

Address by Ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu
“Japan and Meghalaya:
Compatibility and Great Potential in Cooperation”
November 14th, 2018

Mr. Conrad Sangma, Honorable Chief Minister, Meghalaya,
Mr. Vincent Pala Honorable Member of Parliament,
Distinguished Guests from all quarters of State of Meghalaya and
other states in North Eastern Region,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

It is a great pleasure to address you at this forum “Celebrating Shillong - Sakura Connect, & Idea Exchange on Socio Economic Partnerships,” organized by the Government of Meghalaya with the partnership of FICCI’s Forum of Parliamentarians and the Embassy of Japan.

This special event is the second of a series entitled “Dialogue with States”, events we hold in regional cities to highlight various aspects of cooperation between Indian States and Japan.

I express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Conrad Sangma for his active role in enhancing Japan-India relations as a member of FICCI’s India-Japan Forum of Parliamentarians in past years and today as Chief Minister of Meghalaya.

I am deeply grateful to officials of Government of Meghalaya and FICCI for organizing this dialogue. I also appreciate FICCI’s secretariat for their leadership commitment to this dialogue series. I look forward to continuing and expanding our joint endeavor to further promote Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership.

Japan and Meghalaya: Potential in cooperation

Meghalaya is a very attractive state with beautiful nature and rich

culture. As the name of Meghalaya (the abode of clouds) suggests, the abundant rainfall grows its beautiful nature. Lush green mountains and Cherry blossoms in full bloom today resemble with Japan very closely. In addition to cultural similarities, the physical resemblance is so striking that the friendly smiles of Meghalaya people remind me of my old friends.

Mr. Conrad Sangma shared his views with us especially for the development of State of Meghalaya and North East when he was a member of FICCI's India-Japan Forum of Parliamentarians. During his visit to Japan as Forum delegate in May 2017, he had fruitful discussions with high-level government officials, Members of Parliament and business leaders. I believe that he strongly felt the compatibility and great potential in cooperation between Japan and Meghalaya.

[PM Modi's visit: Overview]

Now, let me touch upon the recent visit of PM Modi to Japan two weeks ago. It was his third official visit to Japan, fifth annual summit and twelfth meeting with PM Abe.

PM Modi became the first foreign leader to be invited to PM Abe's private holiday home, located in a forest famous for unique Fuji Sakura Trees. The two leaders enjoyed an informal one-on-one interaction over dinner.

I can say with confidence that the visit was the BEST EVER. With wide-ranging agreements and announcements as well as enhanced mutual trust, the two leaders demonstrated that Japan and India have become "the most trusted partners" and "it is today a partnership of great substance and purpose", as PM Modi stated. The strategic discussions, which the two leaders have held at every annual summit, with maps of the Indo-Pacific region, reached a

new depth. I believe there are few world leaders who share such deep strategic views like PM Modi and PM Abe.

The outcome of the visit was so extensive that we ended up with releasing a 7,400-word fact sheet on 12 areas, in addition to the Japan-India Vision Statement and 24 MOUs/ MOCs. There were 57 Japanese companies which registered interest in new investment projects in India.

Japan has now become the second country with which India will have Foreign and Defence Ministerial “2+2” Dialogue. Both countries have commenced formal negotiations to conclude Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) which will provide a framework for enhanced cooperation between the three forces. Our Navies have signed the Implementing Arrangement for deeper cooperation.

With a view to enhancing financial and economic cooperation, we have agreed on the Bilateral Swap Arrangement (BSA). Both leaders reviewed with satisfaction the progress of Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail project, including the signing of an Exchange of Notes for 150 billion yen loan.

I am pleased to mention that Projects for Renovation and Modernization of Umiam-Umtru Stage-II Hydroelectric Power Station in Meghalaya (5.5 billion yen or INR 350 crore) was among the 6 additional Exchange of Notes for ODA loans that were signed this time.

As a result of these new projects, Japan’s total assistance to the North East alone will be over 300 billion yen in total or INR 19 thousand crore, demonstrating our commitment to this region.

With the momentum gained from the successful visit of PM Modi to Japan, we will further accelerate our cooperation in various fields. Today, let me elaborate on four such areas which are especially significant to our cooperation in Meghalaya.

[Connectivity]

The first area of cooperation is what we call strategic connectivity. What our two governments are striving to achieve regarding strategic connectivity is two-fold.

The first is to globally promote our common principles on connectivity infrastructure, such as openness, transparency and non-exclusiveness based on international standards and responsible debt financing practices.

Furthermore, we believe in the importance of “quality infrastructure,” which ensures alignment with local economic and development strategies, lifetime cost, safety, resilience, and social and environmental impacts, among others.

The second is to materialize concrete cooperation in the Indian Ocean region and beyond. Currently, Japan and India are working together to extend cooperation on quality infrastructure development in various countries and regions including Africa.

