

Address by Ambassador Hiramatsu  
“India, Japan and North East”  
on 7 May 2018,  
in Asian Confluence Center, Shillong, Meghalaya

Honorable Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Mr. Conrad Sangma  
Honorable Ambassador Anil Wadhwa  
Honorable Ambassador Deepa Wadhwa  
Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta, Executive Director, Asian Confluence  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Good evening.

I am delighted to visit this beautiful historical city of Shillong for the first time. I always feel at home whenever I come to the North Eastern Region. As Japan attaches great importance to this region, it is my great pleasure to speak here today. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Asian Confluence for organizing this seminar. First, I would like to give an overview of Japan-India relationship and explain where the North East sits in this picture.

[Introduction]

Today, Japan and India enjoy the closest relationship ever. With the historic visit of Prime Minister Abe to Gujarat last September, Japan-India relationship has entered a new era. During Prime Minister Modi’s first state visit to Japan in 2014, we elevated our relationship to the Special Strategic and Global Partnership. Since then, we have made a dramatic progress in strengthening our partnership. The significant achievements we have made in recent years include 1) the convergence of regional strategies; 2) the launch of High Speed Railway project; 3) Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy; 4) the fundamental upgrading of our economic relations, and 5) the significant deepening of people-to-people exchanges.

These developments are already remarkable. However, we have yet to achieve the great potential of Japan-India relationship, which was described by Prime Minister Abe as “the most promising bilateral relationship in the world”. Indeed, as we all see, the Indo-Pacific region is a place blessed with opportunities

and potential, but it is also a place where various challenges are arising.

We are now working day and night to fulfil the potential, address the challenges, and further deepen and strengthen our partnership in various areas. I would like to talk about how far we have come in recent years and how far we are hoping to go in our strategic, security, economic and people-to-people relationship.

[Strategic convergence]

First, there is a clear convergence of strategic views between the two countries. Japan and India hold summit meetings annually and our Prime Ministers have deep strategic dialogues. Japan and India have agreed to work together to achieve a “Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific” by synergizing Prime Minister Modi’s “Act East Policy” and Prime Minister Abe’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy”. The two countries subscribe to common principles such as the rule of law, freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes. Japan sees India as the most trustworthy partner, and highly appreciates India’s principled and consistent approach to international challenges. Indeed, the strategic convergence is the most remarkable evidence that our relationship has become genuinely Special, Strategic and Global Partnership.

Our strategic views are shared at every level of our governments. Most recently, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj made an official working visit to Japan in March. Cherry blossoms in Tokyo reached full bloom slightly earlier than usual, as if they welcomed the visit of Madam Swaraj. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono and Madam Swaraj held the 9th Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue, where the two Ministers discussed ways to further strengthen our bilateral relationship, and held discussions on regional issues (including North Korea), as well as global issues. During the trip, I was impressed by EAM’s personal commitment to strengthen our Special Strategic and Global Partnership and was very happy to receive her in the best season of Japan.

In addition to frequent bilateral meetings at high levels, Japan and India are engaged in trilateral with US and quadrilateral dialogues with US and Australia. Just last month, Japan-India-US trilateral DG-level meeting was held in Delhi, which followed the trilateral Foreign Ministers Meeting last September and quadrilateral meeting with Australia last November. In the meeting, the officials explored practical ways to enhance cooperation in areas including

maritime security and maritime domain awareness, connectivity and infrastructure development, counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. They also agreed to remain engaged and strengthen cooperation in support for a free, open, prosperous, peaceful and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

[Defence and security cooperation]

Second, we have made tangible progress in defence and security cooperation in recent years; for example, our forces are increasingly engaged in joint exercises such as Japan-India-US Malabar Exercise, and we identified specific areas of cooperation in defence equipment and technology. However, we need to do much more in this field to demonstrate the strength of our Strategic Partnership.

Currently, we are working hard to further enhance exchanges and cooperation between our respective forces in the air, sea and land. We are hoping that bilateral joint exercises and multilateral activities should become more frequent and wide-ranging, as well as more advanced in enhancing our interoperability including on anti-submarine aspects.

In the future, we will witness expanded joint exercises and cooperation, not only in the maritime domain but also in such areas as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations and counter-terrorism. For example, Japan and India decided to execute joint military exercise on counter-terrorism this year. We are currently coordinating with Counter-Insurgency Jungle Warfare School (CIJW) in Mizoram and other relevant organizations for the preparation of the exercise. We are also working to strengthen cooperation in expanding maritime domain awareness in the Indo-Pacific region.

