

Remarks by Ambassador SUZUKI Satoshi
at the Inauguration of the Cherry Blossom Mao
Festival, Manipur 2021(November 30, 2021)

Shri Biren Singh, Honorable Chief Minister of Manipur,
Shri Oinam Lukhoi Singh, Honorable Minister of Tourism,
Shri Dinesh Patnaik, Director General, ICCR,
Shri Devash Deval, Secretary, Department of Tourism
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Khurumzari and Good Morning.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Manipur and ICCR Shillong, for organizing the Cherry Blossom Mao Festival, Manipur 2021. Today I am joining you online, but I hope to visit Manipur again next year and walk through the full bloom of cherry blossoms of Mao.

I am grateful for the true partnership and friendship we have nurtured over the decades. Moreover, the relationship between Japan and Manipur has become substantially closer.

As everyone may recall, during World War II, one of the fiercest battles was fought in Manipur. It took a toll on thousands of precious lives of the Indian National Army, the British Commonwealth Force, and the Japanese Army alike.

Numerous innocent citizens were inflicted immeasurable damages and sufferings here. Reflecting upon the past and bearing in mind the feelings of deep remorse, my sympathy and deepest sorrow go to their bereaved families and loved ones.

I would like to reiterate our gratitude for the paths we could take together since then as well as our commitment to the paths we will march on together towards our future.

I hope that the participants to today's event, especially from Manipur and the North Eastern Region, would enjoy the beautiful cherry blossoms and the fragrant cultural demonstrations of Manipur as well as the interactive sessions with the Japanese participants online.

People-to-people exchanges are essential to the enhancement of the ties between our two nations. The Government of Japan has invited to Japan promising young leaders from the Northeastern region including Manipur under the IRIS program. From this November, Indian students have resumed traveling to Japan under the Japanese Government scholarship program. Unfortunately, due to newly emerging Omicron variant, the entry to Japan is temporarily suspended. I hope the situation will soon be improved.

In terms of human resources exchanges, I see great

potential in our Technical Intern Training Program (TITP). This program enables Indian youths to develop skills through “On the Job Training” in Japan across diverse industry sectors, including manufacturing, caregiving, hospitality, agriculture, construction and so on.

Also Japan and India signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on Specified Skilled Worker (SSW). This will help promote the movement of skilled workers from India to Japan. The MOC covers 14 categories of specified skills under which skilled workers from India who pass the skills and language tests would be eligible for employment in Japan on a contractual basis. I hope this SSW scheme will start in India shortly and look forward to welcoming more skilled workers from India, particularly from Manipur, to Japan in the near future.

The North East Region is strategically important for Japan-India relationship. And the North East Region is located at a critical juncture between India and Southeast Asian countries. In this regard, we are working together for the development of the North East through the “Japan-India Act East Forum.” We identify and implement projects, for example, to enhance connectivity, sustainable forest and ecological management, disaster risk reduction and human resources development. Especially, the Government of Japan has contributed to the economic development of Manipur through ODA projects in the fields of agriculture, healthcare and education.

The year 2022 will mark the 70th 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 100th Anniversary and beyond. And the festival that we are celebrating here today could be one of the preludes to the big celebrations that are coming up next year.

Honorable Chief Minister and distinguished participants, let me close my remarks by wishing you and the people of Manipur a big success of Cherry Blossom Mao Festival and also wishing this year’s festival spread love and good luck to all of you.

Thank you. Thagatchari!