

India-Japan International Exchange Symposium 2026- Outline

28 May 2026

[Opening Remarks]

Mr. SHUKURI Masafumi

Chairman, JTTRI

“Looking back at the history of people-to-people exchanges between Japan and India, India is an advanced region where the Indus Valley Civilization – one of the world’s oldest civilizations –

originated. It is generally accepted that exchanges between the two countries began when Buddhism, which originated there, 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” 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. Furthermore, 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. 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, the need for Japan and India - both of which are enhancing their presence on the international community - to deepen their cooperation and collaboration as partners sharing common values and interests is greater than ever before.

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.

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, 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.”

[Honorable Greetings]

H.E. Mr. ONO Keiichi Ambassador to India (Video Message)

I'd like to extend my heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of India-Japan International Exchange Symposium 2026. Firstly, I'd like to highlight the core policies of the administration of Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae and the vital pillar of Japan's foreign strategy, the updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific, FOIP. Earlier this month, Prime Minister Takaichi announced a new vision, the updated FOIP, Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Since former Prime Minister Abe proposed the FOIP exactly ten years ago, Japan has worked with like-minded countries, including India, to build an international order based on freedom, openness, diversity, inclusiveness, and the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific region. The significance of these core principles will remain unwavering. At the same time, to adapt to the increasing global challenges, it is essential for countries within the region to enhance resilience and capability to have freedom to decide for themselves. We would like to work together and further deepen our collaboration as we share fundamental values and strategic interests.

Moving on to our bilateral relations, during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Japan in August last year, the two leaders agreed on the “Japan-India Joint Vision for the next decade”. This covers a wide range of areas, but among others, strengthening economic ties with a growing India aligns with



the growth policies of the Takaichi's administration. During Prime Minister Modi's visit, both sides agreed on a new target of 10 trillion yen in new private investment, doubling the previous achieved goal.

I would also like to highlight our collaboration in the field of transport and connectivity. Delhi Metro is one of the best example of Japan-India collaboration in the transport sector. Japan has been supporting Delhi Metro with ODA since its beginning, and features of Japanese metro systems such as safety, punctuality, and friendliness to women and vulnerable people are introduced to the Delhi Metro. Today, the Delhi Metro system has expanded to more than 400 kilometers, making it one of the largest metro systems in the world. Furthermore, the Delhi Metro Corporation is now spreading its philosophy to metro systems in cities both within and outside India. In the area of enhancing connectivity, JICA supported projects such as road infrastructure development throughout northeastern states and dedicated freight railway corridor project between Delhi and Mumbai. JTTRI's upcoming India office will be our important partner to promote collaboration in the field of transport and tourism. I look forward to working with you.

In terms of politics and security as well, India is a strategic partner for Japan. Regarding defense cooperation, Japan and India are exploring further expansion of our cooperation on defense equipment and technology, such as the UNICORN project. Japan recently revised its policy to enable itself to transfer, in principle, all defense equipment and technology to the ally and like-minded partners. Additionally, the Quad, Japan, India, the US, and Australia, serves as a major pillar of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting was held in Delhi this Tuesday (26 May). Foreign Minister Motegi of Japan attended, making his second visit to India since January this year. We witnessed tangible results on maritime security and economic prosperity and economic security, including critical minerals.

I also look forward to the people-to-people exchanges between our two nations as an area with immense potential. Last August, our two leaders agreed to aim for the exchange of more than 500,000 people over five years, including 50,000 skilled personnel and potential talents from India to Japan. Many Japanese local governments and businesses are turning to India's highly skilled talent.

Academic exchanges between Japan and India are also critical to foster innovation and drive growth in cutting-edge fields. The Japan-India Universities Forum, held at IIT Hyderabad last year, brought together presidents representatives from more than 30 top universities from each country took part and engaged in passionate discussions on further promoting the circulation of brains.

Tourism and partnership among local governments also play important roles for our exchanges.

Prime Minister Takaichi's policy priority is in line with those of Prime Minister Modi's. We are trusted partners, natural partners, and complementary partners. Japan needs India. India needs Japan.

Next year, 2027, marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and India. Let's work together to organize many special events to commemorate this special year, 2027, that will solidify even further our special strategic and global partnership.

■Keynote Addresses

H.E. Mr. N.K. Singh, President, Institute of Economic Growth Chairman, 15th Finance Commission, Government of India

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Chairman Shukuri for giving me the opportunity to further deepen my ties with Japan. I hope that this highly important institution, under the leadership of the Chairman, will contribute to the further expansion of people-to-people and tourism exchanges.



My association with Japan began 65 years ago, perhaps it goes back further than that of many people in this room. It was 40 to 45 years ago that I served in Japan and had the pleasure of living in that beautiful country.

The relationship between Japan and India is rooted in Buddhism, which was introduced 1500 years ago. Buddhism spread across Asia in the sixth century and reached Nara in the eighth century, exerting a significant influence on Japan. Japan referred to India as "Tenjiku," meaning the land of spiritual wisdom. The structural imprint of Sanskrit and other Indian languages can also be seen in Japanese hiragana and katakana. This civilization and shared wisdom have now taken on strategic significance.

