

Address by Ambassador SUZUKI Satoshi
“Japan’s Connect with Karnataka”
February 17th, 2021

Shri Ashwathnarayan CN, Hon’ble Deputy Chief Minister
of Karnataka

Shri Bhupender Yadav, Hon’ble Member of Parliament,
and Chair of FICCI Forum of Parliamentarians,

Hon’ble Members of Parliament and Legislative Assembly,

Dr. Jyotsna Suri, Past President of FICCI; Co-Chair,
FICCI Forum of Parliamentarians, and Managing
Director, Bharat Hotels,

Mr. K. Ullas Kamath, Chair, FICCI Karnataka State
Council,

Distinguished Guests from all quarters of the State of
Karnataka,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. **Introduction**

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to address you all at this forum, “Japan’s Connect with Karnataka”, co-organized by FICCI’s Forum of Parliamentarians and the Embassy of Japan. This special event is the fifth Dialogue with States, which aims to highlight the various aspects of cooperation between Indian States and Japan. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, today’s Dialogue could only be possible virtually. Nevertheless, I am extremely glad to have this opportunity to interact with eminent dignitaries from Karnataka.

Unfortunately, I’ve never been to Karnataka, because my planned visit to Bengaluru last March was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I’m looking forward to an early opportunity to come to Karnataka.

The collaboration between the Japanese Embassy and FICCI has been enhanced greatly in the past few years. In addition to the annual meeting of the Japan-India Business Co-operation Committee, we have had a number of interactions in the fields of tourism, IT, and several other sectors. I am deeply grateful for FICCI's secretariat and leadership in organizing this dialogue series and look forward to continuing and expanding our joint endeavors.

The cooperation between Japan and Karnataka, one of the most important States of South India as an IT hub, is very significant, and holds enormous potential to further deepen the Japan-India relationship. I am happy to talk about Japan's connection with Karnataka today.

2. Japan-India Relations

But, before we dive into the Japan-Karnataka relationship, I would like to say a few words about the broader Japan-India relationship. As you all know, our relations have been traditionally friendly, built upon our common historical and cultural bonds. We share common values such as freedom, rule of law, democracy, tolerance, and non-violence.

Then, at the dawn of the 21st century, the Japan-India Global Partnership really took off. Our relations culminated in the "Special Strategic and Global Partnership", as it stands today. The convergence between Japan and India is greater than ever, and our cooperation is expanding in various areas encompassing the political, economic, and cultural spheres.

Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been no letup in the momentum of our cooperation.

[Cooperation on Covid-19]

One of the lasting elements of our friendship can be found in Japan's Official Development Assistance to India which started in 1958. Since some time ago, Japan has consistently been the largest partner to India; in fact, the largest portion of Japan's ODA goes to India. Facing the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a huge challenge for all humanity, Japan has been fighting alongside the Indian government in controlling the spread of COVID-19 in India. Last August, the Japanese government extended an emergency loan to support the implementation of healthcare and medical policies in India, in addition to offering grant aid to procure Oxygen Generators to be employed for the treatment of critical patients. Last month, an additional loan was extended, in order to ensure social protection to the disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of the population, including women. Together with multilateral assistance through international organizations such as UNDP and UNICEF, Japan's COVID-19 related assistance to India adds up to more than 5,800 crore rupees.

I am very happy that India has managed this pandemic quiet skillfully and now providing Indian vaccines to as many as 20 countries in the world. This is very impressive.

[Resilient Supply Chain]

During the Covid-19 pandemic, PM Modi has

launched the “Atmanirbhar Bharat” initiative, “Self-reliant India”. The Japanese government is moving forward in tandem with the government of India to strengthen India’s manufacturing sector. We expect to help India get better integrated into the regional value chains and to play an even more important role in the global economy. In this regard, I would like to mention that JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization) is implementing the "Program for Strengthening Overseas Supply Chains". I am pleased that two projects were adopted from India, which are the first and only projects adopted outside ASEAN countries. I hope these efforts will be conducive to our shared objectives of realizing resilient supply chains, and will lead the Indian economy on a path of strong and sustainable growth.

[ICT]

As I address the distinguished guests of Karnataka, let me touch on the bilateral cooperation on ICT. On 15th January, the Memorandum of Cooperation in the Field of Information and Communication Technologies, including 5G, AI and Telecom Security, was signed by both countries’ Ministers of Communications. It was the first time for the two Communications Ministries to sign such an MoC. As the two Ministers expressed their hopes on the occasion of the signing, I also look forward to seeing this MoC serve as a good foundation for future deepening of bilateral cooperation in the field of ICT.

[Specified Skilled Worker]

People-to-people exchange between Japan and India

in the area of skill development has also been progressing. I am truly pleased to have signed the MOC on “Specified Skilled Worker” with the Government of India last month. The scheme of “Specified Skilled Worker” was established in Japan in 2019, to allow foreign nationals who have a certain level of expertise and skills, to work in Japan like Japanese workers, not as trainees. I am sure that this will lead to further strengthening of the bilateral friendship between Japan and India. The Government of India is also eager to utilize the new scheme. The Government of Japan is currently engaged in discussions with the MEA and MSDE to establish an effective cooperation mechanism for implementing this new scheme.

