

Indian Prime Minister's Visit Special

Mutual cooperation bolsters ties across various sectors

SANJAY KUMAR VERMA
AMBASSADOR OF INDIA TO JAPAN



2022 marks two milestones: the 70th anniversary of the establishment of India-Japan diplomatic relations and 75th anniversary of India's independence. In the past seven decades, our two nations have elevated the bilateral relationship to a "special strategic and global partnership."

The recent meeting between our prime ministers in March in New Delhi highlighted the vast canvas of our partnership, expanding across all conceivable domains of diplomatic interactions. During the meeting, our leaders emphasized their commitment to working in tandem toward a peaceful, stable and prosperous world built on a rules-based international order. They also reaffirmed their common vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. The meeting also highlighted our shared commitment to the economic security and prosperity of our peoples through a robust framework of economic cooperation; tackling the issue of climate change through the India-Japan Clean Energy Partnership; cooperation toward reliable, resilient and efficient supply chains in the region; promotion of industrial cooperation; and focus on infrastructure development. In this context, the announcement of the shared intention to realize \$5 trillion in public and private investment as well as financing from Japan to India in the next five years, holds great significance.

Japan is India's key partner in the realization of our vision of "SAGAR — Security

and Growth for All in the Region." Our convergent stand on the Indo-Pacific is quintessential to creating a rule-based order to enhance peace and security in the region. We look forward to working with Japan on the trade, connectivity and maritime transport pillar of the "Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative" of India to implement concrete initiatives. Our third-country cooperation holds immense strategic importance. The recent announcement of the "Japan-India Initiative for Sustainable Development of the Northeastern Region of India" paves the way for further contributions to economic development and enhanced connectivity in the region.

As key partners under "the Quad," India and Japan are cementing their partnership in critical areas, such as COVID-19 responses, maritime security, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and more. The upcoming visit of Honorable Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi to Japan to participate in the Quad leaders' summit will demonstrate our resolute commitment to the objectives of the Quad.

With a vision to be a \$5 trillion economy, India is building a strong foundation of manufacturing, services, agriculture and digital technology infrastructure. India's economic engagement with Japan continues to be a central pillar of our special strategic and global partnership. We value Japan's role in India's transformational journey across all domains. The establishment of the "Japan-India Industrial Competitiveness Partnership" allows us to further promote industrial cooperation between the two countries, including in the areas of micro, small and medium enterprises, manufacturing and supply chains. With India implementing a host of structural and regulatory reforms that have led



Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi

to significant improvement in ease of doing business, we hope that Japanese companies will benefit from opportunities created by these reforms. Efforts are underway to synergize India's demographic dividend and Japan's capital and technology to realize the true potential of the India-Japan economic partnership for a prosperous future.

We see Japan as a trusted partner of India as reflected through our decades-long partnership, which has strengthened significantly in the past few years. We see huge potential for India and Japan to combine their strengths and competitiveness to coinvent, cocreate and coproduce. Some key sectors for India-Japan collaboration include infrastructure development; automotive and mobility; electronic system design and manufacturing; new and renewable energy, including green hydrogen and ammonia; the food industry; health care; research and development; startups; steel; and new emerging and stra-



The Ganges River flows past Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh state. EMBASSY OF INDIA

teleg technologies.

Growing cooperation under the Japan-India Digital Partnership through promotion of joint projects for digital transformation, cooperation for skill development initiatives, and collaboration on the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies are encouraging signs of flourishing ties in technology. Our countries also have robust cooperation in the field of information and communication technology. Further opportunities for cooperation exist in such strategic areas as 5G and "beyond 5G," Open RAN (radio access networks), telecom network security, submarine cable systems, quantum communications and nanotechnology. We would like to work with Japan for international norm-setting in the areas of critical and emerging technologies.

Defense and security cooperation has emerged as one of the most important pillars of our bilateral partnership and an

important factor in ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. The momentum in our defense and security partnership has been sustained despite the pandemic through various dialogue mechanisms, high-level exchanges and exercises between the two sides. Defense and security ties were further cemented with the recent operationalization of the Agreement Concerning Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services. We look forward to further enhancing our defense equipment and technology cooperation.

India-Japan cooperation on thematic international issues, including reforms to the United Nations to make it better reflect contemporary realities, is a key dimension of our partnership. As India emerged as one of the major suppliers of vaccines and critical pharmaceutical products globally during the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan's support in the initial days of the crisis, as well as its cooperation in vaccine manu-

facturing, demonstrated our shared commitment to taking on global challenges together. We also look forward to Japan's cooperation as we assume the chair of the Group of 20 in 2023.

People-to-people ties between India and Japan remain the bedrock of our partnership. From Buddhism to the growing popularity of yoga and ayurveda, Indian traditions and practices for the holistic well-being of society have always found their ways into the hearts of our Japanese friends. Measures such as the implementation of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers plan, operationalization of the Specified Skilled Worker system and expansion of Japan-India Institutes for Manufacturing and Japanese Endowed Courses would add to momentum to people-to-people ties.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere wishes for the prosperity of the people of Japan and for the continued strengthening of the India-Japan partnership.

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Modi's method: 'Love all, serve all'

RYUKO HIRA
CHAIRMAN OF THE INDIAN COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION JAPAN



Even in the severe situation posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, India has proved that the country is resilient, contrary to many negative predictions.

In numbers alone, India's achievement in the effort to control the pandemic is overwhelming.

