

Remarks by Ambassador Hiramatsu at the 3rd India – Japan Tourism Council

Date: 11th January, 2019

Venue: Ashok Hotel, New Delhi

Shri Yogendra Tripathi, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism,

Distinguished Delegates,

(Introduction)

First of all, I would like to offer my congratulations to all of you on the inauguration of “The 3rd India – Japan Tourism Council” today.

It is truly a matter of great satisfaction that tourism council is being regularly conducted between Japan and India since the first meeting in Delhi in October 2016.

I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to everyone concerned in Indian Government, who were devoted to preparations for this meeting.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the leaders of Japanese Tourism-related organizations, namely, Mr. Tabata, Commissioner, Japan Tourism Agency, Mr. Seino, President, Japan National Tourism Organization, and Mr. Tagawa, Chairman, Japanese Association of Travel Agents, for coming all the way to Delhi to participate in this council.

These three gentlemen are key players to promote India-Japan tourism exchange. Thank you very much again for your participation.

(Importance of expansion of Tourism exchange)

Since I arrived in India as the Japanese Ambassador, I have been working hard on expanding the tourism exchange between Japan and India as this is an extremely important mission.

Under the strong leadership of Prime Minister Abe and Prime Minister Modi, the Japan-India partnership has been developing unprecedented manner.

In order to further strengthen the relationship of trust between Japan and India, further expansion of people-to-people exchanges is indispensable. In this regard, I welcome the recent launch of India-Japan Friendship Forum, which will play an important role to achieve people-to-people exchange promotion.

(Strategy for expanding tourism exchange between Japan and India)

The number of Indian visitors to Japan has continued to grow appreciably. In 2018, it is expected to be over 150,000 people who visited Japan. This is the highest number ever.

The number of Japanese visitors to India also reached the record high of 223,000 in 2017, but the growth rate in recent years has declined.

Considering the promising relationship between the two countries and the valuable tourism resources of each country, however, these numbers are not enough and far below my expectation.

In order to further strengthen promotion of tourism in Japan to the Indian people, we have to show various ways to enjoy Japan throughout the year, other than experiencing the charms of "Sakura (cherry blossoms)".

On the other hand, for the Japanese people, it is necessary to introduce India's attractiveness to a wider section of people spanning across generations, not only to the elderly and young women who currently form the mainstream of visitors from Japan to India.

I would like to introduce not only Agra and Jaipur, but other destinations where there are plenty of wonderful charms that Japanese people do not know about, such as mountain ranges of

Himalayas in the north, the rich nature and culture and ayurvedic tradition of Kerala State in the south, rich ethnic culture in the northeastern states, etc. I visited almost all parts of India and am amazed by the fascinating natural beauty, well preserved historic sites and diverse culture. I hope many Japanese people will visit these places.

(FAM tour and Importance of North East Region)

This year the Ministry of Tourism of India has kindly planned familiarization tour for Japanese delegates to visit Assam and Meghalaya States.

The Indian North East, including Assam and Meghalaya is an extremely important region where the Indian Government's "Act East" policy and the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" promoted by Japan are converging. Japan is committed to contributing to the

development of this region through the “Japan-India Act East Forum”.

I have also visited North East many times and recently participated in the cherry blossom festival held in Shillong, Meghalaya, in last November. I realize the potentials of these states as a tourist destination.

I hope that this FAM tour will facilitate developing tour packages to these states in the near future.

(Conclusion)

In the vision statement of our two Prime Ministers after their summit meeting held in last October, the two leaders "regarded tourism as an area with huge untapped potential and shared views to make efforts to enhance two-way flows, including through further easing of the visa requirements and tourism promotions".

Accordingly, Japan has already implemented the ease of visa requirements for nationals of India from this January.

At the 2nd India - Japan Tourism Council in December 2017, we agreed to expand the tourism exchange population between Japan and India to 700,000 in 2020. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary for both Japan and India to make concerted efforts.

Through today's council and summit, I would like you to consider the concrete action of both Japan and India towards achieving this goal. I hope tour operators of both side sit down together and discuss way to promote two-way tourism and come up with concrete tour packages. I am convinced that B to B partnership will play the key role in tourism promotion.

I would also like to expect the expansion of flights between Japan and India by airlines of both countries, through full utilization of Open Sky Agreement.

I am extremely delighted to see so many people from both countries who have a strong influence on the tourism policy and industry working together at the beginning of 2019.

I hope that this meeting accelerates the expansion of tourism relationship between Japan and India.

Thank you very much.

(End)