

Good afternoon.

Let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to you all on holding the 3rd Japan-India Indo-Pacific Forum as a platform for amassing our wisdom.

The theme of this edition is “Global Order and the Indo-Pacific.”

Amid growing uncertainties over the existing international order, Japan has reiterated that the Japan-India relationship is blessed with the greatest potential for development of any bilateral relationship in the world. Japan and India cherish a long history of friendly exchanges, and the present-day dynamism of India is serving as a driving force for this historical friendship to develop.

Estimates show that in 2028 India will become the world's most populous country with 1.45 billion people and overtake Japan in terms of gross domestic product to rank the third largest economy. The annual growth rate in India averaged about 7% during the past 5 years.

I have visited India several times including in 2004, 2013, 2017 and last year. On each occasion I witnessed India's rapid change and growth at first hand.

Japan and India have deepened our cooperation under a “Special Strategic and Global Partnership” which shares fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law as well as strategic interests. We have been making remarkable headway in security and defense sector as well as economic field. We held the first 2 + 2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting in November last year and signed the so-called Japan-India ACSA in September this year.

In addition, External Affairs Minister Dr. Jaishankar came all the way to Tokyo last month, and we had the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Japan-India Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue. During these meetings, we came to share the view on deepening our partnership both bilaterally and multilaterally between Japan facing the Pacific Ocean, and India being located in the heart of the Indian Ocean.

With the spread of COVID-19, the need for international collaboration has been greater than ever. While countries are contending with each other in complex power struggles in the Indo-Pacific, I am convinced that the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific shared between Japan and India will gain increasing importance towards peace and prosperity of the region and beyond.

Japan intends to strengthen its partnership with India's Indo-Pacific Ocean's Initiative. To spearhead an effort to enhance connectivity, Japan will strongly support the Initiative.

Today, the world is facing various challenges. On top of the global spread of COVID-19, these challenges include the confrontation between the United States and China, the situations in the East and South China Seas as well as in the Korean Peninsula, which has led to mounting uncertainty. Under these circumstances, it is my intention to continue promoting a diplomacy with a sense of caring and robustness, through which I will respect diversity while exercising leadership and standing firm in our response when needed.

I believe it is important that both Japan and India, the largest democracy in the world endowed with abundant diversity, further deepen strategic relations, looking ahead to the post-COVID-19 world. Our two countries are the "most natural strategic partners in Asia" as dubbed by Minister Jaishankar in his latest book. We should exercise our leadership in making rules and building order for the post-COVID-19 era.

We will appreciate your continued cooperation in our endeavors in the further development of the Japan-India relations.

Thank you for your kind attention.