

Remarks by Ambassador SUZUKI Satoshi  
at the Inauguration of the Shillong Cherry Blossom  
Festival 2021  
(November 25, 2021)

His Excellency Mr. Conrad Sangma, Honorable Chief  
Minister of Meghalaya,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kumno Meghalaya!  
(Hello Meghalaya)!

I am very delighted to be here with all of you to witness  
the inauguration of the Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival  
2021.

Honorable Chief Minister,

Since we met in New Delhi last time, I have been  
earnestly waiting for an opportunity to meet you again in  
Shillong. That aspiration has now been fulfilled. I would like  
to express my sincere gratitude and congratulation to The  
Honorable Chief Minister and all the officials of the  
Government of Meghalaya for the resumption of this annual  
event after a short one-year break due to the COVID-19  
pandemic. I hope this event will serve as an opportunity to  
strengthen the people-to-people relationship within India as  
well as between Japan and Meghalaya.

I hope that people of Meghalaya and the distinguished guests who have gathered here today, would enjoy the beautiful cherry blossoms, which we call Sakura, and the Japanese cultural demonstration organized by the Meghalaya authorities.

People-to-people exchange is essential to the enhancement of the cultural ties between our two nations. The Government of Japan has invited promising young leaders from the northeastern region including Meghalaya to Japan under the IRIS program. From this November, Indian students have resumed traveling to Japan under Japanese Government scholarship program.

Coincidentally, one of the five Sakura trees designated as Special Natural Treasures by the Government of Japan is growing in my hometown in Shizuoka Prefecture. It would be great if the young people of Meghalaya who go to Japan through such a program could find the time to visit my hometown and witness this famous Sakura tree when it is in full bloom.

Now please allow me to mention the importance of the northeastern region of India for Japan. The North East of India has potential to bloom brilliantly like the cherry blossoms here. And its development would have positive ramifications for a wider region. As a matter of fact, the North East enjoys a strategical location that is key to the

realization of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. This is one of the reasons why Japan attaches great importance to the development of the North East. I co-hosted the 5<sup>th</sup> Act East Forum with Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla at the beginning of this year to exchange views on facilitating Japan-India collaboration in the region. Japan is proud of being a staunch and reliable partner for the North East, based on our historical ties, trust and friendship. The shining example of our assistance for the region is the North East Road Connectivity Project. I believe the people of Meghalaya will especially benefit from this project which will enhance connectivity with the neighboring state of Assam as well as Bangladesh.

We have been also assisting Meghalaya's sustainable development through JICA's project for Community-Based Forest Management and Livelihoods Improvement with an aim to restore and conserve forest and natural resources of the village communities. We are also helping Meghalaya to utilize its abundant water resources by renovating and modernizing the Uiam Hydroelectric power station.

The year 2022 will mark the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Japan and India. We have decided to celebrate this auspicious year under the theme of "Building a future for our Centenary," manifesting our hope that our friendship would grow even stronger toward the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and beyond. And the festival that we are celebrating here today, in my view, could be

understood to be one of the many preludes to the big celebration that is coming up next year.

Mr. Chief Minister, in closing my remarks, allow me to wish for the biggest success for this year's Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival.

Thank you for your attention.  
Khublei shibun! (Thank you!)