

Japan, Cambodia sign \$90 million aid agreement

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Japan signed a grant and loan agreement with Cambodia despite concerns from the international community over Cambodia PM's crackdown on government critics ahead of a July general election.

Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono. (Source: AP/File)

Phnom Penh: Japan signed a grant and loan agreement with Cambodia on Sunday totaling over \$90 million, despite concerns from the international community over Prime Minister Hun Sen's crackdown on government critics ahead of a July general election.

Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Kono and Cambodia's Foreign Affairs Minister Prak Sokhonn signed the \$4.6 million grant and \$86 million loans, for economic and electricity transmission projects, in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh.

The main opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) was dissolved in November at the request of the government, prompting some Western countries to condemn the crackdown, cut aid, and impose visa bans on some ruling party members.

Rights groups and members of the opposition have urged Tokyo to take a stronger stance against Hun Sen, but Japan has said it would continue to provide election support and would not interfere in what it said was Cambodia's internal affairs.

Hun Sen praised Japan for its financial assistance on Sunday but lashed out at critics.

“While Japan, a friend, is providing assistance to Cambodia, some bad people can poison the news as bad as they did,” Hun Sen said on his Facebook page.

During a meeting with Hun Sen on Sunday, foreign minister Kono said Japan would help Cambodia to become an upper middle-income country by 2030, said Hun Sen's aide Eang Sophalleth.

In a recent statement to Reuters, Kentaro Sonoura, advisor to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, urged Cambodia's political rivals to hold talks to end the political crisis.

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