The Quad (Japan-Australia-India-U.S.) Foreign Ministers' Meeting concluded two days ago. This marked a significant milestone in reaffirming the importance of the Quad in addressing the diverse challenges we face, particularly through enhanced maritime security, defense cooperation, and many other areas.

Here are a few broad figures on the challenges facing both countries. First, with regard to investment and foreign direct investment (FDI), India has been Japan's most promising investment destination for four consecutive years. However, in terms of net FDI inflows and outflows, net FDI from Japan to India in 2025 amounted to only \$2.4 billion, accounting for less than 5% of India's total FDI inflows. Furthermore, Japanese investment in India accounted for only 2-3% of Japan's total outward FDI.

In August 2025, Prime Minister Modi signed a 10-year investment roadmap in Tokyo, valued at 10 trillion yen. The roadmap focuses on semiconductors, clean energy, and future supply chains, which are key growth drivers in the areas we seek to transform. We need to rebuild these supply chains in a more reliable way.

Regarding the business environment for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), there is still room for improvement. Only 15% of the 1,400 Japanese companies operating in India are SMEs. In comparison, SMEs account for 99% of all companies in Japan. This imbalance highlights the immense untapped potential in the entrepreneurial energy. According to JETRO, 37% of companies report that land acquisition and other related issues have caused project delays. We recognize this fact and believe it is necessary to streamline the single-window clearance process for Japanese companies operating in industrial townships. Moreover, successful Japanese investment practices in Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat

should be extended to other regions of India. My longtime friend, Mr. Osamu Suzuki, told me that Suzuki's new plant in Gujarat would be "the fastest plant ever built," thanks to its excellent location and environment, as well as the strong support.

Even in the banking and financial sector, which was once considered sensitive, Japanese banks have been actively operating in India. The recent investment by Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation in YES BANK provides an excellent model for establishing high-quality retail banking in India. This will also enhance the ability of our two countries to rely on each other during times when economic vulnerabilities emerge and uncertainty looms. The case of MUFG Bank acquiring a 20% stake in Shriram Finance suggests considerable potential for expanding such investments. Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation and Mizuho Bank have also made similar investments. In the insurance sector, India took the bold step of fully opening its sector to FDI. Now is the time for Japanese insurance companies to seriously consider what they can do to make the most of this opportunity.

Regarding infrastructure, JICA has made significant progress in developing roads, bridges, and other infrastructure. We hope that the delays in the development of the freight corridor, the Delhi-Mumbai corridor, and the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail project will be resolved, leading to the further modernization of India's railway infrastructure through technology, human capital, and skills.

In the travel and tourism sector, the number of Indian visitors to Japan last year increased by 35% compared with the previous year, exceeding 300,000. Currently, we are working to significantly increase visitor flows. When I was serving in Japan, there were well-established tourism offices. I had always hoped that Japan would one day establish an office in India, and I am truly grateful that, under the leadership of Chairman Shukuri, this vision is finally set to be realized this year, further deepening people-to-people exchanges between India and Japan.

Turning to climate change and clean energy, the already-launched India-Japan Clean Energy Partnership focuses on green hydrogen, industrial decarbonization, and hard-to-abate sectors, such as steel and cement. Technological innovation is beginning to make dramatic progress. India has set a goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, and we hope to see further progress in both the share and volume of renewable energy in its energy demand.

The defense sector has remained largely untouched. As technology plays an increasingly important role in new areas and challenges in defense, I believe that building partnerships among companies, universities, and research institutions is an area in which India and Japan can forge a highly important relationship.

Finally, I would like to introduce *Oku no Hosomichi (The Narrow Road to the Interior)*, written by Matsuo Basho in 1689. Days and months are travelers of eternity. So are the years that pass by. India and Japan are now travelers of eternity, walking together in the Indo-Pacific region. I feel honored to have had an association with Japan for 65 years. It has been a long and deeply fulfilling relationship. I hope that the relationship we have cultivated together will deepen even further. And I regard it as the quest of

my life to see India and Japan grow even closer.

H.E. Mr. HIRAMATSU Kenji, Former Ambassador to India
Chairman, Institute for International Strategy, the Japan
Research Institute, Limited

It is a great honor to have this opportunity today, and I am deeply pleased to be reunited with so many dear friends. Dr. Suri and Additional Secretary Billa were my close colleagues in launching the first Japan-India Tourism Council in October 2016, and they have provided tremendous support for tourism exchanges between the two countries.

During my tenure as Ambassador to India from 2015 to 2019, Japan-India relations developed dramatically under the strong leadership of Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Abe. We reached agreements on projects symbolizing a new era for our two countries, such as concluding the cooperation agreement on the peaceful use of nuclear energy and commencing the high-speed rail project, while investment from Japan increased significantly across a wide range of sectors. Furthermore, strategic cooperation between Japan and India, including the establishment of the Quad, has evolved remarkably. I felt immense pride and deep satisfaction in having been directly involved in such a dynamic development of our relationship.

