

The Nation

Islamabad
8 October 2017

Deepening Pak-Japan Ties

Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik



Senior Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Kazuyuki Yamazaki, headed the Japanese delegation to Pakistan on 3 October to participate at the 10th Round Bilateral Consultation. The Pakistan side was led by Foreign Secretary, TehminaJanjua. The two sides discussed the evolving peace and security situation in their respective regions including Afghanistan and Korean Peninsula as well as international issues such as disarmament, non-proliferation, Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), and counter-terrorism besides the situation in Kashmir. On most of these issues, both sides differed in their opinion.

The Joint Statement issued in New Delhi with respect to the recent visit of the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to India, upset Islamabad with reference to terrorism. Foreign Office spokesperson, NafeesZakaria, regretted the mentioning of Pakistan as a country sheltering terrorists in the Joint Statement issued at the conclusion of Japanese Prime Minister's visit to India.

This was the return of the Trump language used against Pakistan, creating uproar between Islamabad and Washington. Tokyo needs to understand Islamabad without taking hints either from Washington and New Delhi. A solid bilateral relationship between Pakistan and Japan needs to be evolved. We must recall here that when Pakistan came into being in 1947, Japan was under the U.S. Occupation. Pakistan had friendly ties with both the United States and Great Britain but it pleaded the case of Japan's sovereignty and end of the Occupation. There are a number of highly praiseworthy gestures, which Pakistan had shown toward Japan in the 1950s. Japan also needs to stand by such gestures in cultivating present ties.

Pakistan-Japan ties are friendly but not warm for the past many years. Both countries lack a big initiative to cozy up cool ties. They are still entangled in issues that are not so directly related to them. Redirection of ties are needed to reinforce them by decision-makers in Islamabad and Tokyo. The last high-level visit by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to Pakistan was made in 2005. From Pakistan's side, President Asif Ali Zardari visited Japan in 2011. For the past seven years, there is no high-level interaction between the two countries and the diplomatic gulf is on the rise as mentioned above.

To express satisfaction over the existing political ties between the two countries, looks like a diplomatic overstatement. As both nations observe 65th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic ties this year, relations have actually drifted away in the past many years. The nuclear issue has remained on the top between Islamabad and Tokyo. Japan suspended aid to Pakistan after it conducted nuclear test on 28 May 1998. Japan also suspects military and nuclear linkages between Islamabad and Pyongyang.

Japan's providing of nuclear civil nuclear technology to India, is another thorny issue between Islamabad and Tokyo. Japan struck the nuclear deal with India in July this year, which Pakistan objected on the ground that a similar deal shall be signed with Pakistan too but Japan does not considered it essential. Tokyo repeatedly refuses to offer such a civil nuclear deal to Islamabad.

China should not be taken as an adverse and deleterious factor in diverting ties between Pakistan and Japan. In the past, Pakistan tried to link up China with Japan, but and apathetic in opening dialogue with the former. This was in relation to connecting Pakistan's national flag carrier (PIA) via Peking or Canton to Tokyo to open up China in the 1960s, during the peak of the Cold War, for trade and commercial reasons.

Although Japan followed the American foot-prints on China, Pakistan reminded Japan of this development much ahead. Ten years earlier than the Sino-American normalization, Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto told a Japanese delegation that the United States will open dialogue with China. The Sino-Japan normalization in 1972 put both countries' ties on developing a robust trade and investment relations soon China

adopted economic reforms in 1978. The role of Pakistan in China's opening was commendable.

Japan also significantly mattered in Pakistan's foreign trade. It was the largest trading partner before the Sino-Pakistan trade blossom to a large extent. Today's bilateral trade stands around US\$ 2 billion between Pakistan and Japan and crossed the barrier of US\$ 20 billion between Pakistan and China. Tokyo's reluctance to promote ties with Islamabad was a major reason. Japanese investor's interests in Pakistan has dwindled in the past two decades . Japan invested US\$ 45 million in 20117 in Pakistan compared to China's FDI of US\$ 1.1 billion for the same period. Japanese investment in big projects completely missed out.

The signing of the US\$ 24 million loan facility in May to construct the Burhan-Islamabad electricity transmission line is a notable project signed in many years. Japanese companies only invests in small commercial projects. It is true that economic ties suffered the most, which needs urgent attention.

JETRO, JAICA, Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC), Federation of Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and its counterpart Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Pakistan-Japan Business Committee and vice versa should work on projects to promote ties. Japanese companies should explore opportunities under the changed economic situation of Pakistan. They should activate to initiate big economic projects at the Government level and mega commercial projects to be taken by Japanese multinationals to revive the mutual spirit and confidence of the 1960s.

The writer is Director of the China-Pakistan Study Center at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad. He writes on East Asian affairs.