

Address by Ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu
“Challenges and Prospects in the Indo-Pacific Region
–in the context of India-Japan relationship”
USI, November 2nd, 2017

Honourable Minister of State for External Affairs, General VK Singh,
Director of USI, LT Gen PK Singh,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

[Introduction]

It is a great honor for me to be here to address the Inaugural Session of today’s seminar under the theme “Challenges and Prospects in the Indo-Pacific Region – in the context of India-Japan relationship.”

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Lt Gen PK Singh, for organizing this event and for inviting me to share my views on Japan-India relationship and broader Indo-Pacific strategic agenda. I am certain that today’s event will nurture a deeper understanding into our common challenges and opportunities.

[Recap of Prime Minister Abe’s visit]

Before delving into the content, please allow me to touch upon the recent visit of Prime Minister Abe. This visit was indeed unprecedented and special, as my Indian friends had predicted. It was special in a way that Prime Minister Abe received an enormous welcome, as well as the gracious hospitality personally shown by Prime Minister Modi, and of course the people of Gujarat. The substance was just as good as the optics. We demonstrated concrete progress in all areas of cooperation which we had developed over the years. The depth of the strategic discussions between the two leaders reached a new level. I could not stress more that the visit surely contributed in elevating our bilateral relationship to a new level, and marked a new era for Japan-India relations.

[Strategic overview (Major challenge)]

The Indo-Pacific region is a place blessed with opportunities encompassing fast growing countries like India, and Africa which is full of potential. However, it is also a place where various challenges are arising.

North Korea poses an unprecedented, grave and serious threat to the

peace and security of the region as well as the international community. Having launched numerous ballistic missiles as well as carrying out six nuclear tests in violation of various international commitments, its threat has entered a new level. It is all the more important that all countries are united to exert maximum pressure on North Korea to change its policies. Japan and India agreed on this point as shown in the Japan-India Joint Statement issued on the occasion of Prime Minister Abe's visit last September, including the need for rigorous implementation of relevant UNSC resolutions. Given the depth of strategic convergence between Japan and India, I look forward to our two countries further deepening cooperation in addressing this grave issue. I would also like to mention the critical importance of a strong Japan-US Alliance, which remains the cornerstone of peace, prosperity and freedom of the Asia-Pacific region. This Alliance has been continuously strengthened in recent years. The Japan-US Alliance and close collaboration among Japan, US and South Korea are key in dealing with the North Korean issue. President Trump will make his first official visit to Japan in three days, and Prime Minister Abe will have an intensive discussion on this issue, along with other wide-ranging issues of our interest. I will point out the key role China plays in dealing with the North Korean issue as well. China's constructive cooperation is indispensable to ensure peace and stability in this region.

Also it has become increasingly important to make deliberate efforts to protect a rules-based maritime order to promote the rule of law, freedom of navigation and over-flight, in full compliance with the principles of international laws including UNCLOS. Japan and India place fundamental importance on the rule of law. The threat of terrorism and extremism is a concern as well, as terrorism knows no borders. All forms and aims of terrorism should be strongly condemned, and Japan firmly stands with India in the international effort to combat terrorism.

[Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy]

Now, taking into account the strategic overview of the Indo-Pacific that I have just mentioned, I would like to talk about the role of Japan and its strategy. On October 22nd, Prime Minister Abe scored a major victory in the general elections for the Lower House, so we expect him to further contribute to the peace and security of the region under the banner of "Proactive Contribution to Peace".

The key to carrying out such proactive contribution is the "Free and

Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” that Prime Minister Abe announced last year. By now, this concept is starting to resonate widely with the international community.

Our “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” regards the Pacific region and the Indian Ocean region as one big strategic domain. It 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. I look forward to the increased engagement by countries to initiatives based on our “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy”.