I completed my tenure in India with a great sense of satisfaction, but at the same time, there was one matter that I felt I had left unfinished. That is to deepen people-to-people exchanges through tourism and academic exchanges, and to promote mutual understanding at the grassroots level. In recent years, Japan-India relations have reached new heights, and interest in India has never been higher, particularly in the business sector. I have supported the development of Japan-India business in various ways, and these efforts are beginning to yield tangible results. At the same time, my constant concern has been to strengthen people-to-people exchanges, especially among young people, and to promote a better understanding of India. There are still many people who hold stereotypical views of India, which I find deeply disheartening. I strive to dispel such stereotypes and misconceptions by explaining the realities of modern India through various lectures. I believe that a better understanding of modern India and modern Japan is the foundation for advancing business ties and strengthening the partnership between our two countries.

In recent years, the Japanese government has also fully recognized the importance of people-to-people exchanges, and various events were held in 2023 as part of the Japan-India Tourism Exchange Year. During Prime Minister Modi's visit to Japan last year, the Action Plan for Japan-India Human Resource Exchange and Cooperation was formulated to promote mutual exchanges involving 500,000 people over five years, including 50,000 people from India. Over the years, through the Sakura Science Exchange Program, many Indian middle and high school students have visited Japan to learn science and technology. I will never forget the sparkle in their eyes as they returned home.



Last year, the LOTUS Programme was launched to invite Indian graduate students and postdoctoral researchers for collaborative research. Applications are now open for this year's program, which aims to host 1,000 participants. Academic exchanges between universities are also gaining momentum, and I sincerely hope that the number of students from Japan to India will grow significantly in the future. To this end, I hope that host institutions in India will further improve the support systems and environment for Japanese students, especially female students, to better accommodate their needs.

Recently, Indian tourists have become a familiar sight in cities across Japan. The increase has been remarkable, with the number of Indian visitors to Japan last year rising by approximately 35% compared to the previous year. Traditional Japanese culture is attracting growing interest among affluent visitors, while Japanese pop culture, such as anime, is immensely popular among younger generations. This is a welcome development, but Japan has a much wider range of attractions to offer.

By contrast, the flow of people from Japan to India remains limited, except for business purposes. While this is likely due to misconceptions about India, I also hope that the Indian side will improve tourism infrastructure and further simplify visa application procedures.

There is growing recognition of the importance of people-to-people exchanges in both Japan and India, and positive signs can already be seen. However, given the size of the two countries and the importance to each other, this is still far from sufficient, and many challenges remain to be addressed. In particular, I believe that, under the leadership of both governments, we should promote exchanges between local governments, students, and women, as well as mutual internship programs, and expand access to Japanese-language education in a more systematic and results-oriented way.

People-to-people exchanges could be described as the "missing link" in Japan-India relations. Just as I envisioned ten years ago, I sincerely hope that exchanges between our two countries will expand dramatically in the years ahead.

■ Panel Discussion 1

The Significance, Challenges, and Future Prospects of International Exchanges

[Moderator] Ms. Indrani Bagchi

Chief Executive Officer, Ananta Centre

[Panelists]

H.E. Mr. Shyam Saran Former Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs
President of the Board of Trustees, India International Centre

Mr. ARIYOSHI Takashi Minister and Deputy Chief of Mission, the Embassy of Japan in India

H.E. Ms. Deepa Wadhwa Former Ambassador to Japan
Member, Governing Council, Asian Confluence

Ms. MIZUTORI Mami Specially Appointed Professor, Tohoku University

Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General

◆ What is your view on the progress of people-to-people exchanges between India and Japan?

Ms. Indrani Bagchi Chief Executive Officer, Ananta Centre

To begin with, I would like to express my appreciation for organizing today's symposium and for setting up the new office in India. This is a highly welcome and long-awaited event. Today, we would like to discuss the significance, challenges, and prospects of international exchanges. While the number of Indian tourists in Japan is on a steady growth, I also feel there is still plenty of room for improvement. So first, I would like to ask for your views on the progress of people-to-people exchanges between India and Japan. How should we take this forward? And what kind of challenges might there be? I would like to hear what the overall picture looks like to you all.



H.E. Mr. Shyam Saran Former Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs

I would like to welcome the setting up of JTTRI's office in India.

Speaking from a diplomat's perspective in terms of the purpose that we have of really promoting people-to-people exchanges, even if we are having good state-to-state relations, having good government-to-government relations, or having good trade relations, that is simply not enough. Unless it is grounded in a much deeper mutual understanding between the people of both countries, there may be nothing left to maintain the relationship when it weakens for some reason. Exchanges among citizens play a very important role. However, frankly speaking, the level of mutual familiarity and understanding between the two countries is actually very thin. Today, most impressions of Japan in India, much like the impressions of India in Japan, are largely shaped through Western perspectives and media coverage.

So the mutual understanding that ought to be fostered between peoples or citizens will never be developed unless we remove this "Western filter" and create possibilities for direct engagement between people of both countries at all levels.

