

Address by Ambassador SUZUKI Satoshi
“Development of North Eastern Indian Region and
Neighborhood:
India-Japan Collaboration for
Fostering Entrepreneurship and People Connectivity”
Second Intellectual Dialogue
(3rd March 2022)

Ms. Smita Pant, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs of
India,

Mr. M.P. Bezbaruah, Chairman, Governing Council of Asian
Confluence,

Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta, Executive Director, Asian Confluence,

Distinguished participants from North Eastern India and Japan,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Namaskar and Konnichiwa to everyone.

It is my pleasure to address you all today.

A year ago, the Embassy of Japan, in collaboration with the Asian Confluence, held the first intellectual dialogue. Today, I am delighted that the Embassy once again supports this important event, and I sincerely appreciate the Asian Confluence for organizing this symposium. This connects the intellectuals and entrepreneurs of both India and Japan, and this also draws our attention again to the important region of India.

Last year, I stated the North-Eastern region of India is full of potential, not only for domestic development, but also for the stability and prosperity of a wider region. That is why Japan has been trying to be a staunch and reliable partner of the North East. This perception continues to be the case and we remain committed to it.

Every time I visit the North East region, I feel at home with its beautiful scenic views of mountains and warm hospitality of the people. Our historical ties and cultural affinities are of great advantage that could be leveraged to further strengthen our connection at the government-level as well as to encourage exchanges between intellectuals, entrepreneurs and the people at large.

November last year, I had a privilege of participating in the Cherry Blossom Festivals held on line in Manipur and physically in Meghalaya, respectively. Cherry Blossom, or Sakura in Japanese, holds special meaning to the Japanese people, and thanks to such festivals, Cherry Blossom has become a metaphor for the blooming friendship between the North East region and Japan. I had a wonderful time spending days with my wife in Shillong, Meghalaya, interacting with various people there. “Seeing is believing” is indeed a right expression. I have learnt a lot out of the visit: how our assistances have contributed to the life of the people and what are still in need there. And how active these people are to empower the local society and economy. My colleagues at the Embassy also visited Assam, Nagaland and Tripura, meeting local people to listen to their voices directly on my behalf. We will continue it.

[The first Intellectual Dialogue]

Last year, thanks to the support provided by Asian Confluence, we could launch our first intellectual dialogue session titled “Development of North Eastern Indian Region: India-Japan Collaboration for Connectivity, Commerce, Capacity Building, Culture and Conservation.” A wide spectrum of agendas were deliberated upon during the dialogue. The report published by Asian Confluence incorporates our discussion points and themes such as Connectivity Projects, Promoting Entrepreneurship, Cross-cultural Communication, Water Resource Management and Ecological Conservation,

Agribusiness involving bamboo, Increasing Collaborations on Skill Development and other projects.

Today, this second intellectual dialogue aims to connect peoples of North East and Japan, and will provide the platform for candid and positive discussions, delivering concrete prescriptions or proposals for the development of North East region so that our two governments could follow up on them.

[Act East Forum]

At the governmental level, Japan and India have been closely working for the development of this region.

The Act East Forum embodies our commitment to this region, anchored on the mutual trust and friendship that India and Japan have nurtured for long. I co-chair this meeting, together with Foreign Secretary Mr. Shringla. Following up on our discussion at the last year's fifth-round meeting of this Forum, we are now planning to hold a next round of meeting very soon to take stock of what we have achieved since last year, to discuss the way forward, and to consolidate a plan of action for specific projects to be implemented in the region.

So far, India and Japan have continuously focused on our joint efforts of enhancing connectivity in many parts of India, through our respective expertise and complementarity over a long period of time. In recent years, Japan has been actively promoting connectivity within the North East region and with the neighboring countries. Our national highway projects, for example, being implemented in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura, will be further extended to the border with Bangladesh. India and Japan have been also working on projects for improving road connectivity in Bangladesh.

In this regard, I am delighted that Ms. Smita Pant, Joint Secretary for Bangladesh and Myanmar, Ministry of External

Affairs of India, is with us today. I am sure she is going to share her insights regarding the further development of North East India and surrounding region. Japan believes connectivity is instrumental from a broader perspective as well. I would like to touch upon one exemplary case of India-Japan cooperation in North East and Bangladesh to highlight how our partnership can enhance both maritime and land connectivity in a mutually reinforcing manner.

