

(As Delivered)

**Ambassador Suzuki's speech at the opening session of the Northeast  
Intellectual Dialogue**

Shri. G Kishan Reddy, Minister for Development of Northeastern Region, Culture and Tourism

H.E. Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs

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H.E. Santana Chakma, Industries Minister of Tripura

Executive Director Sabyasachi Dutta,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am so glad to see such a huge participation for the third intellectual conclave. Actually this is the first in-person meeting and it is significant that this first in person meeting is held here in Agartala. I am so deeply grateful for your participation from so many different places and from various states of Northeast, from New Delhi, from Dhaka and everywhere else.

Thank you very much for coming here today to join this intellectual conclave and also it is striking to note that you all come from different sectors, from the government, from business, from academia, from think tanks. So this is a plethora of people who by meeting in person have this chance to have direct communication. When people and people meet chemical reactions happen, and this could be the new beginning of new friendship or new business partnership, so we will hope for the best.

Now, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was a Visionary leader whom I served for seven and a half years as his personal secretary for diplomacy, often used to say that India and Japan are natural partners. Actually, he forged special friendship with Prime Minister Modi and he created a very special partnership with India, which is both strategic and global. Prime Minister Abe also had a special feeling for the Northeast. Actually, I planned a trip for Prime Minister Abe

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once, which was unfortunately for various reasons, did not come to reality, so it is so much ratifying for me personally to be here in Tripura, Agartala to take part in this intellectual conclave. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also had a very warm and very special friendship with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and he studied together with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina what is called the “Big B”, which I come back to mention a little later. Now, as you all know Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is no longer with us but his vision still lives. His vision of connecting the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean in one geopolitical concept-- he called it Indo-Pacific and he launched a vision of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” back in 2016.

Now, this state Tripura can be called the “Linchpin of Bay of Bengal”, connecting Bangladesh and the Northeast. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who visited New Delhi just two weeks ago, made it clear that he will pursue the same orientation of Japanese foreign policy building on the achievements that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe created with both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. So, Prime Minister Kishida announced in his policy address in New Delhi, a new plan for the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” and one of the major pillars that Prime Minister Kishida mentioned is this place, India's Northeast together with Bangladesh and to create a new industrial value chain. This is not just about connectivity but creating industrial value chain.

(The Bay of Bengal region and Japan)

So, let me explain a little bit of background, so that you will be able to better understand Prime Minister Kishida's new plan. As we all know, The Northeastern States in terms when viewed from topology is situated at a central part connecting Indian subcontinent and East Asia. However, due to various reasons for a long time, this place has never been given a chance to realize its potential. However, under Prime Minister Modi's administration, this place has become the focal point for the Act East policy.

Actually, back in 2016 when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met with Prime Minister Modi in Japan, they had agreed to deepen Japan-India bilateral cooperation to jointly develop the Northeast. Ever since, JICA has been working very hard in cooperation with all the states in the Northeast to make that plan a

reality. Just around the same time, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe agreed with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, what is called the Big B, the Bay of Bengal industrial growth belt. This is another huge vision and according to this Vision both our governments have been working very hard to make the port of Matarbari which is a deep-sea port very special. The deep-sea port will become operational in 2027, which is only four years from now. In 2027, deep-sea port Matarbari will become operational, that is our plan and our plan is to connect this port through Chittagong, through Dhaka and then to make an industrial corridor. So this is the vision of Big B and with the concrete project of this Big B, Bangladesh is inviting so much investments from Japan and from other investing partner countries into Bangladesh.

So, now we all know that Bangladesh enjoys very high economic growth. 7% can you believe it? The main theme of Davos conference this year was that a recession is coming. But, both India and Bangladesh are enjoying extremely high economic growth. Now, there is a huge potential for India's Northeast and Bangladesh. Connecting Bangladesh with India's Northeast can further reach out to further landlocked areas like Bhutan and Nepal. So Bangladesh has the potential to become the Gateway of this entire Bay of Bengal area into inland.

At the same time, India's Northeast high, situated by being connected with Bangladesh, to be the starting point from inland to go through Bangladesh through Bay of Bengal, the Matarbari deep-sea port to anywhere in the world. Because it is a deep sea port, it can connect to anywhere in the world. So as you can see, it can be a win-win plan both for India's Northeast and Bangladesh.

### (Challenges)

However, we have challenges ahead. You know connectivity is being pushed forward by infrastructure projects under Big B and JICA's major projects in the Northeast. But you know, I want to connect these two. Japanese doing so much in Bangladesh. Japan is doing so much in the Northeast. But so far, they have been separate. I want to connect those two to produce a synergy between the two. That is not the only challenge. The challenge is further ahead. You know connectivity alone will not be able to bring about sustainable development. We

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need investment, we need new industries to be created here in the Bay of Bengal area, both in Bangladesh and Northeast.

