

Speech by Ambassador SUZUKI Satoshi  
“Why does Japan support the State of Assam and North East?”  
Guwahati, Assam  
15<sup>th</sup> February 2021

His Excellency, Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Honorable Minister of External Affairs,  
His Excellency, Mr. Sarbananda Sonowal, Honorable Chief Minister of Assam,  
His Excellency, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Honorable Finance Minister of Assam,  
His Excellency, Mr. Chandra Mohan Patowary, Honorable Minister of Commerce &  
Industry of Assam,  
His Excellency, Mr. Baijayant "Jay" Panda, Honorable National Vice-President of the  
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

নমস্কাৰ! মই অসমত আহি আনন্দিত হৈছো।  
(Greetings! I am happy to be in Assam.)

I am pleased to be back in Guwahati and honored to be here today together with External Affairs Minister. There is no better opportunity to talk about how Japan and India have been collaborating for the development of India's North East, in particular the State of Assam.

(Historical Significance)

I want to start by stressing how much grateful the Japanese people are to India. Japan could not have risen from the ashes of the Second World War, without the kind support of India.

With utmost sincerity, Japan has enduring feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology for inflicting immeasurable damage and suffering to the countries in Asia. Yet, India offered reconciliation to us, waiving all reparations claims, when Japan endeavored to rejoin the international community. And then, India generously provided its iron ore to Japan from late 1950s, which supported its high economic growth. We will never forget how much indebted we are to this great nation.

Japan was the first country to have achieved economic development in Asia. I believe that Japan, therefore, has a moral obligation to share our experience with the fellow Asian countries. And there still remain so many things that must be shared with India. Hence, India is now the largest partner of Japan in its Official Development Assistance (ODA).

(My personal thought)

I feel at home here in Assam as its beautiful scenery reminds me of where I come from. My hometown is in the northern part of Hamamatsu City of Shizuoka Prefecture. It is a town surrounded by mountains and beautiful nature like here, once prospered with forestry, in particular cedar woods. Before the war, there existed Japan's largest silk cocoon market. I know Assam is famous for its fabulous Muga silk. And Shizuoka Prefecture boasts its fragrant green tea; so does Assam its renowned tea.

Apart from the primary industry, my hometown bred a host of entrepreneurs, who were instrumental for the post-war economic development of Japan. Near my house, there was a house where Mr. HONDA Soichiro was born. Mr. HONDA started his business with motorcycles. Honda Super Cab swept over Japan with its popularity and is still immensely popular in many Asian countries. HONDA has evolved into a big company which manufactures not only motorcycles and automobiles, but also robots and private jets now.

In the southern part of Hamamatsu City, Mr. SUZUKI Michio was born. He is the founder of SUZUKI Motor Corporation and the Grand Father-in-law of Mr. Suzuki Osamu, incumbent Chairman of Suzuki Motor. Mr. SUZUKI first invented automated looms, then expanded his business to motorcycles. You could say that my hometown is where the popular Multi Suzuki cars can trace their origins.

It is also Hamamatsu City, where Mr. YAMAHA Torakusu started the YAMAHA Company, first in the business of maintenance of reed organs. YAMAHA has now grown into a company producing motorcycles, agricultural machinery, and musical instruments.

I should also add that Mr. TOYODA Sakichi, the founder of Toyota Group, is from a city next to Hamamatsu City.

Hamamatsu City, being a middle size city with the population of 700-800,000, bred these early entrepreneurs who led the post-war economic miracle of Japan and established the “Japan brand” highly recognized across the world. I believe that their success owes to traditional mottos of the Hamamatsu region, such as “open and progressive mindedness” and “give-it-a-try spirit”. I even think these mottos must have had some impact on first Shogun TOKUGAWA Ieyasu who had spent his early days in the Hamamatsu Castle before “founding” the Edo period, which lasted more than 260 years with peace.

Last March, I had a chance to visit IIT Guwahati. Listening to earnest explanations by young and devoted scholars, I felt a similar potential existing in this State and was filled with hope. I felt encouraged, not only by the similar natural and social environment with my hometown, but by the power of youths full of possibilities and the environment to nurture them. It is no accident that Maruti Suzuki established a Japan Endowed Course (JEC) in IIT Guwahati last March. This JEC materialized out of the passion of Chairman SUZUKI Osamu who wants to return his gratefulness to India by helping the Indian youths to acquire skills as Suzuki Motor Company celebrated its centennial anniversary last year. I would also like to add here that Gifu University in Japan has started a joint Master program with IIT Guwahati in food science since 2019. Currently, four students from IIT Guwahati are enrolled in this program. I am sure such collaboration will create a new eco-system of entrepreneurship in Assam.

