

**Japan signs big aid deal with Cambodia despite woes at home
March 15, 2011**

Phnom Penh - Japan on Tuesday signed an aid package worth 94 million dollars for development projects in Cambodia, despite battling the effects of last week's earthquake and tsunami.

The agreement was announced on Friday shortly before the magnitude-9 earthquake struck Japan.

Japanese Ambassador Masafumi Kuroki signed the deal in a ceremony presided over by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

The Cambodian Foreign Ministry said half of the money would be spent on improving flood protection and drainage in Phnom Penh, with the rest earmarked to upgrade provincial water distribution and to provide demining equipment.

On Monday, the Phnom Penh Post newspaper reported that Japan had provided a 250,000-dollar grant to support local educational organizations.

'Even though right now Japan has a natural disaster, we still continue to offer grants to support the agreed projects in Cambodia,' the newspaper reported Kuroki as saying Monday.

Over the weekend Hun Sen sent his Japanese counterpart, Naoto Kan, a message of condolence expressing his sadness at the effects of the earthquake.

In the letter he said Cambodia would make 'a very modest contribution' of 100,000 dollars to help victims.

Hun Sen also instructed government officials to find out whether any Cambodian students studying in Japan were caught up in the earthquake.

The Phnom Penh Post reported an Education Ministry official as saying more than 300 Cambodian students had received scholarships to study in Japan, although none has been reported missing.

Japan has been one of the most important donors to Cambodia over the past decade, particularly in relation to projects for infrastructure and irrigation, as well as the ongoing Khmer Rouge tribunal.

Since 1992 Tokyo has provided around 1.7 billion dollars in grant aid to Cambodia, according to the Japanese embassy in Phnom Penh.