

**Address by Ambassador SUZUKI Satoshi
at the Closing Session of the India-Japan Forum
(July 20, 2021)**

Mr. Jamshyd N. Godrej, Chairman, Ananta Centre,
Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs,
Mr. N.K. Singh, Chairman, 15th Finance Commission,

Distinguished previous speakers and participants,

(Introduction)

It is my great pleasure to join the inaugural India-Japan Forum with distinguished political, economic, and academic leaders from the two countries. I would like to thank Ananta Centre and the Co-Chairs for their leadership in bringing this Forum to a successful conclusion. Today's participants have long been committed to the further advancement of the Japan-India relationship. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for their strong commitment.

(Japan-India Relationship)

As many speakers referred to, Japan and India share fundamental values and strategic interests. Under the "Special Strategic and Global Partnership," I am glad to say that our current bilateral relationship is stronger than ever and further expanding in all aspects: political, economic and cultural fields.

(1) Security

When we look at the Indo-Pacific region and continue to witness unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion, the roles Japan and India need to play in this region are becoming more and more critical. With this recognition, Japan and India are committed to a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, and have worked together based on shared values such as democracy, the rule of law, and a rule-based international order. In

accordance with these fundamental principles, we have jointly promoted collaboration, for example, by developing and upgrading infrastructure in third countries, including Bangladesh. Moreover, as Prime Minister Modi unveiled the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, or IPOI, which has a lot in common with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision, Japan has become one of its lead countries to move this initiative forward.

As discussed in the first session today, we have seen progress in cooperation between our defense authorities in recent years. In addition to the first-ever Japan-India 2+2 ministerial meeting in 2019, we now see bilateral exercises of all of the three forces, navy, army and air force. Furthermore, last year Japan and India signed what we call ACSA, or Agreement on Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services, which entered into force this month. Also, Malabar 2020 last year, with Australia's participation, is considered as a very positive development. The next step for us is cooperation in the field of defense equipment. I think it is time to accelerate joint research to deliver tangible results.

The Quad is one of the key frameworks to realize a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The significance of the Quad lies in a candid discussion on the strategic outlook of the Indo-Pacific as well as practical collaboration in such areas as quality infrastructure, maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and other global and regional issues. I am pleased to witness the Quad practical cooperation accelerating, and the first-ever Quad Summit meeting took place in March this year, albeit on line. The new working groups that the four Leaders launched on (i) vaccine, (ii) climate change and (iii) critical and emerging technology have expanded the horizon of the Quad cooperation. I look forward to further boosting our cooperation toward a next Quad Summit meeting later this year.

(2) Economy

As discussed in the second session, the strong Japan-India relationship is based upon our strong economic ties. As of today, more than

1,400 Japanese companies operate in India, and their trade and investment are flourishing. That being said, very honestly speaking, I must say that many Japanese companies still feel India is a harder place to do business, compared to ASEAN countries, in terms of regulations, tax systems, labor relations and so on. Japan and India need to take advantage of the current post-pandemic recovery-phase and bring positive changes to bilateral economic dynamism by strengthening supply chains and improving the business environment in India. The key for enhancing supply chain resilience is coordination among partner nations in this region, including Japan and India, since no single company or country alone can resolve supply chain problems in the era of globalization.

As Japan and India have discussed under the “Japan-India Industrial Competitiveness Partnership,” which is aimed at enhancing international competitiveness of the Indian industries, I believe that it is imperative for India to stay connected to the global market in all sectors, including manufacturing. Therefore, my humble request to the Central and State Governments of India is to listen carefully to the voices of Japanese companies, which would be willing to make more investments in the years to come. As India is standing at a critical juncture today, only the Indian Government can make a difference in inviting more Japanese investments by improving the business environment here.

(3) Economic Cooperation

Japan and India have been also partnering for the social and economic development for many years. Japan has been keen to support building Quality Infrastructure for India's better future. The Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail is a prime example. We also have been working on urban infrastructure development as well as the improvement of connectivity in the North Eastern Region.

The second wave of the COVID pandemic was a truly heart-breaking experience for us all. To address immediate needs, the Government of Japan provided 1,800 ventilators and 2,800 oxygen concentrators to India. We also provided 8 oxygen generation plants to the North East in partnership with

UNDP. We also worked with UNICEF for the provision of cold-chain equipment for smooth nation-wide vaccination. Health care sector continues to be a critical area for bilateral cooperation between Japan and India. We would like to pursue more active collaboration in this area.

(Conclusion)

The pandemic has brought about challenges in many aspects, including human security, movement of people and supply chains, as I have mentioned. High-level visits between the two countries have been affected as well. It was very unfortunate that we had to postpone Prime Minister Suga's visit to India this spring. As face-to-face meetings between our two leaders are undoubtedly essential for having in-depth discussions on various issues of mutual concern, I hope that we can arrange our Prime Minister's visit to India at an earliest opportunity this year.

Next year, we will jointly celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and India. I look forward to promoting interactions not only between our governments, but also between businesspersons and academics, like today's Forum. Also I look forward to working together to deepen our partnership that is more intertwined, interdependent and indispensable for each other.

Thank you very much.