So I think one of the important things that we can do is to seriously rethink this issue from a completely different perspective. Simply increasing the number of tourists is not enough; tourists might otherwise return home without gaining any real understanding of the country they visited. To truly create tourism supported by exchanges, initiatives in intergovernmental efforts are required.



Mr. ARIYOSHI Takashi Minister and Deputy Chief of Mission, the Embassy of Japan in India

In 2015, while preparing for the formulation of the “Japan–India Vision 2025” at the Japan–India Summit, during discussions with then-Ambassador Hiramatsu and Ambassador Wadhwa at the time, we recognised not only the various points of common ground between the two countries—



such as cultural heritage, democracy, tolerance and pluralism—but also, most importantly, that we share common political, economic and strategic objectives.

At the summit meeting, we agreed on cooperation in areas such as high-speed rail and civil nuclear energy, as well as a commitment to 3.5 trillion yen in Japanese investment in India and a program for 10,000 young Indians to visit Japan over the next five years.

Prime Minister Abe stated, “A strong India is in Japan’s interests, and a strong Japan is in India’s interests.” He said that, as Japan possesses the technology and India has the human resources, the two countries need to cooperate with one another. The investment target for India was actually achieved in three years.

India has been ranked first as a promising investment destination for Japanese companies for four consecutive years, with 61.8% of the surveyed companies giving positive responses regarding India.

With regard to the exchange of human resources, while the numbers of the Technical Intern Training and Specified Skilled Worker programmes are relatively small as it has only been introduced in recent years, they are growing. There are already 14,000 skilled specialists under Engineer/Specialist in Humanities and International Services from India working in Japan, a number that surpasses that of Indonesia. India's presence in Japan is gradually increasing. As regards studying abroad, there are currently around 1,600 Indian students studying in Japan, and although this number is gradually increasing, Japan ranks only 34th as a destination for Indian students, so we need to make further efforts. As for tourist numbers, although they have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, they are growing steadily.

Last year, Prime Minister Modi visited Japan, and the Japan–India Summit was held. The “Japan-India Joint Vision for the Next Decade” was adopted, and it was confirmed that the two countries would advance cooperation on economic security, alongside targets for 500,000 people-to-people exchanges over five years—including 50,000 skilled personnel and potential talents from India to Japan—and 10 trillion yen in new private-sector investment.

Prime Minister Modi described this as the “Golden Chapter”; this reflects the same view held by former Prime Minister Abe, namely that India needs technology and Japan needs human resources. The fundamental structure of Japan–India relations remains the same, and whilst they are progressing steadily, there is a need to take them a step further.

Prime Minister Takaichi announced the vision of the Updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) in May of this year. In order to respond to

changes in the international situation, such as intensifying geopolitical competition, we intend to collaborate with various countries with three priority areas, namely (1) building the economic foundations for the AI and data era, (2) jointly creating opportunities for economic growth and sharing rules through public-private collaboration, and (3) expanding cooperation in the field of security to promote regional peace and stability, utilising the OSA (Official Security Assistance) scheme, and we also wish to deepen our cooperation with the Government of India.

H.E. Ms. Deepa Wadhwa Former Ambassador to Japan

Generally, the image of India in Japan is very positive, just as the image of Japan in India is. But there is no doubt that this has not led to a deeper mutual understanding due to a huge information deficit, which is influencing trade, economic relations, and even tourism. The number of tourists from India to Japan has increased hugely, but it is not happening the other way around. This information deficit has to be bridged.



As nations in Asia that refer to each other as the “oldest and largest democracies,” we bear the responsibility to engage our citizens, convey the importance of the relationship, and build mutual trust, understanding, and even respect.

As can be seen from the process of formulating the India and Japan Vision 2025 in 2015, we have emphasized the importance of people-to-people exchanges in all our joint statements, and the prime ministers of both countries have held meetings. But progress is still slow. There are only 1,600 Indian students studying in Japan, fewer than those from Nepal or Sri Lanka. There are about 100 Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between universities in Japan and India, but most of them are not active in practice. I think we should seriously consider how to activate them.

Another thing that concerns me is the lack of cultural exchange between the two countries. The Cultural Agreement between India and Japan was concluded in the 1950s, during the very early stages of the establishment of relations between the two countries. We had an agreement, but there were no concrete cultural exchange programs. In other words, there were no protocols for implementation. At the previous summit, we signed an MOU on cultural exchange and identified several specific areas. This is something I have been strongly pushing for a very long time. The Japan-India Association is the oldest friendship association in Japan, established in 1903. To achieve concrete results, we need more support from the business community and the government.

Ms. MIZUTORI Mami

Specialty Appointed Professor, Tohoku University

Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General

I am very happy to be able to talk about disaster risk reduction, an area I was in charge of at the United Nations, as it is an area in which India and Japan are moving in the same direction on the global stage.

