

Opening Remarks by Ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu
on
India-Japan-ASEAN:
Promoting Stability in the Indo-Pacific
13 March, 2019

Good morning.

It is my great pleasure to engage in discussions with Ambassador Gongsakdi of Thailand and Ambassador Preeti Saran to kick off this seminar. The title of the seminar itself is very appealing. The Indo-Pacific has become a buzzword now, and the prospect of sharing diverse perspectives in terms of India-Japan-ASEAN certainly sounds promising.

As a diplomat, I often direct my thought towards a long-term viewpoint. What kind of future do we need to deal with? What is required to ensure stability, peace and prosperity? In doing so, I always visualize a world map because we also need to have a broad geographical outlook.

Today, our focus is on India-Japan-ASEAN, so I will not spend much time on the Japan-India relationship. But the uniqueness of our relations is found in how Prime Minister Abe and Prime Minister Modi engage in strategic discussions with a world map in front of them. No wonder why our relationship is called a “Special Strategic and Global Partnership.”

So, let me begin by a long-term perspective. By 2028, India is projected to be the third largest economy, only after the United States and China. India will also be the

most populous country in the world.

Looking east, ASEAN will continue its robust growth. In PPP terms, Indonesia will soon be the fourth largest economy. All ASEAN countries, including Thailand, will increase their economic weight, as the region is expected to continue its growth by around 5% annually.

And Japan will remain an important, responsible and reliable player in the world with considerable economic and technological vigor, stable governance and sophisticated social system.

When we look at the world's map with such a perspective, we will instantly notice that the major players to shape the future world, i.e., the United States, Japan, China, ASEAN and India can only be well captured by the concept of the Indo-Pacific. What is more, the Indo-Pacific reaches the shore of Africa, which is also endowed with rich natural resources and human capital.

The Indo-Pacific is a relatively new perspective. A preliminary idea was first presented by Prime Minister Abe in his speech titled "Confluences of the Two Seas", here in India, in 2007. Since then, the international community has gradually embraced this view point and now the Indo-Pacific is buzzing in the international

dialogue.

I think this perspective has caught our attention because it highlights the sheer potential of the Indo-Pacific. Then we have to seek how we can best realize this in the years to come.

First, I would like to underscore the significance of fundamental principles to sustain peace and prosperity. I cannot emphasize more how much this region has benefited from the free movement of goods, services and people, anchored by the principle of the freedom of navigation and overflight. And these are all indispensable parts of the rule of law. The rule of law is paramount in its importance as it shapes states' behaviors, thereby increasing transparency and predictability.

Second, the pursuit of economic prosperity is an important pillar of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Enhanced connectivity is critical from this perspective. Let me come back on this point later.

Third, we need to reaffirm our commitment to peace and stability. Strengthening the capacity of maritime law-enforcement and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) as well as cooperation in such fields as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief can forge and demonstrate such commitment.

In essence, these three elements form the gist of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” which Japan is espousing.

I am pleased that India has also expressed its clear vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, as expounded by Prime Minister Modi last year at the Shangri-La Dialogue.

Now ASEAN is also engaged in a serious discussion in crystalizing their vision for the Indo-Pacific. A high level policy dialogue on Indo-Pacific cooperation will be held a week later in Jakarta. Based on its long-term friendship with ASEAN, Japan is eager to engage in further dialogues with ASEAN over how to give shape to the Indo-Pacific we want.

It is a matter of fact that, other countries such as the United States and Australia also have their own visions for this region. The important thing is to share our visions, and think and act together for the better future of the Indo-Pacific. I believe such a future can be pursued in a flexible and multi-layered fashion through various channels such as bilateral, trilateral or broader forms of cooperation.

With such a grand vision, we need as many like-minded partners as possible.

Every state which abides by international rules and norms can join and play an invaluable role in establishing a stable and prosperous regional order. Inclusiveness is a key as rightly pointed out by Prime Minister Modi.

I earlier talked about the importance of strategic connectivity. We should promote concrete projects to increase connectivity. As I am the Ambassador of Japan to India, let me take up some examples of how Japan and India are coordinating on such concrete projects.

In Bangladesh, India is constructing roads, and Japan is constructing bridges in the same segment. Japan is also building the Jamuna Railway Bridge, on which locomotives provided by India will run.

In Sri Lanka, Japan, India and Sri Lanka are promoting LNG-related infrastructure. In Rakhine State of Myanmar, Japan and India are joining our hands to provide housing, education and electrification. We are also coordinating our assistance in Africa, such as in Kenya.

Though I will not go into details, suffice it to say that Japan is engaged in various projects with ASEAN countries and other partners as well.

In doing so, we are mindful of providing quality infrastructure. Quality infrastructure ensures international standards such as open access, transparency,

economic efficiency in terms of life-cycle cost, and fiscal soundness of the recipient countries. Responsibility and accountability of all stakeholders, including donors and lenders, carries significance in ensuring quality infrastructure. Of course, Japan is also actively supporting capacity building and technology transfer.

Before closing, I would like you to think of the world map once again. You now visualize that both India and ASEAN are situated at the heart of the Indo-Pacific. Imagine further an Indo-Pacific which is better connected, free, open and inclusive. I am sure you will feel how natural or even indispensable it is for Japan, India and ASEAN to work together for such an end.

Today's seminar is very well-timed and it provides an excellent opportunity to share our views and visions about this region. The seminar will touch upon some of the elements I raised in subsequent sessions. I hope active discussions will ensue, bearing in mind the long-term and broad geographical perspectives. I would like to thank Carnegie India and Pallavan Learning Systems for providing us this opportunity.

I hope today's seminar will be a great addition to our ongoing and future collaborations. I wish you a most productive seminar today.

Thank you.