So, we need to think ahead. We need to think together our new plan on how to invite new investment, and how to create new industries. Now it may not happen just in five years. But when the Matarbari Port comes into reality it can be a new leverage. So you know to be honest it may take 10 years ,15 years. But the time to start is now when both India and Bangladesh are making such a remarkable economic growth. Why wait. We should start right now and we should think together and we should come together in making our wisdom together and plan ahead, so that we will all be able to benefit from this win-win and win plan. When I say win-win and it is win for India's Northeast, win for Bangladesh and win for businesses. I want Japanese businesses to win but also you know other businesses who can take advantage of this great opportunity. So, this is the background of Prime Minister Kishida's policy address.

When he said I have a new plan for “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”, as I said before, this is not just about connectivity, it is about creating new industrial value chain. Japan would like to be in the lead together with India and together with Bangladesh. So that, this can become a concrete outcome for India's “IPOI, Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative” of which Japan is a co-lead country together with India, in the area of connectivity.

Now, this plan intends to give strategic depth or to reach out strategically to landlocked areas and landlocked countries, and the key is to put in a new prism of value chain, not just connectivity. For the Northeast, this new plan is beneficial because it connects with Bangladesh with Synergy. So, India's Northeast can become a part of new industrial value chain. This will bring in new technology, this will generate new employment and the entire Society will become more resilient. For Bangladesh, this new plan makes Bangladesh not a Transit point but the starting point of where the new industrial value chain will be created. So Bangladesh will become the new industrial hub for the entire Bay of Bengal area.

(Japan's Approach)

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Now some may wonder why I am so confident. It's because Japan has a track record, the track record is what we call "The Southern Economic Corridor" in the Mekong region. Now this Southern Economic Corridor connects Bangkok in Thailand to Phnom Penh in Cambodia and finally leading up to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. It took 30 years to develop, but now you can see the value of this Southern Corridor. It's not just connectivity, it brought about industries, it brought in investment, it generated new industry, it generated so many jobs. The result is what you see along with this Southern economic corridor.

Japan has been working hard together with ADB and many other institutions and of course like-minded partners. And I need to mention like-minded Business Leaders because Business Leaders are the key to the success of this new plan. I just want to mention that Bangladesh has so much talented young people. It has a bright future. The number of Japanese companies making operations in Bangladesh has been increasing. Now it is 338 Japanese companies as of November last year and many Japanese companies are making investments in New Economic Zones built in Bangladesh. Bangladesh will graduate from LDC status in a couple of years time.

In December last year, Japan and Bangladesh agreed to launch "the Joint study group on the possibility of "Japan-Bangladesh Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)". So, hopefully in the future when we conclude economic partnership agreement, the trade and the investment between Japan and Bangladesh will expand exponentially. This is my hope. So, through Big B and new EPA, Japan will strongly support Bangladesh becoming the hub of manufacturing and not just manufacturing. In fact a new industrial value chain will make a dynamic growth and India's Northeast can benefit by being connected to Bangladesh and develop together with Bangladesh and through Bangladesh, India's Northeast will become connected to the rest of the world.

This will bring in huge new economic possibilities to India's Northeast. When I look in terms of population, India's Northeast has 50 million people. Bangladesh of course has 170 million and the state of West Bengal has 90 billion. So all put together, more than 300 million people live in the Bay of Bengal area.

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This is so much more than all the Mekong five countries combined. So you can see what a huge potential this area has. Now, government of Japan is providing ODA to India and Bangladesh. They are the first and second. They are neck and neck. both India and in Bangladesh are by far the largest recipients of Japanese ODA, making the Philippines a distant third.

This is a tell-tale example of how much emphasis and priority that the Japanese government places both on India and Bangladesh. I think the future is bright but we need your help. That is why we are gathered here in this Intellectual Conclave.

The government alone cannot bring this new plan of creating industrial value chain here in the Bay of Bengal area. I would like to invite business Leaders to exchange views very frankly because investment is the key to success for this new plan and I want you to exchange views very frankly including various challenges.

In the way forward in creating new value chains, your input from Indian side, Bangladesh side and Japanese side will help us make our plan so much better going forward into the future. Now we have so many participants from the state of Tripura and all the northeastern states. So I would like you to contribute also so that your state will stand to benefit from this new plan. I myself chair the “Act East Forum” with the Foreign Secretary Kwatra and we hope to have this meeting of Act East Forum hopefully sometime next month. So I will take away the concrete results coming out from this intellectual conclave to prepare myself for my meeting with secretary Kwatra in that meeting. I may have spoken too long, but please understand it's out of my zeal to make this new industrial value chain in this huge area of Bay of Bengal connecting India's Northeast with Bangladesh.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank the government of India, the government of Bangladesh, the state of Tripura and all the people who are involved in making this intellectual conclave possible.

It would be my great honor if this conclave can contribute intellectually

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and in terms of providing concrete business opportunities, investment opportunities so that this new plan of creating a new industrial value chain become a reality in the future.

Thank you very much.