Both countries are located in the Asia-Pacific region, an area highly prone to disasters, and their top political leaders understand the importance of this issue. They also have an understanding of not only disaster response and reconstruction, but also prevention. In 2015, a large-scale conference was held in Sendai, Japan, where the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was adopted. Not all countries thought that disaster risk reduction was a priority issue, but India and Japan were exceptions. As a testament to this commitment, the first Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held here in Delhi in November 2016 under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi.



Since 2018, when I started to work as the Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction of the UN Secretary General, people-to-people exchanges between India and Japan have played a vital role in moving the global agenda.

I participated in numerous international conferences and panel discussions with Dr. PK Mishra, who led the reconstruction of Gujarat after the 2001 earthquake, as Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Modi. And we established the “Coalition for Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure” (CDRI) under the leadership of India's highest level. Strengthening basic infrastructure, such as electricity, communications, healthcare, and transport, is not just a problem for India and Japan alone; we collaborated with the shared goal of supporting the most vulnerable nations, that is, Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean, the Pacific, and Africa. Furthermore, India established a new working group for disaster risk reduction with the support of Japan when they held the G20 presidency in 2023, while demonstrating strong leadership.

By the way, my successor at the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) is also Indian, Mr. Kamal Kishore. I think this was not only by chance but because the UN Secretary-General understood that the two countries were cooperating while bearing the “torch of prevention.” I'm really happy to say that the two countries are working very closely in the area of disaster risk.

◆ In what areas can India and Japan deepen their exchanges?

Ms. Indrani Bagchi Chief Executive Officer, Ananta Centre

So far, we have seen the framework and intentions for people-to-people exchanges between the two countries. In today's geopolitical condition of the world, not only bilateral relations but also diversification and resilience are required. In order to diversify or remove dependence on certain countries, how and in what areas do you think India and Japan can deepen their exchanges?

H.E. Mr. Shyam Saran Former Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs

India and Japan share very similar strategic interests, and there are

absolutely no political barriers to cooperation in diversifying their reliance on various supply chains. But unless you understand the culture in which you conduct business with each other, you may not be able to take advantage of opportunities, even if they arise.

When I was in Japan, I introduced a young man who had come to Japan to promote his Indian tea brand to a large number of Japanese trading houses. After about two weeks, he secured a trial order of ₹30,000, yet he was very disappointed that it was all he got. I told him that, “Consider yourself lucky to have got this sample order because this serves as a test. The Japanese partner will first assess what kind of relationship they can build with you. If you are reliable and trustworthy, then business will naturally follow.” About 30 years later, he became one of the biggest exporters of tea from India to Japan.

Cultural exchanges are not just about one-off cultural events. We should establish regular initiatives, accumulate results, foster a positive atmosphere, and build upon what you have done as a foundation for further development. That is what is missing in India-Japan relations.

I believe that the element of excitement is also important in people-to-people exchanges. I had the impression that contact between India and Japan was very limited under the isolationist policy during the Edo shogunate. But it is very interesting that there was a Japanese person who traveled to India. His travelogue, “Tenjiku Tokai Monogatari” (The Tale of Crossing the Sea to India), became widely known. By leveraging the many connections between India and Japan to create excitement, we can spark curiosity for people to visit India and to travel from India to Japan. Wadaiko (Japanese drumming) could also serve as an element of excitement.

Ms. Indrani Bagchi Chief Executive Officer, Ananta Centre

Is there anything more we can do to better understand business and cultural values between the two countries? Should we conduct some sort of training for Japanese and Indian companies?

Mr. ARIYOSHI Takashi Minister and Deputy Chief of Mission, the Embassy of Japan in India

We need to take concrete actions for people-to-people exchanges.

The first area concerns students; the Japanese Government's ‘Sakura Science Programme’ is a scheme that invites young talent in the fields of science and technology—such as undergraduates and postgraduates—to Japan to deepen their understanding through a stay of several weeks. Now, 500 out of 3,000 global slots have been allocated to India to focus on inviting students or researchers. The “Lotus Programme” is dedicated exclusively to India; it allocates 1,000 slots and provides opportunities for students, postdoctoral researchers and others to visit Japan.

The second area concerns economic security. Semiconductors, critical minerals, information technology, clean energy, and pharmaceuticals are identified as priority areas. In the semiconductor sector, Japanese companies are considering projects at the Dholera Industrial Zone. However, for Japanese companies to establish a presence there, various administrative procedures and infrastructure improvements are required, and the cooperation of all stakeholders is essential.

The third area concerns content, such as anime and manga. To encourage Indian talents settle in Japan, we would like them to develop an interest in Japan through manga and anime. Held in Delhi for the past two years, 'Mela! Mela! Anime Japan!!' attracted over 60,000 visitors this year.

Fourthly, many local governments are currently visiting India, and Indian local governments are also showing interest in collaborating with Japanese companies.

Next year marks the 75th anniversary of Japan-India diplomatic relations between Japan and India. So we intend to strengthen our efforts across all four of these areas to foster more concrete exchanges and create further opportunities for mutual understanding.

