

“What is Certain in an Age of Uncertainty”
Keynote Address by Ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu
At DPG International Conference “Emerging Realignment in Asia”
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Ambassador H.K. Singh,
Mr Siddharth Shriram.
Distinguished guests and speakers,

It is a great honor for me to deliver the keynote address at this important and timely conference.

I would like to first congratulate and express my sincere appreciation to the Delhi Policy Group for the excellent arrangements for this seminar, and for their hospitality. I would also like to recognize the great efforts of DPG members who have worked hard to prepare for this seminar, particularly in conceptualizing its substance.

I am sure this seminar, which is aptly titled “Emerging Realignment in Asia”, will provide us with useful insights into the source of uncertainty and unpredictability of this precarious world.

Today, I will dwell on the sense of “certainty” in an age of uncertainty. As we all know, this is a critical moment for Asia and the world at large. Every day we hear about the “uncertainty” or “unpredictability” of the world affairs. Be it BREXIT, South China Sea, or the ballistic missile launch by North Korea... we never know what will happen tomorrow.

In my nearly 40 years as a diplomat, I haven't felt the kind of unprecedented degree of changes in international situations as witnessed in recent years, and it's further escalating.

Nevertheless, I confess that I feel very happy about my current job. This is because what I commit here every day is something I can feel “certain” in this age of uncertainty. That is: Strengthening Japan-India partnership; Supporting Japanese business in India; Forging ties between the people of the two countries. These are sincere efforts to create “certainty” which the people of the two countries can rely on towards the future.

To put it in other words, for the very reason that we are living in an age of uncertainty, Japan and India cherish our relationship, the relationship between the

oldest and the largest democracy in Asia. We share civilizational links, fundamental values and strategic interests, as well as respect for the rule of law and liberal international order.

Therefore today, as the Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of India, I will talk about 5 statements that I believe are certain in this increasingly changing world.

1. The Indo-Pacific region will be the centre of gravity in the years to come.

This is the first “certain” point I wish to make today. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific region is blessed with opportunities encompassing the fast growing region including India, and Africa with full potentials. This is where the magic of the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa should take place. At the same time, this region faces several challenges including attempts to change the status quo by force and influx of radical elements, to name a few.

Prime Minister Abe’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” is Japan’s response to such challenges and opportunities. It was announced at TICADVI or the 6th Tokyo International Conference on African Development last August in Kenya. In essence, this strategy regards the Pacific region and the Indian Ocean region as one big strategic domain (Indo-Pacific), and aims to improve inter- and intra- region connectivity and to promote fundamental values such as freedom, openness and rule of law. The strategy is also a statement of intent that Japan is ready to play a greater role in the Indian Ocean region with the banner of “Proactive Contribution to Peace.”

In his speech, Prime Minister Abe said, and I quote: “Japan bears the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion, and making it prosperous.” “Let us make this stretch that is from Asia to Africa a main artery for growth and prosperity.”

As you must be aware, we can find close affinity between this Strategy and Prime Minister Modi’s “Act East” Policy. In fact, our two Prime Ministers have “recognized the potential for deeper bilateral cooperation and synergy between” our respective Strategy and Policy during Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Japan last November.

Japan and India are conscious of the common responsibilities we must bear in the maintenance of the liberal order in this part of the world and it is only natural that our national strategies converge.

2. Strong India is Japan's interest. Strong Japan is India's interest.

We've been saying this for nearly a decade. Recently an American official used a very similar phrase to describe the US-India relationship but I think it is our original creation.

Prime Minister Modi said that Japan and India enjoy spiritual ties, and there are great complementarities between the two countries. Japan has capital, innovation and technologies. India has vast human resources especially talented young people. India is now going through a very dynamic economic growth. We are hoping that this growth will continue for the years to come.

Our two leaders also enjoy mutual respect and confidence. They meet regularly and have visited each other's countries many times. We have the Special Strategic and Global Partnership. I think our partnership is the only one which is special, strategic and global at the same time. Every time I join meetings between the two Prime Ministers, I feel that they are developing a closer relationship, and the degree of shared strategic views and insight between them is unprecedented. At the same time, Our Partnership has generated tangible outcomes such as high speed railway and civil nuclear cooperation, among others. I really feel that the relationship has entered into a new era.

I would like to highlight some of our bilateral and trilateral cooperation. One is connectivity agenda – not only connectivity between India and neighbouring countries but also connectivity within India. We are very happy to cooperate with the Indian Government to support projects in India's northeast region to connect this very important region with other parts of India and with neighbouring countries. We are also working very closely with the Indian Government to support connectivity projects in countries such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh among others.

Defence and Security cooperation is also important. On Wednesday, Foreign Secretary Jaishankar and Defence Secretary Mohan Kumar and their Japanese counterparts, Akiba and Manabe met in Tokyo and had the fourth "2+2" Sub-cabinet Meeting. They discussed a wide range of areas of cooperation including defence equipment and technology, counter-terrorism, maritime security, peace keeping operations, cyber and space.

Trilateral cooperation with the United States, Australia or even quadrilateral cooperation is also making a progress. Japan, India and the United States have started Director General level discussion in 2011. I led a delegation for four times since its

inception. Under the President Trump's administration, we would like to start trilateral cooperation as soon as possible to deepen our joint commitment in this region. We also have trilateral Malabar Exercise. The dates of this year's joint exercise will be announced in due course.