As you know, the inland North East does not have a direct outlet to the sea. Therefore, cross-border connectivity is crucially indispensable for the development of North East. Keeping that in mind, Japan is upgrading National Highway 208 in Tripura, and is planning to continue to extend assistance for the construction of this critical road which reaches the border with Bangladesh. Across this border, there is a city called Ramgarh in Bangladesh, where another stretch of India- Japan collaboration is being implemented. From Ramgarh to Baraiyarhat in Bangladesh, India is building a road while Japan is constructing eight bridges, ensuring complete connectivity. These projects ensure the connectivity of India's North East region to the ports of Chittagong and Matabari in Bangladesh.

This means, if all these joint efforts by India and Japan are viewed in a holistic manner, it becomes evident that the comprehensive collaboration provides the landlocked North East with access to the Bay of Bengal and, most importantly, access to ASEAN countries. Since the maritime connectivity in Indo-Pacific plays a key role in unleashing enormous potential of growth and prosperity, a better access to the Indian Ocean becomes crucial for the improvement of people's lives. I think this example aptly depicts the synergies between land and maritime connectivity. It also shows the positive impact that India and Japan can make together to the lives of people.

(Two focus areas in Agricultural sector, People to people connectivity)

[Entrepreneurship in Agricultural and Bamboo sector]

During our first discussion last year, I mentioned “Yaramaika” or “give it a try” spirit, which is a word from the dialect spoken in my hometown of Hamamatsu City. Hamamatsu City is a mid- sized city but it has produced a host of notable entrepreneurs who pioneered the post-war economic miracle of Japan, such as the founders of HONDA, SUZUKI Motor Corporation, and YAMAHA. Even a founding family of TOYOTA came from this area.

During our last dialogue, plenty of ideas were put forward by participants from both India and Japan. Amongst those, promotion of entrepreneurship, especially in the Agriculture Sector, can be our priority. I believe that the utilization of the abundant and unique natural resources of the North East region will contribute to its development.

The rich bio-diversity of the region can provide opportunity for deeper Indo-Japan collaboration in agri-business sectors. To improve agricultural productivity, processing and packaging, we can share best practices and technologies from Japan. Furthermore, programs and projects involving identification, networking and capacity building can be carried out for entrepreneurs of the region. The improvement of transportation and supply chain connection may be another factor to be looked into. Today, at this second dialogue, we have specialists from agriculture and bamboo sector among us. I am looking forward to fruitful discussions in this area, sprouting new ideas for effective collaboration with Japan.

[People to People Connections]

At the same time, our people-to-people ties form the core of our bilateral partnership. Japan has invited promising youth from the North Eastern States to Japan under the IRIS program.

This year, the IRIS program is integrated with the JENESYS program. The IRIS program is organized as online program for five days. Due to the COVID restrictions, the program is to be held virtually, but the course includes a wide range of activities such as learning Japanese culture through animation work, virtual tour to Kyoto city, discussion with Japanese youth in Nagasaki University. I hope the young participants of the program have a rare-to-find experience and, in the future, contribute to the development of the North Eastern region.

Speaking of people's interaction, I also see a great potential in our Technical Intern Training Program (TITP). This program enables Indian youth to avail internships in Japan across diverse industries including manufacturing, caregiving, hospitality, agriculture and so on. I am delighted to announce that the Japan's border controls for COVID have been relaxed at last since the beginning of this month, and TITP trainees are now allowed to enter Japan, after such a long pause caused by the pandemic.

Furthermore, in January last year, Japan and India signed a Memorandum of Cooperation pertaining to Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) scheme. This will promote the movement of a certain level of skilled workers from India to Japan. SSW scheme has been highlighted in the Summit interactions between both Prime Ministers last year. In January this year, the long-awaited SSW test to assess applicants' individual skills and Japanese language levels commenced in India. Now we are looking forward to welcoming more skilled workers from India to Japan in near future.

(Closing)

I hope today's intellectual dialogue inspires us and our collective cognizance stimulates effective cooperation between our two countries. Let us discuss the kinds of possibilities, specifically in two areas.

In the agri-business field,

- How can we upgrade the quality of original and unique products in North East India?
- How can we work together for developing skills pertaining to agri-business?

In the context of People-to-people connectivity,

- How can we promote interaction between India, Japan and neighbouring countries?
- What are good examples in the region and how can we work towards higher occurrences of these instances?

I believe these two areas will be the good foundation of cooperation between North Eastern region of India and Japan, and will result in further extended connectivity with neighboring countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year 2022 marks the 70th Anniversary of the establishment of the Japan-India diplomatic ties. We have decided to celebrate this auspicious year under the theme of “Building a future for our Centenary,” manifesting that our friendship would grow even stronger towards the 100th Anniversary landmark and beyond. Today’s dialogue provides a golden opportunity to commemorate this historic year by further vitalizing our bilateral cooperation.

Thank you very much.