3. Japan-Karnataka Relations

Now I would like to highlight some important areas where Japan and Karnataka are collaborating. I am keen to explore the possibilities of further development of our relationship, given Karnataka’s potentials. The Japanese Government has been and will be assisting to build basic infrastructures in the State to promote Japanese companies’ investment there.

[Japanese companies operating in Karnataka]

Currently, 217 Japanese companies are operating in Karnataka, mainly in the automobile industry, including Toyota and Honda. Also, in the IT field, Japanese startups, such as Sagri, an agri-tech venture, and other venture capital firms are scaling up their presence. That has been supported by the Japan-India Startup Hub, which was launched as a part of the Japan-India Startup Initiative in 2018. In addition, trading companies such as Sojitz and

Mitsui have opened their branches so that they can closely collaborate with those startups. Panasonic and Sony are setting up their R&D bases to capitalize on the talent of Indian youths. We will continue to cooperate with various parties to promote Japanese companies' operations there. Let me add, though, that for Japanese companies operating in India, a stable business environment as well as smooth labor management relationship is very important. It would be much appreciated if they could continue to receive necessary assistance from stakeholders in Karnataka. The better business environment you offer, the more Japanese companies will willingly come to Karnataka. We cannot be complacent. We should move further ahead.

[Infrastructure]

In order to support the growth of Bengaluru and to encourage Japanese investment there, Japan has been supporting various infrastructure projects, such as the Bangalore Metro, the ITS, and water supply and sewage projects, through loans and grant aid.

A prime example is Bangalore Metro Phase 1, which is the first Metro project in Bengaluru. Now we are conducting a feasibility study of lines 2A and 2B, which will connect the eastern side of the Outer Ring Road and Kempegowda International Airport.

Besides these, an Intelligent Transport System will be installed using Japanese grant aid, in order to reduce traffic congestion in the city of Bengaluru.

Further, to improve the living environment in the extended Bengaluru Metropolitan Region, Japan has been supporting the installation of water supply and sewage projects. And Japan is implementing Phase 3 of these

projects by supporting the construction of stable potable water supply and sewage networks in 110 villages which were recently integrated into the Bengaluru Metropolitan Region.

[People-to-People exchanges]

Keeping pace with the increase of Japanese companies and improvement of infrastructure in Bengaluru, we see a growing potential for people-to-people exchanges, including flow of talented human resources in the IT sector.

Based on this potential, Japan Airlines is ready to operate direct flights between Tokyo and Bengaluru. The operation was initially planned to start in March 2020, but unfortunately was suspended due to COVID-19. But I am hopeful that once COVID-19 is subsided and the direct flight route connecting the two cities opens, people-to-people exchanges between Japan and Karnataka will expand appreciably. I am sure JAL will be in operation soon.

The flight will also offer seamless connectivity to North America via Tokyo. I look forward to seeing Japan Airlines flights supporting overseas activities of Bengaluru's IT talents. Furthermore, in the post-COVID times, this route could serve as a main artery of tourist transportation network as well.

In addition to these exchanges in IT and tourism sectors, I hope that people-to-people exchanges will be promoted by utilizing the "Specified Skilled Worker" scheme that I mentioned earlier. We also have another scheme called "Technical Intern Training Program," TITP, which aims to contribute to the development of sending countries through on-the-job training of foreign nationals

who wish to acquire certain skills. I have noted that, in Karnataka, NAVIS, one of Sending Organizations of TITP, has been doing remarkable work in the area of care-giving. Karnataka State has several such excellent Sending Organizations. Karnataka is a pioneer which has accumulated know-how of sending workers with prominent skills and capabilities abroad. Support from the leadership of a State is the key to promote the effective utilization of these systems. We hope that the Government of Karnataka will encourage its people to utilize the SSW as well as TITP schemes.

4. Japanese Language Education and Universities Exchanges

I would also like to encourage the young generation to study the Japanese language in order for them to take advantage of their talent at a Japanese company or in other Japan-related opportunities.

[Japanese Language Education]

The number of people studying Japanese is increasing all over India, and a similar trend is also seen in Karnataka. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that, the number of applicants for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test in Bengaluru increased three times from 1500 to 4500 between 2015 and 2019.

Six universities in Karnataka currently offer Japanese language courses, and more universities are considering establishing such courses. We will continue to cooperate with relevant organizations to increase the number of Japanese learners by providing opportunities for them.

[University Exchanges]

There are approximately 630 agreements on academic and people-to-people exchanges between universities in Japan and India nationwide. Among those agreements, 67 are with academic institutions in Karnataka, more than 10%. For example, the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore has signed agreements with the University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, Keio University, and International University of Japan. That said, there is still much room to enhance exchanges based on these agreements. So we will continue to extend our strong support to give additional boost to such initiatives.

5. Closing

Today I have focused only on a selected fields, but let me emphasize that the cooperation between Japan and India goes beyond the limited number of areas I was able to address today. I am hoping that we will be able to identify more promising areas of cooperation between Japan and Karnataka through our discussions today. I hope that, in addition to all of you present in this meeting today, many more will join us in our common endeavor to further strengthen the Japan-India and Japan-Karnataka partnership.

Thank you very much.