(Significance for India)

As I am speaking next to External Affairs Minister, I would like to talk about this region from a bit larger perspective. For India to achieve the 5-trillion-dollar economy, the development of North East is indispensable. I am sure India is driving and mobilizing all its capacities and resources for this goal. I believe that the abundant human and natural resources as well as rich cultural diversity of Assam are no exception and need to be

tapped to their full potential. I came here today to say that Japan stands together with you to this end.

(Strategic significance)

Japan always takes a panoramic perspective in its diplomacy. The vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific (FOIP) is at its center; and India's North East, including Assam, occupies an important place in this vision. For India, which faces certain restrictions in the western border outlet, enhancing connectivity across its eastern border is critical. Connecting India with Southeast Asia and to the Bay of Bengal does make sense both economically and strategically.

North East is situated where India's Act East Policy and Japan's vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific converge. To be "free and open" is critical here in Assam. That is why Japan is supporting various connectivity projects in this State.

One of the on-going projects in this context is our mega project of the Dhubri-Phulbari bridge, which will dramatically shorten the travel time across the magnificent Brahmaputra river from more than 8 hours to less than 30 minutes. This bridge will be the longest river bridge in India and will be constructed with a unique technique called the "extradosed bridge", which was applied in Japan for the first time in the world in 1994. Japanese consultants will bring in Japanese-style quality and safety measures. Japan is planning to upgrade its approach roads, NH-127B as well. In total, these projects will improve the connectivity from Bhutan through Assam and Meghalaya to Bangladesh, magnifying the flow of people and goods and demonstrating the spirit of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Assam lies at the center of North East, and Guwahati Airport has been serving as a hub for air connectivity. By enhancing land connectivity, North East will also enjoy access to the sea, as they will be better connected to Chittagong or Matabari in Bangladesh, providing outlets to the Bay of Bengal and to the Indian Ocean. Assam and North East will no longer be a land-locked region.

(Improving the livelihood of the people of Assam)

Earlier this morning, I accompanied Minister Jaishankar to the Guwahati Water Supply project site. I am very impressed by the progress of the project on the ground. Clean water will soon flow to the water taps of households in Guwahati. Together with the Guwahati Sewage project, these projects will not only support a more convenient way of life, but also bring healthcare and sanitation to the next level. In the context of COVID-19, healthcare and sanitation have become even more important. Japan would like to partner with North East in this field and provide effective support, while listening to the actual needs on the ground. Considering the fact that Assam is the hub of North East, I believe strengthening the healthcare system of this State will bring benefits to the entire region.

Minutes ago, I talked about the role of entrepreneurship. Japan is committed to human resources development of North East. We are keen to support Japanese language education too, because we want to share our technology as well as our craftsmanship or spirit of manufacturing, including our relentless pursuit of better quality.

For example, three young Japanese entrepreneurs of Terra Motors India, one of start-up companies, are assembling e-rikshaws in this State, which are providing eco-friendly mobility to the people of Assam. This is a good example, contributing to the global effort for carbon neutral and to the “Clean India Initiative”. I hope the expansion of such businesses and new start-ups will bring about further innovative solutions. I am aware that Assam is keen to host an industrial township. I think an idea of de-centralized version of Japan Industrial Township (JIT) is an innovative approach. I would say, for any industrial townships to be successful, we need to cater for the actual needs of companies. I therefore suggest that we shall start by having conversations with the business community to hear their voices.

This region is abundant with natural resources as well as skilled human capital. Our next task is to connect them with new businesses and then to connect these businesses to the global market. One promising example is bamboo. By enhancing skills and integrating the North East bamboo industry to the regional and global value chains, we can make a difference. To this end, we are planning to work with the National Institute of Design in Jorhat by providing technical assistance. Agriculture and food processing are another promising area. We understand that Assam is interested in developing its agriculture and fisheries sector. We are keen to learn the details of the proposal and discuss with relevant parties.

Lastly but not least, Japan is helping the people of North East to acquire skills through the Technical Intern Training Program. Last year, three caregivers from Manipur went to Japan under this program. More are to come, and we are prepared to support nursing schools for Japanese language education. In my previous tour, I visited one of the sending organizations in Guwahati, called “Learnnet Skills”. I fondly remember the faces of the students, radiant with expectation and hope. Just last month, Foreign Secretary and I signed a new Memorandum of Cooperation for Specified Skilled Workers. This is a new scheme under which more skilled Indian nationals can come to Japan and work like Japanese nationals. I am sure our efforts will further open the door for talented people of Assam and North East to find job opportunities in Japan.

Once again, I would like to thank all of you for this opportunity. I am pleased to have been able to share with you our commitment to Assam and North East and their people today. I would like to conclude by promising you that this commitment is unwavering and enduring.

Let me say, *জয় আই অসম* /  
(Glory to mother Assam!)

Thank you very much.

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