

Opening Remarks by Chairman SHUKURI
for the India-Japan International Exchange
Symposium 2026

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,
Namaskar. I am SHUKURI Masafumi, Chairman of
the Japan Transport and Tourism Research Institute,
called “JTTRI”,

On behalf of JTTRI, I would like to extend my sincere
appreciation to all of you for joining us today at the
“Japan-India International Exchange Symposium
2026,” despite your busy schedules.

I would also like to warmly welcome those
participating online.

First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude
to His Excellency Mr. ONO Keiichi, Ambassador
Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to India,
for kindly sending us a video message today, amid his
extremely demanding official duties which are at the
core of Japan–India relations.

I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation to our two keynote speakers:

His Excellency, Mr. N. K. Singh,
President of the Institute of Economic Growth, and
Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission of India;
and

His Excellency, Mr. HIRAMATSU Kenji,
Chairman of the Institute for International Strategy at
the Japan Research Institute, and former Ambassador
Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to India.

Then, Panel Discussion 1 will focus on the significance, challenges, and future prospects of international people-to-people exchanges.

We are honored to welcome 4 distinguished panelists:

- His Excellency, Mr. Shyam Saran,
former Foreign Secretary of India;
- Her Excellency Ms. Deepa Wadhwa,
former Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary of India to Japan;
- Mr. ARIYOSHI Takashi,
Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d’Affaires
of the Embassy of Japan in India; and
- Ms. MIZUTORI Mami,
Specially Appointed Professor of the Tohoku
University, and former Special Representative of
the United Nations Secretary-General.

The discussion will be moderated by Ms. Indrani Bagchi, CEO of the Ananta Centre.

Panel Discussion 2 will address the significance and challenges of tourism and cultural policy in fostering international exchange.

We are honored to welcome 3 distinguished panelists:

- Dr. Jyotsna Suri,
Chairperson and Managing Director of The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group;
- Mr. Suman Billa,
Additional Secretary and Director-General,
Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; and
- Mr. MURATA Shigeki, Commissioner of the Japan Tourism Agency, Government of Japan.

This discussion will be moderated by H.E. HIRAMATSU Kenji, whom I introduced earlier as former Ambassador of Japan to India.

To all moderators and panelists, thank you very much for joining us today.

Let me begin by briefly looking back on the history of people-to-people exchanges between Japan and India.

India, needless to say, is an advanced region where the Indus Valley Civilization — one of the world's oldest civilizations — originated.

It is said that exchanges between our two countries began when Buddhism, which emerged in India, was introduced to Japan in the 6th century.

In later times, before the Second World War, the renowned Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore visited Japan and was welcomed by the Japanese people with deep respect.

It is well-known in Japan that Tagore was the first Asian Nobel Prize winner in Literature, and that he wrote and composed India's national anthem.

More recently, the Indian film "RRR" released three and a half years ago became the most successful Indian film ever shown in Japan.

The Indian film cultures have become widely accepted in Japan.

Further, Indian cuisine and Japanese "washoku" have also become increasingly familiar to people in both countries.

In these and many other fields, cultural exchanges between Japan and India have steadily expanded.

In the manufacturing sector, Maruti Suzuki has been a symbol of Indo-Japan cooperation in India, for over 40 years.

The Delhi Metro, constructed through cooperation between Japan and India, now serves as an essential means of daily transportation for the citizens of Delhi and is regarded as a "shining example" of Japan–India cooperation.

The leaders of our two countries meet frequently every year, including through reciprocal visits.

Under the “Special Strategic and Global Partnership,” the Mumbai–Ahmedabad High Speed Rail project, which draws on Japan’s Shinkansen technology, is currently under way.

In addition, the two-year period from April 2023 was designated as the “Japan–India Tourism Exchange Year,” during which the public and private sectors worked together on a variety of cooperative initiatives. In fact, in the field of tourism exchange, the number of visitors from India to Japan has been increasing in recent years, and, from now on, there is a great potential for tourism exchanges that make use of the connections related to Buddhism.

In this context, I would like to mention that, when I had a meeting with the Honourable Minister of Tourism, Mr. Shekhawat in July last year, we agreed to continue working-level discussion by setting up a joint group or a working group in order to promote the future exchange in the field of tourism between Japan and India.

Japan and India also share contemporary challenges. In working toward the realization of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific,” our two countries not only share values such as the rule of law and the importance of democracy, but also face common national security challenges from a geopolitical perspective, as both countries border vast oceans and critical Sea Lanes.

Moreover, as the international situation becomes increasingly unstable due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, geopolitical tensions in the Middle East including a de facto blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, and the continuing rise of inward-looking national policies, the need for Japan and India to deepen their cooperation and collaboration as partners sharing common values and interests is greater than ever before.

India has achieved remarkable economic growth over many years and is becoming increasingly prominent in the international community.

In this context, broad and multi-layered people-to-people exchange between Japan and India is an important element not only for the further development of bilateral relations, but also for deepening mutual understanding, building trust, and contributing to the stability of the international community.

Fundamentally, people-to-people exchanges offer an invaluable opportunity to gain new perspectives by encountering the cultures, institutions, values, and initiatives of other countries and societies.

I firmly believe that such exchange can go beyond individual encounters; it can change the way people think and act, and ultimately bring about positive transformation in society as a whole, by encouraging us to respect our own cultures and histories while flexibly embracing different cultures and values.

Today, through the lectures and discussions by distinguished speakers who have held leading positions in diplomacy, international organizations, culture, and tourism, I look forward to sharing with all of you, both here in the venue and online, the significance, future prospects, and proposals for international people-to-people exchanges.

In addition, in order to further promote people-to-people exchanges as well as cooperation and collaboration in the transport sector between Japan and India, and to further extend such activities to the broader South Asian region, JTTRI intends to establish a new overseas office in New Delhi around the autumn of this year.

Through this new office, we will endeavor to build and further expand our human networks with India, an extremely important partner for Japan in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as with public- and private-sector stakeholders across South Asia, and to further deepen mutual understanding and relations of trust with the region.

In closing, I sincerely hope that today's symposium will deepen our discussions on the promotion of broad and multi-layered international exchange, further strengthen cooperation between Japan and India, and contribute to the continued development of both countries.

Dhanyawaad. Thank you very much.