This leads to my third statement of "certainty"

3. The unshakable Japan-US Alliance remains the cornerstone of peace, prosperity and freedom in the Asia-Pacific region.

This is an excerpt from the first Joint Statement which the Trump Administration issued with a foreign government, i.e. on the occasion of Prime Minister Abe's visit to the United States last month.

I am aware that there may be a certain skepticism about the continuity of the United States presence and commitment to Asia under President Trump.

From Japan's perspective, it was very important to speak and share our thoughts at the earliest with the new U.S. administration. After the election, my colleagues in Washington DC worked day and night to realize the meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President-elect Trump in N.Y. as well as the two-day summit in DC and Florida last month.

One of the outcomes was the very robust Joint Statement about our alliance I mentioned earlier.

Japan and India alone cannot make this region peaceful and profitable. We need countries like the United States. During the two days Prime Minister Abe spent together with President Trump, they had very extensive and wide-ranging discussions to include not only security issues but also economic agenda. I am sure that they formed a bond of friendship, trust and confidence during the course of two day meetings.

Japan-US alliance will continue to be a linchpin and cornerstone of our relationship and of the entire security and safety of Asia-Pacific region. I can easily say that this is common goods for this region. As the Joint Statement says, "The United States and Japan will further enhance cooperation with allies and partners in the region." India is the first country which should be mentioned.

The document also says that “The two leaders underscored the importance of maintaining a maritime order based on international law, including freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea. The United States and Japan oppose any attempt to assert maritime claims through the use of intimidation, coercion or force. The United States and Japan also call on countries concerned to avoid actions that would escalate tensions in the South China Sea, including the militarization of outposts, and to act in accordance with international law.” I think this is a very clear and important message to the world.

With regard to North Korea, the two countries strongly urged North Korea to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. However, on February 12, when the two leaders were staying in Florida, North Korea launched a ballistic missile which had a range of 500 km. The press conference was organized at midnight of the day. At the conference, Prime Minister Abe said very clearly that this launch of a ballistic missile was intolerable and North Korea should strictly abide by the UNSC resolutions. President Trump said “I just want everybody to understand and fully know that the United States of America stands behind Japan, which is a great ally, 100 percent.”

After this, North Korea did it again. They launched four ballistic missiles on Monday. They implied that the potential target was US Forces in Japan. Indeed, we are facing a very real and imminent threat. Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, will be visiting Japan next week. I’m sure we will have in-depth discussions to address this issue.

To sum up, we had a good start with the Trump administration and we were reassured about US commitment to the region. We will continue to work with them on this assurance. I heard that Prime Minister Modi and President Trump had a very good telephone conversation. Based on that, we would like to have more robust trilateral cooperation between Japan, India and the United States.

My fourth point is:

4. Japan for the rule of law. Asia for the rule of law. And the rule of law for all of us.

This is the title of Prime Minister Abe’s keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2014. I was the Director General responsible for this speech which emphasized the critical importance of the rule of law for the coexistence of big countries and small countries as well as the continued prosperity of the future generations.

Nowadays we talk about “balance of power” much more frequently. The ‘realist’ way to look at the world seems prevailing. Today’s seminar addresses ‘regional powerplay’, ‘new Asian great game’, ‘retreat of globalisation and Asian geo-

economics.' I think all of those are the reflection of the reality and something which must be discussed extensively.

At the same time, I would say, as classic theories of international relations argue, we cannot neglect the impact of values, ideologies and laws in international affairs. Even in the age of the "Emerging Realignments in Asia," I believe this simple statement should be taken for granted, i.e. "all countries must observe international law".

International law prescribes the order, particularly order governing the seas. Its history is very long, stretching back to the days of ancient Greece. By Roman times, the seas were already kept open to all, with personal possession and partitioning of the sea prohibited.

Ever since what is known as the Age of Exploration, large numbers of people have come together by crossing the seas, and marine-based commerce has connected the globe. The principle of freedom on the high seas came to be established, and the seas became the foundation for human prosperity.

As history moved on, the wisdom and the practical experiences of a great many people involved with the sea, accumulated into common rules. This is what we now know as the international law of the seas.

This law was not created by any particular country or countries, nor was it the product of some sort of group. Instead, it is the product of our own wisdom, cultivated over a great many years for the well-being and the prosperity of all humankind.

Today, the benefits for each of us lie in the seas from the Pacific to the Indian Oceans being made thoroughly open, as a place of freedom and peace.

All of us should find one common benefit in keeping our oceans and skies as global commons, where the rule of law is respected throughout.

Prime Minister Abe proposed in his speech mentioned earlier the "three principles" of the rule of law at sea.

The first principle is that states shall make and clarify their claims based on international law.

The second is that states shall not use force or coercion in trying to drive their claims.

The third principle is that states shall seek to settle disputes by peaceful means.

These principles are very simple. And yet they must be emphasized. India's adherence to the rule of law is worthy of admiration. One example is India's compliance with an arbitral decision regarding a longstanding sea boundary dispute with Bangladesh. India accepted the ruling which was not entirely in their favour. People around the world praised India for its sense of responsibility for the peace and prosperity of the region.

Japan will continue to work with India and other like-minded countries to see a day when all of us individually uphold these principles exhaustively.

Finally, I will conclude my remarks with the fifth statement.

5. Japan always keeps its promises, standing ready as a partner for India to become a Leading Power.

I don't think this statement needs any explanations. What I have spoken today supports this statement. Japan and India are best partners to navigate together in this unpredictable world. They complement, stimulate and enrich each other. This is a certain formula for growth and prosperity in years to come.

Thank you very much for your kind attention. I hope the seminar will be a great success