Ms. Indrani Bagchi Chief Executive Officer, Ananta Centre

There was a discussion about over 100 Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between educational institutions in India and Japan. In India, the decision of where children receive higher education is left much more to student counselors and career counselors than to their parents. Every high school and junior college in India employs counselors who advise students on where they should go, whether it is Canada, Australia, America, Germany, or France. Despite the attractive level of higher education in Japan, there is no system in place to send counselors to Japan to explain, "Japan offers this kind of education." How can we make Japan a viable option?

H.E. Ms. Deepa Wadhwa Former Ambassador to Japan

There is a real lack of information regarding education in Japan. As you said, it is necessary to send a team of counselors to Japan to explain the Japanese education system. Furthermore, I believe that mutual empathy is especially important in people-to-people exchanges. This is also closely related to disaster management.

Following the massive earthquake that struck Bhuj city (in Gujarat) in 2001, the Japanese were among the first to engage in relief operations there. They also cooperated in the reconstruction efforts. They are still remembered so much. When the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, our disaster relief force went to the affected areas. At that time, the Indians did not attempt to use machines to go through the rubble. They conducted a search using their hands because there might be bodies inside. That really struck a chord. Now Dr. Ashok Jain is here at the venue, participating in this symposium. He leads the Indian Ministry of Education Student Association (MOSAI), an organization composed of scholars and individuals who studied in Japan and returned to India. They hold lectures on history related to Japan and India every month. It has long been my aspiration and dream to publish a book on the historical connections between India and Japan.

Ms. Indrani Bagchi Chief Executive Officer, Ananta Centre

Disaster and resilience are themes that touch a chord in India and have developed significantly in recent years. I believe that not only the CDRI but also India's National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) have received substantial support from Japan. From the perspective of promoting people-to-people exchanges, what are your thoughts?

Ms. MIZUTORI Mami

Specially Appointed Professor, Tohoku University

Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General

While the low number of Indian students studying in Japan has often been highlighted, I think probably the research and study of disaster management is an exception. Many universities in Japan, especially top-tier universities, have accepted many Indian students conducting research in master's and doctoral studies.

But why does not this happen the other way around as well? Japanese students could certainly come to India to learn about the country's approach to disaster management research. I think we already have the foundation for robust exchange in the area of academic research on disaster risk reduction.

Furthermore, the private sector, particularly insurance, is an extremely important way to ensure that people can recover after a disaster. I currently serve as an advisor to a non-life insurance company in Japan. The company has a very specific area of expertise: early warning systems and early action using artificial intelligence (AI). AI can really boost this. It helps to translate into any local language very quickly and adapt to differences in literacy rates and cultural contexts. I think India and Japan can cooperate to enhance the early warning system, especially in vulnerable countries.

H.E. Mr. Shyam Saran Former Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs

Regarding early warning systems, Dr. Shailesh Nayak, Director of the India International Centre, received the Brock Gold Medal 2026. It is one of the most prestigious awards for his contributions to satellite monitoring, and I would like to add that he has developed an early warning system for maritime disasters covering the entire Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific region.

Ms. Indrani Bagchi Chief Executive Officer, Ananta Centre

This session provided some interesting insights into student exchanges, specifically the student flows from India to Japan and vice versa. The information deficit between the two countries, and the extent to which it acts as a hindrance, has been highlighted. We are considering further investment in economic exchanges between the private sectors. We need to understand each other much more deeply than we do now.

■ Panel Discussion 2

The Roles of Tourism and Cultural Policies in Driving International Exchanges

[Moderator] H.E. Mr. HIRAMATSU Kenji
Former Ambassador to India

[Panelists]

Dr. Jyotsna Suri Chairperson & Managing Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group

Mr. MURATA Shigeki Commissioner, Japan Tourism Agency, MLIT

Mr. Suman Billa Additional Secretary and Director- General, Ministry of Tourism

◆The current state of tourism exchange between Japan and India

H.E. Mr. HIRAMATSU Kenji Former Ambassador to India

I am very thrilled to have three panelists today who are key players in the tourism industry in both countries. Dr Jyotsna Suri is a true giant in the tourism industry and is deeply involved in tourism exchanges between Japan and India. Commissioner Murata is, needless to say, a key person in the Japanese government regarding the tourism sector.



Mr. Suman Billa is a longtime friend of mine; we worked closely together on the establishment of the Japan-India Tourism Council in 2016. While he was in Madrid serving for the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), I was also there working together. First, I would like to ask for your views on the current situation of tourism exchanges between Japan and India.

Dr Jyotsna Suri Chairperson & Managing Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group

India and Japan share a strong and trusted business relationship. What makes this relationship stronger, is the understanding and goodwill between our people. Tourism is one of the most meaningful ways to build these connections.



While the number of Indians travelling to Japan is steadily growing, we would like to see many more Japanese visitors discovering India. There is still so much that people in both countries have yet to experience about each other. For instance, the Japanese love golf, however there is currently little awareness of the fact that India has the finest golf courses across the country, often situated near sites offering captivating cultural and heritage experiences. For those who deeply love wellness experiences and the natural surroundings, Ayurveda (India's traditional medicine) is another attraction.

