

Remarks by Ambassador Hiramatsu at the Inauguration of International Buddhist Conclave 2018

Date: 23rd August, 2018

Venue: Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi

Hon'ble President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind,
Hon'ble Minister for Tourism, Shri K.J. Alphons,
Smt. Rashmi Verma, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism,
Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all of you on this auspicious occasion to inaugurate the 6th International Buddhist Conclave 2018. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere respect for the vision and able leadership of Shri Ram Nath Kovind, Hon'ble President of India, and Shri K.J. Alphons, Hon'ble Minister for Tourism, for realizing the 6th International Conclave and Tourism Investor's Summit today. It is a great honor for the Government of Japan to participate in these important tourism initiatives, as a partner country.

The promotion of tourism on Buddhist related heritages perfectly fits with Japanese sensibilities, justifying its participation as a partner country. Japan has had strong and long-lasting cultural ties with India. Since the arrival of Buddhism in the year 538, Japanese culture has profoundly developed and integrated with the cultural influence of Buddhism. Buddhism is one of the important aspects forming the foundation of Japanese culture and way of thinking.

One significant example of the ancient cultural ties between India and Japan can be seen in Nara, the ancient capital of Japan. In the year 752, Bodhisena, a monk from India officiated the opening ceremony of the statue of the Great Buddha at Todai-ji Temple in Nara. This statute was a grand project constructed under the order of Emperor Shomu. To the present day, the center of the approach path leading towards the Great Buddha is made of Indian stones. It represents a strong bond between India and Japan through Buddhism, and a deep respect for the Indian priest who performed the role of the officiating monk at the inauguration ceremony.

To emphasize my point, please allow me to play a short video clip of the historical Todaij-ji Temple, Yakushi-ji Temple, and Enjyo-ji Temple in Nara, to show you how Buddhism-related heritage sites are attracting many Japanese and international tourists.

(Video clip screening)

The cultural interaction between Japan and India through Buddhist heritage still continues to the present day. In 1902, Okakura Tenshin, a renowned Japanese historian and intellectual visited Bodh Gaya three times besides the Ajanta-Ellora caves, interacting with Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore.

Okakura Tenshin was aware of the strong cultural connection with India, based on his research on Buddhist statues and architectures in Nara. Coincidentally, Okakura Tenshin was also passionately working to build a guest house in Bodh Gaya for the Japanese Buddhist pilgrims in 1902, although his attempts could not be materialized.

Japan is promoting “extensive sightseeing routes”, focused on Buddhist Pilgrimage Routes in Japan, such as “Kumano Kodo and Shikoku Island pilgrimage routes”. India’s Buddhist Circuit has conceptually a lot in common with Japan’s programmes.

Japan has been contributing towards the preservation and development of Buddhist heritage sites in India. Japan has, in the recent past, actively supported measures to preserve the Ajanta-Ellora caves, to improve access to the caves by building roads and by upgrading airports, as well as by establishing visitor centers at both Ajanta and Ellora through Japan’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) loan. I am delighted to know that the exhibition of Ajanta Murals will be held at the visitor center in Ajanta, during the 6th International Buddhist Conclave.

As the strategic importance of relations between Japan and India is certainly getting more and more significant these years, we expect more robust ties between the people of both countries.

I firmly believe that there is much room for expansion in the travel and tourism relationship between Japan and India.

Last December, Japan and India held the Tourism Council meeting in Japan and decided to target 700,000 people to travel between the two countries by 2020. There are many issues to be discussed and improved between our countries, in the field of tourism-related infrastructure, sanitation, and air connectivity. I hope that discussions in this conclave will inspire and activate further tourism development between Japan and India.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to all the people who have been working so hard to realize the 6th International Buddhist Conclave today.

Thank you very much.