

Address by Ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu  
on the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Kohima  
4th April, 2019

Shri Neiphu Rio, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Nagaland,  
Sir Dominic Asquith, High Commissioner of the United Kingdom,  
Ms. Akiko Macdonald, Chairperson, Burma Campaign Society,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this day, after the passage of 75 years of the Battle of Kohima, we have gathered here to offer our heartfelt prayers to the fallen souls. Our sympathy and deepest sorrow go out to their bereaved families and loved ones.

The Battle of Kohima is etched in our hearts as one of the fiercest and toughest battles during the Second World War. It took a toll on thousands of precious lives of the Indian National Army, the British Commonwealth Force, and the Japanese Army. The people of Nagaland and its neighbors, including Myanmar, had to endure severe sufferings and pains.

We should never forget that the peace we enjoy today is built over such tremendous sacrifices. Squarely facing the history of the past, Japan renews its commitment to never repeat the devastation of the war. We look back, in order to look towards the future. I would like to thank Shri Neiphiu Rio and the State of Nagaland for providing us with this precious opportunity to make such a reflection and reaffirm our reconciliation with the past.

Genuine reconciliation is only possible through dedicated efforts by us all. I would like to pay a special tribute to those who have dedicated themselves to such tireless struggles for reconciliation over these long years.

Now, the relations of countries which once fought with each other have been transformed for the good. Japan currently enjoys relations at their best with India, the United Kingdom and the United States. I am grateful for the true partnership and friendship we have nurtured over the decades. Moreover, the relationship between Japan and the North Eastern region, including Nagaland, has become substantially closer.

This is my second visit to Kohima. The people of Nagaland have always warmly welcomed me and made me feel at home. They have, indeed, been tremendously kind to all the visitors from Japan. Many of you have helped the efforts of excavating war remains with utmost sincerity. I feel a sense of warmth inside, when thinking of the bonds emanating from our deep historical links.

As such, I, as the Ambassador of Japan, wanted to do something to contribute to this region. Two years ago, I established the Act East Forum, together with the Foreign Secretary of India, to help accelerate the development of the North East region and expand our people-to-people exchanges.

Japan attaches great importance to people-to-people exchanges, in particular among the youth. The youngsters will shape our future, and there can be nothing more rewarding than investing in them. Japan has been implementing the IRIS program for two years now, inviting young Nagas and other youths from the region. Japan is also willing to welcome people from the North East through the Technical Intern Training Program as, for example, apprentice care workers.

I am confident that participants of these programs, who gain real experience in Japan will eventually become instrumental in making our bonds even stronger in the years to come.

I would like to further pursue my efforts to strengthen the ties between our people. I would like to promote intellectual dialogue with the people of the North East, so that we can think about and act together on facing our challenges.

Spring is the time when new things start. As we gather here on this spring day, I once again solemnly pay homage to the lives lost. At the same time, I would like to reiterate our gratitude for the paths we could take together since then, and for the paths we will march on together from now.

Thank you very much.

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