To encourage more Japanese to visit India and more Indians to visit Japan, it is necessary to actively promote both countries and highlight their respective attractions and strengths.

Mr. MURATA Shigeki Commissioner, Japan Tourism Agency, MLIT

In 2025, the number of foreign visitors to Japan reached a record high of approximately 42.48 million, while the number of Japanese outbound tourists stood at approximately 14.73 million. Regarding travel between Japan and India, the number of tourists to Japan from India hit a record high of approximately 320,000 in 2025, while the number of tourists to India from Japan reached approximately 220,000.



The Japanese government has drawn up the Fifth Tourism Nation

Promotion Basic Plan as a five-year plan covering the period from the 2026 financial year to the 2030 financial year. The policy sets out three key pillars: 'balancing the strategic promotion of inbound tourism with safeguarding the quality of life for local residents', 'expanding domestic travel and outbound tourism', and 'building resilient tourism destinations and tourism industry'.

There are five key points in the Basic Plan. The first is that, given that tourism is the second-largest export industry after the automotive industry, it has been explicitly designated as a 'strategic industry'. The second point is that, rather than focusing solely on the 'numerical target' of attracting 60 million foreign visitors to Japan by 2030, the emphasis should be on substance and quality—for example, ensuring that 40 million of those visitors, equivalent to two-thirds of the total, are repeat visitors. The third point established 'balancing the strategic promotion of inbound tourism with safeguarding the quality of life for local residents' as a pillar of the Basic Plan. The fourth point is that the text has been expanded to include measures to promote travel by Japanese people both domestically and outbound, such as setting a target of 30 trillion yen in domestic travel expenditure. The fifth point concerns the vision for developing tourist destinations, the traditional principle of 'good to live and good to visit,' has been expanded to include 'a good to work', thereby taking into account the sustainability of the tourism industry.

With the aim of achieving 60 million foreign visitors to Japan by 2030 and restoring outbound travel to 20 million, the government will work as one and collaborate with the private sector to implement these policies.

H.E. Mr. HIRAMATSU Kenji Former Ambassador to India

The number of Japanese tourists visiting India is lower than the number of Indian tourists visiting Japan. I would like to know whether a similar gap generally exists with other countries as well, or if the gap is particularly large in the case of India.

Mr. MURATA Shigeki Commissioner, Japan Tourism Agency, MLIT

Whilst outbound travel from Japan as a whole accounts for less than half the number of foreign visitors to Japan, in the case of travel between Japan and India, the number of Indian visitors to Japan stands at approximately 320,000, whilst the number of Japanese travellers to India is approximately 220,000. Given that Japanese outbound travel has not yet fully recovered since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe that a considerable number of Japanese people are visiting India. Bearing in mind India's population, I feel that we could welcome even more visitors from India to Japan.

Mr. Suman Billa Additional Secretary & Director General, Ministry of Tourism

India's tourism sector has experienced significant growth over the past decade. Comparing the situation ten years ago with the present, the number of foreign tourists visiting India has risen from about 11 million to 20 million, and the number of outbound tourists from India to overseas has increased from about 10 million to 30 million, and the number of domestic

tourist visits has jumped from 1.4 billion to 4 billion. The primary problem facing tourism in India today is that supply is not keeping up with demand, as tourism demand is exploding and the domestic market is expanding very fast. Secondly, the growth in the number of outbound



tourists is much faster than the growth in the number of inbound tourists; outbound tourism spending amounts to \$27 billion against revenues of about \$24 billion, resulting in a net loss for the tourism sector. We have to make tourism a major source of foreign currency earnings by expanding tourism infrastructure and increasing the number of inbound tourists.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, during Mr. Hiramatsu's tenure as Ambassador to India, led by Ms. Deepa Wadhwa, who was Ambassador to Japan, as well as Dr. Jyotsna Suri, the level of the business council was elevated as the discussions, which were previously limited to intergovernmental consultations, evolved to include trade and business partners sitting at the same table and addressing common agendas. We also agreed that both should endeavor to double the number of tourists who are going from India to Japan and from Japan to India within the next five years. Although there has been disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic, I think that several initiatives implemented then are worth reconsidering. For example, Japan Airlines (JAL) started flights to Bangalore and All Nippon Airways (ANA) started direct flights to Chennai. And we have been sending people robustly to Japan. But the reverse is not happening. This is a challenge that we should work on. We need to more clearly highlight the appeal of our country within Japan. Today, most travel from Japan to India is for business purposes. We need to consider how to expand its use to leisure purposes. One of the issues we are discussing with the Embassy of India in Japan is that some regions of India, such as a part of the state of Assam, are subject to a Level 2 travel advisory. It means that it is not safe to travel or that the situation is equivalent to being unsafe. But as you know, Assam has been very peaceful for decades now. I think both sides should work to maintain this situation and create a growth environment for business expansion.

