

His Excellency Mr. Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu, Minister of Railways,
Honorable Members of Parliament,

Mr Richard Hay,

Mr Rahul Kaswan,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honor to be here with all of you to celebrate the inauguration of “2017 the year of Japan-India Friendly Exchanges”.

I would like to express my warmest appreciation to the Japan Tourism Agency and Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) for co-hosting this launching event tonight.

During the visit by Prime Minister Modi to Japan last November, he and Prime Minister Abe decided to mark the year 2017 as a year of Japan-India friendly exchanges. Throughout this year, we will have a number of culture and tourism-related events in India. I am thrilled to have such a great opportunity to introduce the various faces and charms of Japan to the people of India.

Whenever I observe any commonality between the two countries, I am fascinated by that, and feel closer to the country and the people of India. Many of you already know that Japan and India enjoy long-standing cultural bonds dating back to the 6th century. For example, Japanese people are surrounded by so many gods which originally came from India. We worship Kissho-ten (which is Lakshmi), Taishaku-ten (which is Indra), Benzai-ten (which is Saraswati), Bishamon-ten (which is Kubera) and many more. Some of these gods are part of the group that we, in Japan, know as the “Seven Deities of Good Luck”.

When we look into the future, Japan-India relations have a vast potential, given the complementarities that exist between the two Asian economies, as well as our common values and shared strategic interests. Our relationship has greatly flourished and has entered a new era. I would like to see the partnership between the two countries to be strengthened even further. That is why I would like to see a lot more Indian people visit Japan and be captivated by that.

As you can see on the card we handed to you, Japan is a country

“where heritage meets modernity”. Natural beauty, such as cherry blossoms in spring, the changing colors of leaves in autumn, and white snow in winter combines charmingly with traditional and historical architecture to create a breathtaking scenery. These features coexist with an advanced society characterized by ultra-modern elements like High Speed Railways, innovative buildings, and robotics. Japanese people comfortably live with cutting-edge technology, while, at the same time, cherishing their own heritage. Once you visit Japan, you will certainly be fascinated by that.

In order to encourage more Indian people to visit Japan, JNTO has decided to establish its regional office here in Delhi and is currently working hard to open it soon. I truly look forward to this. The Government of Japan is introducing other measures to facilitate the visit by Indian people to Japan. It was decided that Japan will relax visa requirements for Indian students, starting from February 1st. We hope this will encourage the younger generation to discover Japan. We also plan to have 13 more drop-off offices of visa applications all over India, by the end of this coming March. We believe this will make it a lot easier for Indian people to apply for a Japanese visa.

I hope that the events we will hold throughout 2017, the year of Japan-India Friendly Exchanges, will allow us to share our culture with Indian friends and further develop a close bond between Indian and Japanese people. I believe this is the most meaningful way to solidify the ever-growing relationship between our two countries.

Thank you very much.