Cooperation on defence equipment and technology is also a crucial area to be expanded. Japan has traditionally taken a rather cautious approach in this field, but with the new Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology approved by the cabinet in 2014, Japan is determined to contribute to international peace and security more proactively through appropriate overseas transfers of defense equipment and technology. By doing so, we can also strengthen security and defense cooperation with our ally and partners. With India, we have started technical discussions for future research collaboration in the areas of Unmanned Ground Vehicles and Robotics. Our readiness to provide

our state-of-the-art US-2 amphibian aircrafts has been appreciated by the Government of India as symbolizing the high degree of trust between the two countries. We look forward to more tangible outcomes in the future.

[Economic relationship]

Third, Japan-India economic relationship has significantly expanded. A striking example is the rapid increase in Japanese FDI to India under the Japan-India Investment Promotion Partnership, which was announced in 2014 to aim for doubling the number of Japanese companies in India and the amount of Japanese FDI to India, and disbursing 3.5 trillion yen (33.5 billion US dollar) of public and private finances from Japan in five years. Most recently, the FDI figures leaped from US\$ 2.6 billion in FY2015 to US\$ 4.7 billion in FY2016 which is the highest except Mauritius and Singapore. The number of Japanese companies operating in India has also marked a steady increase, totaling 1369 in 2017. India has been named the most promising mid- to long-term investment destination for Japanese companies. We hope this trend will be accelerated by mutual endeavours.

The expanding investment is now accompanied by investment in people and skills. Five Japan-India Institutes for Manufacturing (JIMs) have been inaugurated to introduce and accelerate future workshop leaders' training in Japanese manufacturing practices. In October 2017, Japan and India signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP) which enables Indian technical interns to receive on-the-job training for three to five years in Japan. Under TITP, trainees will be trained in quality management, work practices and cost awareness, etc., with a view to improving production and developing industries back in India. First batch of 15 Indian engineers will be dispatched soon.

Not only private investment but also public financing plays a key role in expanding our economic relations. India has been the largest recipient of Japan's Official Development Assistance, ODA, and Japan has been the largest bilateral donor for India. The amount of Japan's ODA loan provided to India has renewed the highest record for three years in a row since 2015.

The prime project with our ODA assistance is the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Railway. The historic first step of the project took place during

Prime Minister Abe's visit to Gujarat last year. The actual construction works will begin shortly. Shinkansen was once a dream project for Japan. It transformed the country into an industrial hub. Now the project to realize the same dream has started in India. Japan is committed to fully supporting this project, as well as measures for railway safety in India, making full use of Japan's expertise as demonstrated in the zero-casualty record of Shinkansen.

It is true that Japan has supported a number of quality infrastructure projects in India. However, our economic cooperation is not limited to hard infrastructure. Japan's ODA has long contributed to India's efforts in social sectors and basic human needs. We are witnessing further expansion and upgrading of cooperation in wider areas. For example, Japan and India signed a MoC on disaster risk reduction last year and the first workshop was held in March with the participation of State Minister for Home Affairs, Honorable Kiren Rijiju, and Vice Minister of Cabinet Office of Japan. Japan shared its experience and practices in disaster risk reduction. We have also initiated a policy dialogue on environment. Japan is committed to contribute to solving environmental problems in India through utilizing our own experience of overcoming grave pollution in the 1950s and 60s. There is also a big potential in agricultural and food cooperation: Japan has participated in World Food India 2017 as a partner country and there is a growing interest among Japanese companies to invest in the agricultural and food processing sector in India.

[People-to-people exchanges]

Fourth, we are promoting further people-to-people exchanges. Compared to strong political and economic relationship, people-to-people exchanges have been less than modest and carry huge potential to expand. Last year, we celebrated the Year of Japan-India Friendly Exchanges, and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries gathered momentum through various events during the commemorative year. The introduction of Open Sky effectively boosts travels to either country by both peoples. We hope that more active two-way exchanges will solidify the foundation of our partnership.

In this connection, Japanese language education plays an important role. Fluency in Japanese language greatly benefit the Indian people, not only in terms of better mutual understanding, but also for augmenting businesses and job opportunities. An increased number of Japanese language speakers will also

benefit Japanese entities which endeavour to enhance their scope of operation in India.

We saw great progress in this area during Prime Minister Abe's visit last year. Japan and India decided to endeavor towards establishing Japanese language certificate courses at 100 higher educational institutions in India as well as training 1,000 Japanese language teachers over the next five years. I signed the Memorandum of Cooperation with former Foreign Secretary Jaishankar, to this end.

[North East]

I have just provided the gist of Japan-India relationship. As our bilateral relationship is so deep and extensive that it would take as ten times as long to cover everything. Now let me turn to North East, which in fact is one of the core agendas of our bilateral relationship.

Japan's encounter with the North East started through the experience of the Battles of Imphal and Kohima during World War 2. I myself have visited Manipur twice and Nagaland once to pay tribute to the war victims. On these occasions, I interacted with the people in those States, and I was impressed and touched by the warm and friendly feelings that the local people extended to Japan.

