

Japan would never attach strings or lay down conditions to the beneficiaries in the form of political, ideological or national commitments when she offers foreign aid to any country in any part of the world, says Japanese ambassador Kunio Takahashi in an interview to the daily mirror.

“The only objective of Japan’s aid to friendly countries is towards economic, cultural and social development. That is why the Japanese government has given financial assistance to the tune of 1 trillion Yen (over Rs. 1,000 billion) to Sri Lanka since the 1950s. The foreign policy of Japan does not have any hidden agendas,” Mr. Takahashi explained. The Japanese government through its foreign aid management arm, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JAICA) has been in the forefront of Sri Lanka’s economic development in many fields, Mr. Takahashi stressed.

The JAICA is involved in a number of infrastructure and power generation mega development projects with billions of dollars of financial commitments right now in Sri Lanka.

“We believe power and energy are the most vital basic infrastructure needed to develop the national economy. Japan has been in the forefront of providing Yen grants and loans to Sri Lanka through technical cooperation programmes for the last few decades,” Mr. Takahashi said.

One of the major infrastructure development projects of the Japanese government at the moment is funding at the first phase of the Vavuniya – Kilinochchi – Jaffna power transmission line that runs for 78 kilometres. The financial commitment the Japanese government pledged through JAICA is 1.278 billion Yen – approximately Rs. 1.35 Billion. of power transmission line from Vavuniya to Kilinochchi funded by Japan is expected to be commissioned by 2013 providing an uninterrupted 24 hour power supply to that part of the country.

“Japan’s economic co-operation programmes in Sri Lanka have been diversified and given a new impetus in the post conflict situation. I firmly believe that Sri Lanka has much potential to achieve a speedy economic progress in a record time if she exploits her natural and human resources properly. We are just assisting her to go to that target,” Mr. Takahashi explained.

The construction of the Vavuniya - Kilinochchi power transmission line is a major ongoing infrastructure development project undertaken by JAICA with the particular attention to assist the reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation programme of the government in the post conflict era. Both governments expect to bring a new lease of life to the people in the north once this project was commissioned within the next three years. This highly important project was inaugurated last month at Kilinochchi with the participation of representatives of the two countries.

“The first phase of the power line was scheduled to start in 2005. But we had to wait until the de-mining process was over and the government started reconstruction in Jaffna after the conclusion of the war”. Mr. Takahashi pointed out.

The financial commitment pledged by JAICA for the mega hydro power generation project at

Upper Kotmale is 39.3 billion Yen, equivalent to Rs. 41 billion. This hydro power project is expected to add 150 MW to the national grid when the power plant is commissioned in 2013. This will help Sri Lanka to reduce the dependency on costly thermal power generation and minimize the costs to supply electricity to the entire country by 2013.

This is an era where the whole world is looking for alternative and clean energy sources. The best, most viable and clean source of energy is solar power. If man can use solar power as a major source of energy for power generation, he will also find a solution to the climate change that has challenged the existence of man.

The Japanese government has launched a pilot project at Hambantota to generate solar power. The solar power plant at Hambantota constructed at a cost of 860 million Yen – nearly Rs. 870 million - to generate 400 kilowatts has been a great success and the Japanese government expects to further expand the project in the south.

Japan is also involved in many other minor development projects island wide ranging from energy efficiency, infrastructure, telecommunication, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Japan established diplomatic relations with Sri Lanka in 1952. From then onwards the Japanese government has been immensely helpful for Sri Lanka to maintain her political system as a democratic country. Japan has always been a partner in the progress of Sri Lanka domestically and in international forums and has joined in her efforts in the promotion of economic liberalization and structural reform.

Japan has been assisting the country's efforts for a political solution regarding the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka. Japan has extended (Overseas Development Assistance) ODA for facilitating the consolidation of peace and assisting socio-economic development. After the end of conflict between the Government and the LTTE, Japan continued to provide assistance including that for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Japan's assistance for the socio-economic development of Sri Lanka, which is striving for the economic liberalization, aims to contribute to the consolidation of democracy and political stability in the whole South Asia region as well as securing safe sea lanes for the Japan's oil imports from Middle East. Japan also aims to assist in the acceleration of the peace process, Mr. Takahashi maintained.

The priority areas under Country Assistance Program of Japan have been, the consolidation of peace and reconstruction, humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance and nation building.

Mid and long term vision for Japanese aid programme in Sri Lanka has been the institutional reforms and economic infrastructure, foreign-currency acquisition capabilities and poverty alleviation

The main focus of Japanese ODA Loan is on physical infrastructure such as transport, power, irrigation etc. In 2009, Japan has extended ODA Loan for 4 projects totaling about 36.7 billion Yen or Rs. 38 billion

The Provincial Rural Road Development Project at a cost of 13.121 billion Yen or Rs. 15 billion

is to rehabilitate severely degraded provincial and rural roads in Central, Sabaragamuwa and Eastern Provinces.

In the Eastern Province a major Water Supply Development Project in the Ampara District at a cost of 940 billion Yen an equivalent of Rs. 950 billion was launched to develop water supply facilities - development of pipe borne water and water purification - in the Ampara district and small scale water supply facilities in areas not covered by water pipe network in the Eastern Province.

The Kandy City Wastewater Management Project that costs 14.087 billion Yen or Rs. 16 billion is to construct the first sewerage system in Kandy for improving the public hygiene in the city, especially in the areas where people of the low income group live. Japan's Grant Aid covers broad areas vis-à-vis physical infrastructure, water supply, sanitation, health, tsunami related support and the total Yen disbursement amounted to 5.374 billion Yen in 2009.

The improvement and reconstruction in Jaffna in 2009 alone included the reconstruction of the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, introduction of Clean Energy by Solar Electricity Generation System, Project for Reconstruction of 5 bridges, 14 projects under the Grassroots Human Security Grant Aid, Emergency Grant Aid for IDPs that costs 4.83 billion Yen or Rs. 5 billion.

The Cumulative JICA disbursement up to 2008 stood at 62.833 billion yen or Rs. 65 billion. In addition some 1,547 Sri Lankans have been trained in Japanese educational and training institutes up to 2008 in various professional disciplines.

Following the end of the fighting between Sri Lanka Army and LTTE, the focus has been moved to the reconstruction and development. In 2009 Japan decided to implement three Technical Cooperation projects which are the Digital Topographic Mapping Project for Reconstruction of Northern Region, the Development Planning for the Rapid Promotion of Reconstruction and Development in Jaffna District and the Development Planning for the Urgent Rehabilitation of the Resettlement Community in Manner District

Japan has implemented humanitarian aid for IDPs, assistance of the improvement of communities' livelihood and the activities for the de-mining through Grant Aid for Japanese NGO's Projects and Grassroots Human Security Grant Aid. Japan's ODA to Sri Lanka in the past 5 years alone totalled 1,049 billion yen or Rs. 1,100 billion.

Asked whether Japan has a soft spot for Sri Lanka for its unbelievable generosity and benevolence to her, Mr. Takahashi said it was because the two nations has a religious, cultural and historic attachment to each other for centuries.

"The friendly ties between the two countries run to pre historic time. We have a high regard to the hospitality and friendly manner of Sri Lankans that attracts any one," Mr. Takahashi noted.

Sri Lanka must identify her potential and resources. Similar to Japan the most valuable asset Sri Lanka possesses is human resources.

Now that Sri Lanka has restored durable peace in the country, the challenge is to develop the

economy in the shortest possible time. To do that she must have confidence in herself, the resolve to stand on her own feet and work hard to achieve the target, Mr. Takahashi emphasized.

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