

Address by Ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu
Opening Session: Politics and Security
India-Japan Colloquium, September 8th, 2017

IIC Life Trustee Mr. Shyam Saran,
IIC Director Air Marshal Naresh Verma,
Foreign Secretary, Dr. S. Jaishankar,
Mr. Jay Panda, M.P.,
Ambassador Mrs. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

[Introduction]

It is a great honor for me to deliver an address at this significant and timely conference. This event comes especially at an important time, as we anticipate Prime Minister's visit to India soon, and I am delighted to see mounting interest in Japan and Japan-India relations here in Delhi and elsewhere in India.

I would like to first express my sincere appreciation for Mr. Shyam Saran for organizing this event with the excellent list of speakers and arrangements. It is very encouraging to see that the IIC has renewed interest in Japan and is committed to support our ties. I am certain that this event will help foster a deeper understanding of Japan-India bilateral relationship, which is, in my opinion, at its best ever.

Today, I would like to focus my address on the strategic outlook in terms of politics and security, with regards to our bilateral relationship.

[The strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific]

"Indo-Pacific" has been the key word for Japan's strategic thinking. We used to discuss strategic issues looking at a world map that focused on the Pacific Ocean. However, nowadays, that focus has shifted to India and the Indian Ocean. We are now having strategic discussions on the Indo-Pacific region, stretching from the African Continent to Asia. We place India right in the middle of this dynamics.

Why has this change taken place? I would like to offer 3 reasons for this.

The first reason is that the global power balance is changing dynamically, and is becoming more complicated. The strategic situation in Asia is becoming ever globalized, with new emerging powers rising in the region. The centre of the power balance is shifting to Asia, especially to the Indo-Pacific region.

The second reason is that the world we live in is becoming increasingly uncertain and unpredictable, where outstanding issues such as North Korea, South China Sea, and others in the area surrounding India are surfacing. Some months ago, I made a speech entitled 'What is certain in the age of uncertainty'. I argued that for the very reason that we are living in an age of uncertainty, we cherish Japan-India partnership, the partnership between the oldest and the largest democracy in Asia. The Japan-India partnership provides certainty and stability in the region and beyond.

The third reason is the increased significance of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. The sea lane stretching from the African continent to Japan is becoming crucial for the peace and prosperity of the region. Japan sees the countries existing along this sea lane as the engine of growth, full with potential. In that sense, it is our view that the Indo-Pacific region is blessed with vast opportunities. This is where the magic of the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and of Asia and Africa take place.

With those reasons in mind, Prime Minister Abe's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" is Japan's response to such challenges and opportunities. This is a strategy that regards the Pacific region and the Indian Ocean region as one big strategic domain, and aims to improve inter- and intra- region connectivity, and to promote fundamental values such as freedom, openness and rule of law. This strategy is also a statement of intent that Japan is ready to play a greater role in the Indian Ocean region under the banner of "Proactive Contribution to Peace."

[Japan and India as key partners]

India is the key partner to carry out Prime Minister Abe's "Free and Open

Indo-Pacific Strategy.” It is not an exaggeration to say that this strategy is largely about cooperation with India.

As I have mentioned in the beginning of this address, Japan-India relations are at their best ever, and are becoming elevated to a higher level. Ever since our relationship became a Special Strategic and Global Partnership during Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Japan in 2014, our relationship has expanded in various areas, not only in traditional areas such as trade, investment and economies, but also in the sphere of defense and security.

[Reasons why India is Japan’s important partner]

I would like to further explain why India is Japan’s important partner.

The very basic but extremely important factor is that we share values, such as our commitment to democracy, openness, and rule of law. Above all, Japan attaches great importance to the rule of law for the coexistence of big and small countries, as well as the continued prosperity of future generations. India’s adherence to the rule of law is worthy of admiration, as seen in the country’s compliance with an arbitral decision regarding a sea boundary dispute with Bangladesh that was not necessarily in India’s favor.

I appreciate India’s consistent attitude to engage with dialogue through diplomatic channels to find a mutually acceptable solution.

This is precisely why India is an indispensable strategic partner for us. We can work together in upholding these fundamental principles for the peace and prosperity of the world.

Furthermore, there is affinity between Prime Minister Abe’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” and Prime Minister Modi’s “Act East” policy. Indeed, our two Prime Ministers “recognized the potential for deeper bilateral cooperation and synergy between” Japan’s Strategy and India’s Policy during Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Japan last November.

In that regard, our strategic and political cooperation is deepening. In terms of military cooperation, we have actively engaged in dialogues regarding maritime security, and also conducted strategic dialogues on

various levels including 2+2 at Foreign Secretary level. A significant set of agreements were reached during Minister Shri Arun Jaitley's recent visit to Japan, including an agreement to begin the technical discussions for research collaboration in the areas of Unmanned Ground Vehicles and Robotics. In terms of a broader framework, the MALABAR exercise that was carried out by Japan, India and the US was a huge success.

[North Korea]

Japan and India are both facing a challenging time. Just last weekend, North Korea conducted its 6th nuclear test which was by far the largest in scale ever. The ballistic missile launched last week flew over our nation and landed in the Pacific Ocean. These provocative actions pose unprecedented, grave and serious threat to the peace and security of the region as well as the international community, and are a very clear and repeated violation of various international obligations including UNSC resolutions. In this regard, we welcome India's statement issued on Sunday, which deplores the nuclear test and calls on North Korea to refrain from provocative actions.

The international community must recognize that North Korea's threat has entered a new level. Whether we can stop their reckless act depends on whether the international community can be united against them.

Given the depth of strategic convergence between Japan and India, it is time for our two nations to further deepen our cooperation in addressing this grave issue of North Korea.

[Significance of Japan-US Alliance]

Not just in the context of North Korea, but in every front of foreign and security policy, Japan places great importance on our Alliance with the US, which remains the cornerstone of peace, prosperity and freedom in the Asia-Pacific region. Under President Trump's administration, Japan and the US have been maintaining close ties through frequent official visits including Prime Minister Abe's visit to the US in February, as well as the recent 2+2 with the participations of our new Foreign and Defense Ministers. Numerous telephone conferences foster close cooperation between the two countries' leaders.

The renewed and strengthened Japan-US Alliance and India-US partnership, as demonstrated at the recent visit of PM Modi to Washington DC, provide a perfect basis to further develop our Japan-India-US trilateral cooperation. This trilateral is essential for the entire region, and we are keen to strengthen our trilateral strategic discussions and cooperation.

[Visit of Prime Minister Abe]

Lastly, I would like to highlight the anticipated visit of Prime Minister Abe. This is a perfect opportunity to further elevate our bilateral relationship. Our two leaders are true friends, genuinely enjoying mutual respect and confidence. They meet regularly, and the degree of shared strategic views and insight between them is unprecedented. During the upcoming visit, I look forward to the further deepening of our strategic partnership in fields such as security, connectivity, trade and investment as well as people to people exchanges.

Japan and India are true partners in an age of uncertainty, and together, we will bring peace and prosperity to the region and beyond.

[Closing remarks]

Thank you very much for your kind attention. I wish the conference a great success.