I felt their strong wish to enhance cooperation with Japan, not only economically but also culturally and people-to-people contacts, based on our historical connection and ethnic similarity. It is very encouraging and we are committed to respond to their expectations as positively as possible.

As I explained earlier, Japan and India are working together by synergizing "Act East Policy" and "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy". North East is where these two policy and strategy converge. In view of the strategically and economically important location of North East, at the juncture between India, South Asia and Southeast Asian countries, our Prime Ministers agreed to cooperate for the development of the North Eastern Region and enhancement of connectivity.

To this end, we established the "Japan-India Act East Forum." The Forum was launched last December at its first meeting co-chaired by myself and

Dr. Jaishankar, then Foreign Secretary. The Forum is a unique platform dedicated to Japan-India cooperation in the North East. It puts together relevant agencies from Japan and India to discuss further cooperation in the region.

While “Japan-India Act East Forum” is a new impetus to our cooperation in the North East, it is worth noting that Japan has long been an active development partner in the region. We have provided a wide variety of cooperation, ranging from connectivity and other economic infrastructure, to skill development, to community empowerment.

Japan is supporting road connectivity improvement throughout the region, starting from National Highway 54 in Mizoram and National Highways 40 and 51 in Meghalaya. NH40 runs from Guwahati through here in Shillong to Dawki, Indo-Bangladesh border. Japan supports the expansion and upgrading of Shillong-Dawki strip and the construction of a new Dawki bridge, which will sustain heavier load than the existing 90-year old bridge. We expect significant improvement in the flow of cargo and people to the benefit of Meghalaya and North East.

We also support other essential economic and social infrastructure development such as water supply and sewage facilities in Assam and Umiam hydro-power stations in Meghalaya. Umiam-Umtru power stations provide 40% of electricity in Meghalaya. Upgrading of these power stations will increase the generation capacity and efficiency. Japan has already supported two stages and is now ready to work on the third phase.

In addition to infrastructure, Japan considers skill development as an important factor to promote development, as I mentioned earlier. Therefore, we are conducting capacity development for forest management and income diversification throughout the North Eastern Region. In addition, I expect more trainees from North East will receive quality trainings. Under the Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP) in Japan, we hope to receive more interns from this region in areas such as care service for elderly people.

Furthermore, addressing the basic needs of vulnerable communities is as important as large scale infrastructure. Japan has collaborated with local NGOs

through our grant aid for grassroots projects (GGP) scheme to build a community health clinic, schools and women's vocational center in Manipur, Mizoram and Assam. Last month, we have just signed another grant contract for the Project for Construction of a Secondary School for Scheduled Tribe in Manipur.

In recent years, Japan and the North Eastern region are starting to strengthen cultural and people-to-people exchanges. To name a few, the Government of Japan initiated the "IRIS Program" last year and invited 23 young people from Manipur and Nagaland to Japan; IIT-Guwahati has opened a Japanese language course with the support of a university in Japan; and Manipur Tourism Forum is constructing War Museum in Imphal with financial support from a Japanese organization, Nippon Foundation.

North East has rich sports talents. Japan is considering the cooperation with Manipur National Sports University. Through the cooperation, we want to promote the exchange of sports talent and trainers between North East and Japan and create more opportunities for them. We are going to host Olympics and Paralympics in 2020 in Tokyo and we expect more athletes from North East will get many medals in Tokyo.

On top of that, cherry blossoms will connect Japan and North East, especially Shillong. Japanese people have a strong attachment to the adorable flowers and enjoy watching their full bloom now. More Indian tourists visit Japan to enjoy cherry blossoms during the season. I wish the cherry blossoms will be a charming catalyst to enhance people-to-people and cultural exchanges between Japan and North East.

These are just quick snapshots of what Japan has been doing in the region. Now Japan and India are working together to enhance such kind of economic cooperation and people-to-people ties between Japan and the North East through "Act East Forum." I hope that concrete cooperation projects will be identified and implemented soon.

### **[Conclusion]**

The North East assumes critical importance in our bilateral relationship and the region should benefit more from the ever deepening partnership between

Japan and India. There is a growing momentum to boost Japan-India cooperation in the North Eastern Region. Our historical ties and future-oriented views of the people are now precious asset to expand friendship between Japan and the North East. Japan is committed to working closely with Central Government and State Governments of North Eastern Region to realize concrete cooperation projects. I would like to count on the support from the people in the region as we go forward on this endeavor.

I had fruitful discussions with Hon'ble Chief Minister Mr. Conrad Sangma this afternoon. Hon'ble Chief Minister was an active member of Japan-India Parliamentary Forum of FICCI and we had the privilege to receive him in Japan last year. I am pleased and excited to join hands with Hon'ble Chief Minister to further strengthen the ties between Japan and the beautiful State of Meghalaya as well as the entire North East.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate my gratitude to Asian Confluence for organizing this workshop.

Thank you for your kind attention.