

Address by Ambassador Hiramatsu at the Inauguration Session
of Japan-India Coordination Forum on Development of North East
3 August, 2017

- Honorable secretary, Mr. Naveen Verma, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region,
- Honorable officers of central government,
- Delegation of states government of North Eastern Region,
- Distinguished guests,
- Ladies and gentlemen.

It is my great pleasure to welcome and express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for gathering here today to witness the commemorative inauguration of the Japan-India Coordination Forum on Development of North East. Indeed, I am sure that this launch of the Coordination Forum will be a milestone for an enhanced relationship between Japan and the North East Region.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the victims of the flood that recently hit the North East. I hope the affected areas will recover and return to normal life at the earliest.

In the North East, Japan has been extending cooperation on slope protection of mountain roads and forest management, which contribute to flood disaster management. To improve disaster resilience of the region, Japan is ready to share our knowledge and expertise in disaster management accumulated through our own experiences.

With regards to the Coordination Forum, I believe Japan will be a natural partner for the development of the North East. I would like to highlight two major reasons for this, one is strategic and economic, the other is historical and cultural.

The North East Region is located at a strategically and economically important juncture between India and Southeast Asia as well as within

BIMSTEC countries. Therefore, Japan and India have placed a particular importance on our cooperation in North East, which is clearly and repeatedly stated in the Joint Statements of our annual summit meetings.

In addition, last year, Prime Minister Abe announced “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy,” under which Japan is working towards improving connectivity across the region to promote stability and prosperity. North East is the place where Japan’s strategy and India’s “Act East Policy” converge.

Japan is cooperating with road connectivity improvement in North East, starting with NH54 in Mizoram and NH51 in Meghalaya, through our ODA loan project. I am hopeful this project will expand to other parts of North East over time.

Furthermore, since Japan is an important development partner with other South and Southeast Asian countries, Japan can be a catalyst in enhancing connectivity in the wider region.

So, Japan has been undertaking extensive cooperation in the region, ranging from electricity, water supply and sewage, to forest resource management and biodiversity. The detailed list is distributed in the room for your reference.

Historically, Japan has close ties with the North East Region, through the experience of the fierce Battle of Imphal and Kohima during WW2. The people of Manipur and Nagaland suffered greatly from these battles.

I visited Manipur twice and Nagaland once to pay tribute to the war victims. I was strongly impressed and touched by the warm and friendly feelings that the people of Manipur and Nagaland extend to Japan, in spite of the tragic experience of the war.

I also felt there is a strong wish that Japan enhances its cooperation, not only economically but also culturally, based on our historical connection. I was encouraged by the enthusiasm for Japanese language education in the region.

There are already some projects planned or implemented in this direction. To name a few, Manipur Tourism Forum is planning to construct a War Museum in Imphal with financial support from a Japanese organization; the Japanese Government initiated what we call “IRIS Program” to invite young people from Manipur and Nagaland, this year 25 of them, to Japan; IIT-Guwahati has opened a Japanese language course with the support of a university in Japan.

With the convergence of the two countries’ strategies and regional policies, as well as the region’s welcoming atmosphere to Japan’s engagement, Japan believes there is huge potential and opportunities to boost our cooperation in the North East.

To materialize such potential into realities, Japan and India jointly decided to launch this Coordination Forum. The Coordination Forum will be comprised of all the relevant Ministries and state governments of North East from India, and the Embassy and all government-affiliated agencies in New Delhi from Japan. This is the first such endeavor to get all the relevant officials together. The Coordination Forum will work as a critical platform to expand cooperation between Japan and India in North East.

To conclude, I wish this initiative will further expand our cooperation in the North East, deepen friendship between Japan and this region, and give a fresh boost to the already very strong Japan-India relationship.

Thank you.