[India as key partner to Japan]

India and Japan are key partners to carry out this strategy. Prime Minister Modi’s “Act East” Policy synergizes well with Prime Minister Abe’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy”. The two leaders agreed to reinforce the alignment of the two strategies in the last Japan-India Joint Statement. As the synergy is gaining momentum, Japan would like to further work with India on strengthening the connectivity among countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

[Connectivity]

It was a welcoming development that Japan and India shared the principles of connectivity infrastructure during the Japan-India Summit Meeting. The connectivity infrastructure projects should be implemented “in an open, transparent and non-exclusive manner based on international standards and responsible debt financing practices, while ensuring respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the rule of law and environment”. I am happy to point out that the elements of these principles were echoed in the recent speeches and statements by the United States, which shows that the US thinking is closely aligned with that of Japan and India.

Japan would like to promote cooperation on infrastructure development to the countries in the Indian Ocean region and beyond, based on these principles of connectivity enhancement. Furthermore, we believe that connectivity not only in the sea, but also on land is essential. That is why Japan and India have set up the Act East Forum to advance development in and to foster people-to-people exchanges with the North Eastern Region. We hope the Forum will serve as a springboard for concrete projects in the Region.

[Materializing Japan-India cooperation in various areas]

In the near future, we would like to give shape to the efforts of defence cooperation between Japan and India. So far this cooperation has been materialized in our MALABAR exercise, which was held in the Bay of Bengal back in July. It was a huge success and was a sign of enhanced and deepened maritime security cooperation among Japan, India and the United States.

We also aim to enhance exchanges between our countries' respective forces in the air, sea and land. Cooperation on defence equipment and technology is also a crucial area to be expanded. We have recently shown progress in this regard with the commencement of the technical discussion for the future research collaboration in the area of Unmanned Ground Vehicles and Robotics. We look forward to more concrete outcomes in the future.

[Regional architecture]

Before closing my remarks, I would like to briefly touch upon the issue of regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific region, as I saw this will be discussed in a later panel today. There are various regional fora that promote peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific and Asia-Pacific region, and Japan has proactively contributed to the forming and strengthening of such institutions. Our idea is that we don't need a single entity to address various regional challenges, and rather, we should make the institutions reinforce each other and maximize the synergy and thereby comprising a flexible regional architecture. Among these regional organizations, Japan places particular importance on the East Asia Summit (EAS), as the premier leaders-led forum to discuss broad strategic, security and economic issues. We look forward to vibrant discussion among leaders at the upcoming EAS Summit in Philippines. Japan is also actively engaged in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and other ASEAN related frameworks. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is also significant in enhancing regional economic integration and cooperation. Japan is strongly supporting the efforts towards India's membership to APEC. This year's APEC Economic Leaders' Week will be held in Vietnam prior to the EAS Summit. We look forward to India's active engagement in these architectures in the Asia-Pacific.

In the Indian Ocean, we think that the Indian Ocean Rim

Association (IORA) is valuable and has potential. We are proactively participating in the discussions at IORA, and hoping to step up our engagement. I would also like to point out the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Japan is not of course a member, but we regard BIMSTEC strategically important as it places itself in the Bay of Bengal, which is the area of convergence between our “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” and India’s “Act East Policy”. We welcome India’s recent efforts to further strengthen regional cooperation in this forum, and would like to find ways to support BIMSTEC. Japan is eager to join the efforts of these various frameworks in the Indian Ocean.

With India’s increased engagement in the architectures of the Asia-Pacific region combined with Japan’s increased engagement in the Indian Ocean, Japan-India cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region as a whole will be greatly enhanced.

[Conclusion]

Lastly, I would like to reiterate that we strongly hope to elevate the Special Strategic Partnership with India to an even higher stage. Japan and India are countries that share values including our commitment to democracy, openness, and rule of law. As Prime Minister Abe said, a robust Japan-India relationship is a global common good that underpins the regional order.

Through our promising bilateral relationship, we aim to provide certainty to an increasingly uncertain and volatile world. I am confident that our enhanced bilateral relationship will serve as a shining beacon that will light the way to peace and prosperity for the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

Thank you very much for your kind attention. I hope that the event will be a great success.