

Inaugural Address by Ambassador SUZUKI Satoshi
“Connectivity Cooperation towards a Free, Open and
Inclusive Indo-Pacific”
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Professor Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General of RIS,

Dr. Mohan Kumar, Chairman of RIS

Ms. Riva Ganguly Das, Secretary East,
Ministry of External Affairs of India,

Distinguished Guests from Japan, India,
and all across the Indo-Pacific region,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Introduction

Good afternoon. It is my great pleasure to address you all today.

I would like to thank RIS for organizing this seminar and bringing together various experts from all corners of the region. The Japanese Embassy is very happy to co-host this seminar along with the Ministry of External Affairs of India.

2. Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)

It is still fresh in our minds that Prime Minister Modi unveiled the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative in his speech at the East Asia Summit in 2019. This is a

foresighted and timely initiative in the sense that it reflects two critical realities of the time. One is that peace and security of the Indo-Pacific is paramount for stability and prosperity of not only the region itself, but of the entire world, given its weight in the global economy. The second reality is that collective efforts are necessary to cope with various challenges this region faces.

Prime Minister Modi explained IPOI as a cooperative framework to translate principles for the Indo-Pacific into concrete measures, and these principles included freedom of navigation and overflight, sustainable development, protection of ecology and the marine environment, and an open, free, fair and mutually-beneficial trade and investment system. Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision completely shares the emphasis on these fundamental principles and values. So it is only natural for Japan to welcome this initiative by India. Therefore, when Foreign Minister Mr. Motegi discussed with his counterpart External Affairs Minister Dr. Jaishankar in October last year on the occasion of Japan-India Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue, Japan conveyed its decision to be the lead country for the seventh pillar of this IPOI, which centers on connectivity.

Today's seminar marks the very first step for Japan in this role. I hope that this will provide a positive momentum for the shaping of IPOI under India's strong leadership and with growing support from many countries across the region.

3. Importance of Connectivity

Over the years, Japan and India have been a positive factor to the region. And I believe that

connectivity is the best area to showcase how our two countries can bring about tangible benefits to the entire region.

Japan's decision to become the lead country for the connectivity pillar of IPOI was a strong reaffirmation of our commitment to enhancement of connectivity. But on the ground, bilateral cooperation in this area is nothing new. Our two countries have long been advancing various connectivity projects in India as well as in third countries. Today, we have a number of distinguished speakers who will talk about concrete projects and good practices in this area, so I would just look forward to their intensive discussion in the later sessions.

But, before that, let me remind you that connectivity should be captured in a broad perspective. For that purpose, I would like to introduce one exemplary case of Japan-India cooperation in India's North East and Bangladesh to highlight how our partnership can enhance both maritime and land connectivity in a mutually reinforcing manner.

As you may know, the North East is another focus of Japan in our quest for a free and open Indo-Pacific. But the North East itself does not have an outlet to the sea. With that in mind, in Tripura, for example, Japan is upgrading National Highway 208 and is planning to continue providing assistance for this critical road to the border with Bangladesh.

Across this border, there is a city called Ramgarh on the Bangladesh side, where another important Japan-India collaboration starts. From Ramgarh to Baraiyarhat of Bangladesh, India is building a road, while Japan is constructing eight bridges, nicely complementing with each other. And the story does not end here. From Baraiyarhat, National Highway 1 brings you to the ports

of Chittagong and Matabari.

This means, if you look at all these joint efforts by Japan and India in a holistic view, there appears a dynamic connectivity network in which Japan-India collaboration provides the landlocked North East with access to the Bay of Bengal and beyond, most importantly to ASEAN countries. As IPOI rightly captures, the Indo-Pacific maritime domain is the source of growth and prosperity, so better access to these Oceans is vital for the improvement of people's lives. I think this example depicts quite well how land connectivity can also contribute to maritime connectivity. It also shows how much difference Japan and India can make for the lives of people.

Japan and India will continue such joint efforts of enhancing connectivity in the Indo-Pacific region, utilizing our expertise and complementarity. We welcome any other country which shares our vision to come on board on such endeavors. To this end, perspectives and insights from countries in the region are critical. In this regard, I am very happy to welcome participants not only from India and Japan but also from Southeast Asian countries today.

4. Closing

Japan will continue to play its leading role towards a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific along with partners who share the same vision. I would like to close my remarks by wishing for the success of this seminar and looking forward to hearing useful insights from all the participants.

Thank you very much.