Since North East is located at a strategically and economically critical juncture between India and Southeast Asia as well as with BIMSTEC countries, connectivity is a priority in the region. In this regard, we are working together for the development of North East through the “Japan-India Act East Forum”. We identify and implement projects to enhance connectivity, sustainable forest and ecological management, disaster risk reduction and people-to-

people exchanges.

To highlight some of the important projects, the projects on National Highways 40 and 51 in Meghalaya are well under way. NH40 will be connected to Dhaka, Bangladesh through other cross-border project of Japan.

During the summit last month, exchange of notes was made on a huge bridge project across the Brahmaputra River, linking Dhubri in Assam with Phulbari in Meghalaya. This bridge, to be the longest in India when completed, will be an important part of Gelephu (Assam-Bhutan border) and Dalu (Meghalaya-Bangladesh border) corridor project.

[Forest, Bamboo]

The second area, forest management, has been a key feature of the Act East Forum. It has multiple benefits from sustainable development, protection of biodiversity to disaster risk management. We have been cooperating in Sikkim and Nagaland. Today, responding to the request by India, I am pleased to express our firm intention to expand such cooperation to Meghalaya.

A novel area of cooperation is bamboo. Bamboo is abundant in North East; hence its potential is huge. Our cooperation on bamboo so far has been limited to artisanal crafts. Through “Japan-India North East Bamboo Initiative”, we would like to draw out the potential of bamboo for the region. I welcome innovative and interesting ideas to utilize this resource.

[Disaster risk reduction]

The third area of cooperation is disaster management. Upon Prime Minister’s visit to India last year, Japan’s Cabinet Agency and India’s Ministry of Home Affairs signed the Memorandum of Cooperation on Disaster Risk Reduction, thereby opening doors for

exchanging expertise and attaining better preparedness together.

In March and October this year, Japan and India jointly held Workshops on Disaster Risk Reduction to discuss scientific risk assessment, disaster risk management framework development, early warning systems, and resilient infrastructure development.

Japan, situated in the Pacific Ring of Fire, is prone to natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, tsunami, and landslides, and thus acquired the hard way better disaster management. Topography and geography of the North East make it susceptible to Natural disasters and hence calls for better disaster preparedness. We hope that the overarching bilateral framework for cooperation in disaster risk reduction would benefit the local people in Meghalaya and this region in the near future.

There are many other potential areas for cooperation. Japan has been attaching great importance to promoting agriculture and food industry, ranging from food processing to cold chains. The number of Japanese companies investing in this area is growing and organic products in the North East should be an attraction. The Embassy of Japan has initiated Japan-India Food Dialogue to further promote investment by food industries.

Tourism is another promising area. I am hoping to see more Japanese people visiting the North East, which is endowed with rich natural and cultural resources and traditions. To boost people-to-people exchanges, Japan scaled down the travel advisory for 5 districts (East Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi, West Jaintia Hills and East Jaintia Hills) of Meghalaya in August to the lowest level, following to the scaling down for the city of Guwahati and the Tripura in January. I am happy to be able to take concrete actions, taking into

account the request from Honorable Chief Minister Mr. Sangma.

[People to People Connections]

This topic nicely leads to another important one: our people to people ties are at the core of our bilateral partnership. Japan will invite 25 promising youth from the North East States to Japan next January in the second IRIS program, where the participants will have a first-hand experience of Japan's efforts in disaster management, eco-tourism, culture, and many more.

We are eager to promote Japanese language education in the North East. I am grateful that EFLU (English and Foreign Language University) and some other educational institutions are expressing their interests. Embassy and Japan Foundation are ready to work with these institutions to start Japanese Language courses.

I also see a great potential in our Technical Intern Training Program (TITP). As people of Japan and North East have similar physical features, through the training of care givers from North East, both of our countries will benefit. Japan has taken a step in this direction through "Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative" and we are looking forward to further cooperating with India.

When we talk about people-to-people exchanges with the North East, we can never forget about sports. As you know, Japan will host the 2020 Summer Olympics. We know there are many talented athletes in the North East. As the fervor for sports rise across the globe towards those great games, we are hoping to have a stronger cooperation with the North East on this "physical" front, too.

[Closing]

Today I have only focused on four areas, but let me emphasize that Japan and India have many other upcoming cooperation in various

areas, such as start-ups, smart cities, science and technology, and intellectual exchanges. I am hoping that we can identify some promising areas of cooperation between Japan and Meghalaya through our discussions today.

It is my firm conviction that Japan-India relationship is an element of certainty in an increasingly uncertain and volatile world. I hope that all of you in this room and many more will join in our common endeavor to further strengthen our Special Strategic and Global Partnership.

Thank you very much.