

Remarks by Ambassador SUZUKI Satoshi
at the Inaugural Session of
the Bengal Global Business Summit 2022
(April 20, 2022)

Her Excellency Ms. Mamata Banerjee,
Honorable Chief Minister of West Bengal,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

নমস্কার (Nomoshkar, ノモシユカール)

I am delighted to join the eminent business leaders gathered here today for the “Bengal Global Business Summit 2022”. It is a great honor for Japan to participate as a partner country for the 5th time in a row.

Honorable Chief Minister,

I would like to convey my sincere congratulations on the resumption of this event after a lapse of two years caused by the pandemic. I pay my deepest respect to your endurance and devotion to inviting investment to your State. I am sure that this effort is what enabled the State of West Bengal to constantly witness a positive growth rate despite the challenges brought by the pandemic in the last two years.

Japan enjoys a long-standing friendship with West Bengal. For Japan, Kolkata has always been the cultural

hub of India and is also the city where the friendship between the great poet Rabindranath Tagore and a famous Japanese artist Tenshin Okakura flourished. Okakura visited this historic city of Kolkata twice, in 1902 and 1912. Darjeeling too is one of the best known cities of India, famous for its exquisite teas. I had the pleasure of visiting this serene, hilly city three weeks ago and was amazed by the delicacy of Darjeeling tea. The diverse landscapes, culture and the warmth of the people of West Bengal has always been charming to us. It adds to my pleasure that I met a Japanese lady who has been devoted for years to partnering with one of the oldest tea estates in Darjeeling and to making high quality organic Darjeeling tea available for Japan.

This Business Summit is very timely from my viewpoint because Prime Minister Kishida visited India just a month ago. The visit was a big success and led to the reaffirmation of the both leaders' resolve to further advance our economic partnership. The joint statement issued during this visit includes a number of important economic takeaways such as: a public and private investment and financing target of 5 trillion Japanese yen, which amounts to approximately three lakh crore rupees, from Japan to India in the next five years; the launch of the "India-Japan Clean Energy Partnership" towards achieving respective carbon neutrality goals; the operationalization of the Specified Skilled Workers' scheme and the starting of its qualification tests in India; and the launch of a new initiative for the sustainable

development of the North Eastern region of India.

Geographically West Bengal plays an important role as a gateway to the North Eastern region as well as a BIMSTEC area as it shares international borders with Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. The State has an important locational advantage that offers great potential in doing business and promoting people-to-people exchanges between nations within this region.

West Bengal is also the third largest state in the country in terms of road connectivity, having 16 National Highways and two Asian Highways. Furthermore, the State is also leading the country in terms of National Inland Waterways. It has two large container and bulk cargo handling ports at Kolkata and Haldia and two international airports at Kolkata and Bagdogra.

These facilitating features of locational advantage and excellent connectivity have attracted Japanese companies to the State. There are as many as 200 Japanese business establishments over here. Let me introduce some of them.

During the devastating second wave of the pandemic in India, a Japanese company called 'Air Water India' came forward along with other Indian companies to produce and deliver medical oxygen in order to save the lives of COVID-19 patients who were in critical condition. The dedicated work of Air Water India actually contributed to saving many

Indian lives.

Kawasaki-Rikuso Transportation constructed a warehouse with solar-powered cool storage system for agricultural products in Krishak Bazaar in Singur. Currently, using eco-friendly methods of packaging, they supply vegetables wrapped in banana leaves to retailers and also employ local farm ladies. Thus, they are contributing to empowerment of local women by providing sustainable rural livelihoods.

Terra Motors, a start-up company of three young entrepreneurs from Japan, has been assembling E-rikshaws in Kolkata since 2017, providing approximately 35,000 units of eco-friendly mobility across India. They now aspire to make West Bengal one of the major EV hubs of India. Definitely, they will contribute to carbon neutrality in India.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the support from the Honorable Chief Minister that has led to the success of these Japanese companies. I strongly believe that their activities are contributing towards sustainability and improvement of the social and economic infrastructure of the State.

In this regard, let me mention our Official Development Assistance projects in the State, which contribute to the improvement of business environment. We are partnering with the State in such projects as Kolkata

Metro between Howrah Maiden and Salt Lake, forestry management, the improvement of drinking water infrastructure and the improvement of hydropower generation plants.

Japan is also actively taking steps to promote Japanese language education in India, including in West Bengal. Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, provided the first-ever Japanese language education in India in 1954. Japanese language education is being enthusiastically promoted at this university now.

Honorable Chief Minister,

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Japan-India diplomatic ties. We are celebrating this year under the theme of “Building a future for our Centenary”. I firmly believe that the special bond between West Bengal and Japan will further lead this promising journey and be the beacon of light towards our 100th anniversary and beyond.

Thank you. ধন্যবাদ (Dhonnobad, ドンノバッド)