

Japan and India: Strategically Aligned Trusted Partnership

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I am delighted to visit New Delhi for the Japan-India Annual Summit at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

This visit to India — my first as Prime Minister — coincides with the 20th anniversary of the first of a series of



annual alternating visits the leaders of Japan and India have been making to each other's country. Frequent exchanges between the leaders not only serve to reinforce the robust bilateral relationship but also provide an opportunity for candid discussions on how to address the challenges facing the international community in these uncertain and testing times. It is a great honor to carry forward this baton, following Prime Minister Modi's visit to Japan last Aug.

Since Japan and India elevated their bilateral relationship to a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" in 2014, concrete cooperation has progressed across a wide range of fields including security, the economy, and people-to-people exchanges. As former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe once stated, "A strong India is good for Japan and a strong Japan is good for India." I am firmly convinced that, by leveraging each other's strengths and becoming "more resilient and prosperous together", we will serve the interests of both nations.

It is here in India that the very concept of today's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" first took root. "The different streams, having



A Buddhist temple in Kyoto, one of the many in the country, bears testimony to the cultural and historical ties between Japan and India

their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea." Prime Minister Abe, in his speech to the Indian Parliament, quoted these words of Swami Vivekananda in declaring that we should view the Pacific and Indian Oceans as one and that it is our shared responsibility to pursue freedom and prosperity by cooperating with like-minded countries. This vision remains as relevant as ever, and there is a compelling need for Japan and India to cooperate in realising this goal.

One of the areas to which I attach particular importance at this summit is the strengthening of the strategic relationship between our countries. I wish to deepen cooperation in the field of security and strengthen our capacity to navigate the uncertain international landscape. In addition, we must work together to enhance the autonomy and resilience of countries in vulnerable positions so that they are never forced into choices under coercion from other states — this is the essence of the "Updated FOIP" I set forth in May. A genuinely free and open region is not one where only the great powers enjoy

freedom but one where every nation is able to chart its own course of its own free will, unswayed by external coercion. This is the true nature of FOIP.

I am convinced that this vision resonates profoundly with India's MAHASAGAR initiative. This initiative, advocated by Prime Minister Modi, regards the ocean not as an arena for hegemony but as a shared commons that underpins the stability and growth of the entire region. India is a maritime nation that has taken concrete action to provide regional stability and support the resilience of countries in the area. It is for this very reason that India is an indispensable partner for Japan in the joint realisation of FOIP, and I look forward to shaping together an international order founded upon these principles.

Cooperation grounded in FOIP, India's Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI), and MAHASAGAR is already in evidence. The "Industrial Value Chain" concept, for instance, seeks to enhance connectivity from Assam to various parts of North-East India and Bangladesh, thereby enabling access to the Indian

Ocean. Through Japan's ODA, infrastructure developments such as regional roads and bridges, including the Dhubri-Phulbari Bridge, as well as Matarbari Port in Bangladesh, will extend industrial value chains not only within North-East but also across India and onward to ASEAN and beyond. Our valued friends like Nepal and Bhutan will benefit as well.

When PM Modi visited Japan last Aug, both countries announced the "Japan-India Joint Vision for the Next Decade". As we work toward the realisation of this vision, and taking full account of the international situation that has unfolded over the past year, I intend to put forward concrete cooperation initiatives, especially in the pressing areas of economic security, energy security, and emerging technologies such as AI.

Cultural and people-to-people exchanges, rooted in the historical and cultural ties between Japan and India, are equally important. In my hometown of Nara, Buddhist culture, which traces its origins to India, still vividly lives on. I trust the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and India next year will serve to give further impetus to such exchanges.

The relationship between Japan and India is now a strategically aligned trusted partnership. I look forward to wide-ranging discussions with PM Modi on how best to advance our relationship for future generations as we aspire to become "more resilient and prosperous together".

The writer is PM of Japan