◆Regarding the achievement of a two-way flow of tourists between Japan and India

H.E. Mr. HIRAMATSU Kenji Former Ambassador to India

In the next round, I would like to discuss the issue of how to achieve a balanced two-way flow of tourists between Japan and India.

Dr Suri offered suggestions about the diverse and interesting aspects of Indian culture, but Japanese people do not necessarily fully understand them. How can the appeal of India be effectively conveyed to the Japanese people? In particular, what initiatives should be considered to conduct effective promotions targeting the Japanese tourism industry and attract more Japanese tourists to India?

In my view, Japanese females like to travel together with many friends.

So I think it is very important to figure out how to attract them to India. India also offers attractions, such as wellness, golf, and cultural heritage. Personally, I like the tiger reserves. And there are many beautiful landscapes. Beyond the so-called Golden Triangle (a tourist circuit connecting the three northern cities of Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur), I find southern India is also appealing. I like Kerala. It is a very attractive place for women to enjoy delicious food. Mr. Suman Billa talked about shopping. I think India can offer very attractive shopping opportunities in jewelry, textiles, shoes, and more, appealing not only to women but to men as well.

I would like to ask you all your ideas for giving more attraction to Japanese people. But before that, I have to talk about safety. Most Japanese people are really worried, but I think Delhi is very safe. That said, safety and infrastructure are very important to Japanese tourists. There are many excellent hotels across the country, yet transportation remains a challenge. How can we make cities more pedestrian-friendly?

For example, there are very attractive places like Hampi (a World Heritage Site featuring ruins of the Vijayanagara Empire) and southern Tamil Nadu; these areas have many interesting temples and excellent hotels. There are many fascinating places to visit, but we have to consider how to improve transportation from major hubs like Delhi, Bangalore, and Chennai.

Dr Jyotsna Suri Chairperson & Managing Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group

Safety is naturally a priority for every traveller, and we apologise for the unfortunate incident. At the same time, we should not allow such isolated incidents to define an entire country.

India has made remarkable progress in strengthening its infrastructure. Air connectivity, rail networks and highways have improved significantly. However we need to still work on the seamless last-mile connectivity and the amenities at the destination.

Equally important is how we tell India's story. We need to communicate and highlight the positive experiences and showcase the warmth, diversity and hospitality that define our country. This requires focussed marketing in Japan. I am confident we will encourage many more Japanese travellers to experience the incredible richness of our country.

Mr. Suman Billa Additional Secretary & Director General, Ministry of Tourism

India's infrastructure development has progressed significantly. About ten years ago, there were only around 75 airports, but today there are more than 150. The number of national highways has more than doubled, and the number of expressways exceeds 4,000 kilometers. What we really need to do is improve the environment of tourist destinations. Following Prime Minister Modi's directive of "one state, one global destination," the Indian government is investing funds in initiatives across various states to upgrade infrastructure, such as tourist site descriptions, information signage and transportation options, with the aim of having these sites selected as top 50 tourist destinations.

Furthermore, while the tourism sector accounts for an average of around

9% to 10% of GDP in countries worldwide, it represents only about 5% in India. Prime Minister Modi has outlined a vision to double this figure, raising it from 5% to 10% within the next ten years. I think we will get there shortly.

H.E. Mr. HIRAMATSU Kenji Former Ambassador to India

Making tourist destinations more friendly requires improvements, such as walkable environments and adequate restroom facilities. I was very encouraged to learn that this has already become part of the government's policy. From the Japanese government's point of view, what initiatives do you think India should take to encourage more Japanese tourists to visit India? I would like to ask Commissioner Murata about any specific requests or proposals.

Mr. MURATA Shigeki Commissioner, Japan Tourism Agency, MLIT

It is important to foster balanced people-to-people exchanges. To address the fact that the overall number of Japanese outbound tourists remains low, the Japanese Government intends to use the reduction in passport application fees as an opportunity to actively encourage Japanese people to travel abroad.

It was also suggested that the Japanese public may not be receiving sufficient information about India. In Japan, the 'Tourism EXPO Japan' is held every autumn, with tourism boards and government bodies from around the world taking part to showcase their countries' attractions. We would like to propose that this event be used as an opportunity to communicate the appeal of India directly to the Japanese public.

Furthermore, the tourism authorities of the Japanese and Indian governments hold the Japan-India Tourism Council—which was established in 2016 during Ambassador Hiramatsu's tenure—roughly once every two years to exchange views on expanding mutual travel between the two countries. In Japan, efforts are being made to promote the provision of multilingual information on regional tourism resources and to create an environment that makes it easier for foreign visitors to travel within the country. We believe we could share the insights gained from these initiatives with our counterparts in India. We would like to make efforts to further promote mutual exchanges between the two countries, utilising the platform of the Japan-India Tourism Council.

H.E. Mr. HIRAMATSU Kenji Former Ambassador to India

I appreciate the very strong commitment to further promoting tourism exchanges between the two countries. It is important to continue constructive dialogue within the framework of the Japan-India Tourism Council, and we hope that a better environment will be created for tourism in both countries. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of today's wonderful panelists.

