

Inaugural Address by Ambassador SUZUKI Satoshi
Seminar on Connectivity Cooperation for a Free, Open, and Inclusive Indo-
Pacific: Building Economic Resilience through Enhanced Connectivity
April 8th, 2022

Dr. Mohan Kumar, Chairman of the RIS,
Amb. Saurabh Kumar, Secretary East of the Ministry of
External Affairs,
Distinguished participants from India, Japan and all
across the Indo-Pacific,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. **Introduction**

Namaskar and Good morning,

It is my great pleasure to address you all today in this seminar. The Embassy of Japan is honored to co-host this seminar with the Ministry of External Affairs of India. I would like to thank the RIS for organizing this seminar and bringing experts together from various governments and government-related agencies, research institutions as well as businesses. I am also delighted to welcome experts from ASEAN, the important partner in the Indo-Pacific.

2. **Japan's engagement with IPOI**

On 19th of March, Prime Minister Kishida of Japan made an official visit to India to meet with Hon. Prime Minister Modi. It was Prime Minister Kishida's first bilateral foreign visit since he took office last October, which demonstrates the significance Prime Minister Kishida attaches to India.

After his successful visit to India, Prime Minister Kishida flew to Cambodia, ASEAN Chair for this year. I believe that this is a befitting example of Japan's

appreciation of India and ASEAN as principal partners for promoting its Indo-Pacific vision.

Mr. Kishida's visit to India was an excellent opportunity to review developments in the bilateral cooperation in wide-ranging areas and to chart its future course. They reaffirmed their commitment to the shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific, free from coercion. The Joint Statement issued after the Summit meeting made it very clear "the Prime Ministers acknowledged the growing space for cooperation between the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)." It also emphasizes the collaboration in building resilient supply chains and strengthening the protection of critical infrastructure. This is one of the key areas for ongoing Japan-India collaboration, and on that note, I would like to move on to speak about the context in which we convene this seminar today.

At the East Asia Summit in 2019, Prime Minister Modi unveiled the IPOI as a cooperative framework that translates principles of the Indo-Pacific into concrete actions. Japan welcomed the IPOI as being congruent with its vision of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" guided by such values as democracy, rules of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, and economic prosperity, among others. Based on this shared vision of the Indo-Pacific, Japan agreed to undertake a lead country role for the Connectivity Pillar of the IPOI. The IPOI enjoys wide support of other partners, such as Indonesia, Australia and France as lead countries of other important pillars.

In discharging our responsibility as lead country, the Embassy of Japan hosted the first seminar on

connectivity cooperation under the IPOI in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs in March last year. The agenda of the previous seminar was to analyze infrastructure projects in India as well as its neighboring countries and to deliberate upon the ways to enhance connectivity in the region, based on our shared principles.

3. Connectivity and Economic Resilience

To build upon our discussion at the previous seminar and take it forward, we added one perspective to today's theme; that is, "building economic resilience through enhanced connectivity." It is essential that we build infrastructure in a way that improves resilience of the region and bring about prosperity to all partners in the Indo-Pacific. During the pandemic, countries have experienced a series of disruptions in global supply chains, including those of medical equipment, semiconductors and critical materials for manufacturing high-tech products. Excessive reliance on a single country, be it in trade or infrastructure investment, makes nations extremely vulnerable to economic coercion.

We also witnessed instances where inadequate infrastructure led to the aggravation of problems such as inability to prevent and mitigate natural disasters and reliance on external debts beyond repayment capacity. It even undermined the autonomous decision-making in some countries. These challenges have taught us an important lesson: to design and enhance connectivity through identifying reliable partners who share common values, principles and strategic interests.

Japan, together with India, has worked to enhance connectivity in many ways. From building hard and soft

infrastructure to establishing regional frameworks for dialogue and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, Japan is working with partners in many places such as India's North Eastern region, the Bay of Bengal and the Mekong region. We aim at providing these regions with reliable alternatives so that countries can pursue robust and self-reliant economic growth, free from concerns of economic coercion.

Today, we will also discuss digital connectivity. When it comes to economic security, digital infrastructure has come to the center of policy discussions on connectivity. Secure and reliable digital technologies such as 5G and 6G, submarine cables, and AI are indispensable infrastructure for further economic development of the Indo-Pacific. I believe Japan and India, as trusted partners, should collaborate in both the public and private sectors in this field. In addition, the two countries are also exploring ways to make full use of India's digital talents. This view is reflected in the Japan-India Digital Partnership launched in 2018. Also, Japan and India signed the Memorandum of Cooperation in the Field of Cybersecurity at the recent Summit to promote collaboration in such areas as information sharing, capacity building as well as research and development. I believe that the two countries must develop digital infrastructure that would not succumb to any attempts to undermine our principles and to use digital platforms for illicit purposes, while upholding freedom, openness and transparency.

Japan has been accelerating its efforts to take various measures for bolstering economic security in line with this philosophy. Just last month, the Government of

Japan has submitted a new bill to the parliament for approval to tighten Japan's economic security. This legislation includes such elements as safeguarding key infrastructure from cyber security risks and augmenting research and development programs on critical and emerging structure, by involving both public and private sectors.

The cooperation in this area is also progressing within the Quad framework. Since 2015, the four countries have provided more than \$48 billion in official financing for infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region, which represents thousands of projects across more than 30 countries. The Quad Infrastructure Coordination Group aims at further advancing our complementarity in the infrastructure development, along with other Quad groups working to deepen cooperation on cyber security and critical and emerging technologies, including digital technologies.

4. Closing

Japan believes that improved connectivity will bring prosperity and resilience to all the members of the Indo-Pacific. With the support of India as well as partners from ASEAN and other Indo-Pacific countries, Japan will continue to lead the region towards a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

In closing, I wish this seminar all the success. And I look forward to hearing useful insight and input from all the participants today. Thank you very much.