese who stood by in its trying hours. A bond of mutual goodwill, respect and friendship has since been developed between the two peoples. Immediately after the diplomatic relationship, Bangladesh established its Embassy in Tokyo on 03 March 1972, while Japan opened its Embassy on 01 July 1972 in Dhaka.

Japan is among the very few countries where the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman paid an official visit as the leader of the country. His visit in Japan (18-24 October 1973) laid down the political foundation for advancing the bilateral relations between the two countries. Since then, the bilateral relations between the two countries have developed steadily and satisfactorily and never looked back. Despite the setback suffered following the Holey Artisan attack in 2016, Japan's friendship and commitment towards Bangladesh remained unchanged. The significant augment of Japan's ODA commitments with each passing year, proving yet again Japan's friendship and commitment towards Bangladesh.

The bilateral cooperation between Bangladesh and Japan entered into a new dimension following the exchange of summit level visits in 2014, when the relationship was elevated to "**Comprehensive Partnership**" level; a broad-based political, economic and social cooperation. Under this partnership, the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B) received strategic impetus in recent years and Japan is increasing its financial and technical assistance in Bangladesh to build mega-infrastructures including Metro Rail, Jamuna Railway bridge, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport Terminal-3, Matarbari deep seaport, power projects and so on.

There exists excellent rapport at the highest political level. Hon'ble President H.E. Mr. Abdul Hamid attended the enthronement ceremony of the Emperor of Japan in October 2019 at the invitation of the Govt. of Japan. Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Japan in 1997, 2010, 2014, 2016 and 2019. These visits provided fresh momentum to deepen the multi-faced bilateral cooperation and created new thrusts in bilateral cooperation, particularly in the areas of business, investment and economic aid. Another visit by Hon'ble Prime Minister to Japan was scheduled on 30-31 March 2020 at the invitation of the Govt. of Japan, but the visit was postponed at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This close political ties could also be attributed from the friendly gesture and personal attachment of the highest Political levels of Japan. On the occasion of the Birth Centenary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Golden Jubilee of our Independence, the then Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga congratulated the people of Bangladesh through a Video Message as well as sent a letter to the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. For the last two consecutive years, the Japanese Prime Minister has kindly been issuing messages on the Independence Day Special Supplement published on the prominent Japanese Newspapers including the Japan News and the Yomiuri Shimbun (Japanese Version).

When the former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, a good friend of Bangladesh, was killed in July 2022, the Hon'ble Prime Minister expressed her deep condolences and sent message. The Bangladesh National Parliament and the Cabinet adopted separate motions on the demise of Shinzo Abe. Bangladesh observed one-day state mourning (09 July). Later, the Hon'ble Foreign Minister attended the State Funeral of late Shinzo Abe held in September 2022.

Bangladesh is deeply appreciative of the Government and the people of Japan for their timely assistance to Bangladesh during the pandemic period. Japan provided 75-billion-yen equivalent to USD 681 million worth of budget support loans in 2 phases and contributed over 4.5 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccines in phases under COVAX-mechanism in 2021 to fight against the **COVID-19 pandemic**. Bangladesh is also encouraged to see the growing confidence of Japan towards Bangladesh with the decision of Japan to lower the travel advisory from Level-1 to level-2 for whole Bangladesh, except CHT. The announcement for Dhaka Division came on 10 November 2021, which was in place since 2016 following the Holy Artisan attack. Following Japan's satisfaction about the improved security situation in Bangladesh, in September 2023 after a gap of 7 years, the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) returned to Bangladesh.

The year 2022 is a landmark year in the history of Bangladesh-Japan relations, as the countries celebrated the **Golden Jubilee** of Bangladesh-Japan friendship. On 10<sup>th</sup> February 2022, the Embassy of Bangladesh in Tokyo inaugurated the year-long celebration programme in a grand manner with a reception held in a local hotel. The reception was well-attended and the goodwill video messages of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh and Hon'ble Prime Minister of Japan were displayed. To mark this occasion, a commemorative stamp designed by the Japan Post was launched. A **Special Exhibition** featuring documents of historic significance and still photographs on different landmark occasions that took place over the past 50 years was displayed.

The major achievement following the celebratory year was for the Embassy to arrange the successful official visit of the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Japan on 25-28 April 2023. The Embassy started preparation for the official visit of the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Japan in August 2022. The visit planned for 29 November to 02 December 2022, however, was postponed at the last moment due to Covid-19 pandemic situation in Japan. With the relaxation of the travel restrictions at the end of 2022 by Japan, the two sides worked to arrange the official visit of the Hon'ble Prime Minister to Japan was held on 25 to 28 April 2023. The successful conclusion of the visit with the signing of the Joint Statement elevating the bilateral relations from "Comprehensive Partnership" to a "Strategic Partnership" was a watershed event for the two countries' bilateral relations. During the visit, the Hon'ble Prime Minister met with His Majesty the Emperor of Japan Naruhito on 26 April at the Imperial Palace. This was the first meeting by any Head of Government with the Emperor after pandemic. Bangladesh also honoured four distinguished Japanese nationals with the 'Friends of Liberation War' honour during the visit.

Following the visit of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, a Bangladesh Parliamentary delegation headed by Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP, Hon'ble Speaker of the Bangladesh National Parliament visited Japan during the period 24-29 May 2023 at the invitation of Mr. HOSODA Hiroyuki, Hon'ble Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Furthermore, the operation of direct flights between Dhaka and Tokyo commenced from 01 September 2023 as announced by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Community Reception in Tokyo on 27 April 2023.