



Delhi Policy Group

**Opening of Japan Month 2024
Embassy of Japan, New Delhi
August 30, 2024**

Remarks by Amb. H.K. Singh as the Chief Guest

**Ambassador Hiroshi Suzuki,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my great pleasure to join you at the opening of Japan Month 2024. Let me also congratulate you, Mr. Ambassador, on taking this initiative to organise a series of special events designed to enhance bilateral relations, focusing in particular on the promotion of trade, investment, culture and people-to-people exchanges.

It has been my privilege to serve as India's Envoy to Japan from 2006 to 2010, so I am familiar with the remarkable journey of our bilateral relations since the dawn of this century.

Speaking today in my personal capacity, I would like to share with you three key perspectives that stakeholders may like to bear in mind at events marking the Japan Month.

First, significant relationships like ours are based primarily on shared values, strategic trust, public understanding, and the pursuit of mutual interest. India and Japan are ancient and connected Asian civilisations, democracies committed to the rule of law, and complementary free market economies. They also stand out as two nations in Asia with the absence of any historical constraints to their relations. And they are geographic bookends along the outer arc of the Eurasian rimland, brought together by the confluence of oceans.

These factors have underpinned the strategic vision laid out so eloquently by Japan's former Prime Minister, the late Shinzo Abe, as far back as 2007. In his words, "A strong India is in the best interest of Japan, and a strong Japan is in the best interest of India."

Abe's vision continues to give direction to our relations, as the outcomes of the latest India-Japan 2+2 Ministerial Meeting indicate. But we need to work even harder to make that vision a reality, and strengthen our partnership for regional security and stability.

Beyond this favourable geopolitical dimension, and considering that Japan is the most developed democracy in Asia while India is the largest developing democracy, the essential heart of the bilateral relationship resides in the areas of trade, economy, investment, technology and infrastructure.

Japan has made enormous contributions to India's economic growth, helping set the basic template for urban transportation, automotive manufacturing, and core economic infrastructure, including the latest component of high speed rail.

However, India-Japan trade, at a meagre \$22.85 billion in 2023-24, continues to lag behind. The need for an effective dialogue to substantially improve overall trade, and to address the trade imbalance, cannot be denied.

Similarly, while Japan's cumulative FDI in India stands at \$41.9 billion, making it the fifth largest investor in India, this level also does not reflect the true potential. The number of Japanese companies operating in India remains modest in comparison with several other Asian economies.

It is heartening to note that both sides are working hard to implement Japan's commitment to invest 5 trillion yen in public and private financing in India during the 2022-2027 period. In fact, given India's robust economic growth, we should already be discussing even more ambitious targets for this period, and beyond.

Still on the economic agenda, it is my hope that events during the Japan Month will promote in-depth dialogues for greater cooperation in the areas of economic security, trade, and trust-based collaboration in emerging technologies. We should also be considering high-level India-Japan initiatives on critical and emerging technologies, as well as close coordination on trade and technology issues, like India has already instituted with the United States and the European Union.

And finally, the third and perhaps the most vital area for transforming India-Japan relations is our people-to-people exchanges.

Buddhist monks brought Indian civilisation and culture to Japan in ancient times, and not many Indians realise how well this past is preserved in Japan even today.

The enormous diversity and richness of India's cultural mosaic is not always easy for our Japanese friends to comprehend. Indians on their part must also learn more about the traditions of social cohesion and harmony which are so prized by the Japanese people.

Simply put, we need to know each other better, understand each other's aspirations better, and learn to work more closely with each other as friendly Asian peoples.

While I realise that efforts are underway and progress is being made, we must further sharpen our focus on building contemporary ties across the realms of language, culture, education, skills, mobility, and tourism.

Travel between India and Japan must be made easier, with reciprocal and harmonised visa regimes, cutting across all areas of travel, and it is time to contemplate a visa-free regime in certain sectors, such as research and academic exchanges. Indian tourists are increasingly looking to visit Japan, and expedited visa issuance can greatly facilitate this trend.

There are woefully few Indian students and scholars in Japan, and even the numbers of IT professionals and engineers continue to be low.

In the wide spectrum of people-to-people exchanges, an important category is India's young workforce which can go to Japan through the Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP) and the Specified Skilled Workers (SSW) Programme.

It has taken time to train this youthful workforce in Japanese language and culture to prepare them to go to Japan, contribute to Japanese society and bring back better skills. I understand that numbers have finally started to pick up.

Given the potential, additional efforts are required to encourage more students and trainees from vocational institutions in India to learn the Japanese language at higher levels. I would like to use this opportunity to urge the Japanese side to increase the number of designated Centres for skill tests, and to also consider opening up potentially all domains for the mobility of the Indian workforce.

To conclude, let me once again thank you, Ambassador Suzuki, for inviting me to this launch of Japan Month 2024, and I wish you, and all organisers and participants in the events which will take place across India over the course of September and October, the very best in their endeavours.