More than 960 million people have been vaccinated against the virus across 327,000 centers serviced by more than a million health workers. More than 64% of its nearly 1.4 billion people have received two doses through nearly 14 million vaccination sessions. 75% of them in rural and hard-to-reach areas. India has administered more than 1.53 billion doses, more than the combined total achieved by the United States, Brazil, Indonesia and Japan; only China has higher numbers (according to data available as of March). The speed of administering those doses has been impressive — from 100 million to 1 billion from April to November 2021 — an average of 5.75 million doses daily (United Nations Development Program, April 2022). A key factor in India's success is Cowin, a digital platform initiated by the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is a cloud-based system that facilitates registration, immunizations and appointments while issuing digital vaccine certificates. The COVID-19 pandemic has also reaffirmed the importance of India's health-sector infrastructure.

In 2014, India had 387 medical colleges. In the past seven years, this number has gone up to 596, for an increase of 54%. In the same year, there were around 82,000 undergraduate and postgraduate medical seats. This number has since jumped to around 148,000 seats, an increase of about 80%. In 2014 again, there were only seven All India Institutes of Medical Sciences in the country. Now the number of AIIMS approved stands at 22. At the same time, Modi has implemented various reforms to

make medical education more transparent. Regulations for setting up medical colleges and hospitals have been liberalized.

In the coming years, India is envisioned as being the go-to destination for affordable high-quality medical care. India has many assets and resources needed to become a global medical hub.

Today, the world has also taken note of Indian practices that further enhance wellness, including yoga, ayurveda and meditation.

The problem of India's doctor shortage is well-known, but there hasn't been enough efforts to address this problem.

I would say Modi has had such excellent courage in leading India into better shape in this battle also, based on his firm faith in the Indian philosophy of Sanatana Dharma. History shows that fighting against vested interests and toward transformation has often brought on tragedies — like those that befell the Kennedy brothers and Mahatma Gandhi, to name a few.

"Perhaps vested interests also did not let previous governments take the right decisions. And, access to medical education remained an issue. Ever since we have taken office, our government has worked to address this gap," Modi said in January. Along with the medical field, many varied reforms were brought in, and India is leading the world in the field of technological advancement. In just the past four years, the number of Unified Payments Interface transactions has grown by over 70 times. Rupees 110 lakh crore (about \$135 billion) are being spent on a National Infrastructure Pipeline. India is also actively working to ensure every village has high-speed internet connectivity.

Why does Modi have such unwavering faith in his mission? I am convinced that is because he has a deep understanding of the ancient Indian philosophy of Sanatana Dharma, with strong faith in the teachings of the Indian saints, such as Swami Vivekananda and Satyha Sai Baba.

Sai Baba repeatedly emphasized the axiom of "Love all, serve all" through affordable and yet excellent medical service, especially for the underprivileged.

Recalling Vivekananda's iconic 1893 speech at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, which beautifully demonstrated the salience of Indian culture, Modi said in January: "The spirit of his speech has the potential to create a more just, prosperous, and inclusive planet."

"He was a life devoted to national regeneration. He has motivated many youngsters to work towards nation-building. Let us keep working together to fulfill the dreams he had for our nation."

Since Buddhism was introduced from India to Japan in the sixth century, Indian philosophy and culture have been deeply cultivated in Japan.

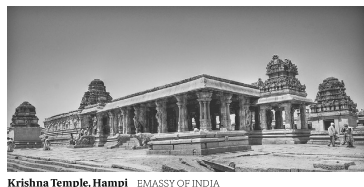
Since then India and Japan have created a strong and resilient mutually complementary relationship of culture, economics and politics with each other.

"Okakura Tenshin is the symbol of Asianism. In his book, 'Ideals of the East,' the very first sentence, this is one important thing I want to tell you. The very first sentence is 'Asia is one.' Okakura invited Swami Vivekananda to Japan and also sent him a check of 300 rupees. He came to Calcutta and met Swami Vivekananda on first February 1902 and both went to both Gaya together," Modi said in 2015.

Established in 1921, the Indian Commerce and Industry Association Japan serves as an apex body for friendship, goodwill, economic and cultural exchanges and mutual understanding between India and Japan.

With profound gratitude to The Japan Times and its readers, I offer my hearty welcome to Modi and the members of his delegation to Japan.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.



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A health worker vaccinates a man during a mobile vaccination campaign against COVID-19 in Banjul, Gambia. REUTERS

In Africa, delayed COVID shots no longer wanted

EDWARD MCALLISTER AND COOPER INVEEN
REUTERS

It's noisy inside the Mamprobi clinic in Accra as kids clamor over their mothers while they wait to get their measles vaccines. Outside, an area reserved for COVID-19 shots is empty. A health worker leans back in his chair and scrolls on a tablet.

One woman, waiting to get her daughter inoculated, is fully aware of the dangers of measles: the high fever, the rash, the risk to eyesight. But COVID-19? She has never heard of a single case.

The perception that COVID-19 doesn't pose a significant threat is common in Ghana's capital and elsewhere in Africa, whose youthful populace has suffered a fraction of the casualties that have driven vaccine uptake in places like Europe and America, where the disease tore through elderly populations.

"I mean, Ghana has been spared up until now doing just what we're doing," said Nana Kwaku Addo, a 28-year-old construction worker in Accra. "I've heard people say it's common sense to get vaccinated, but what about all the other countries that have taken it and still put people in lockdown?"

Only 17% of Africa's 1.3 billion population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19 — in part because richer nations hoarded supply last year, when global demand was greatest, to the chagrin of African nations desperate for international supplies.

Now though, as doses finally arrive in force in the continent, inoculation rates are falling. The number of shots administered dropped 35% in March, World Health Organization data shows, erasing a 23% rise seen in February. People are less afraid now. Misinformation about vaccines has festered.

"If we had gotten vaccines earlier, this kind of thing wouldn't happen so often," Christina Odei, the COVID-19 team leader at the Mamprobi clinic, said of the low uptake in Accra. "Initially everyone really wanted it, but we didn't have the vaccines."

That worries public health specialists who say that leaving such a large population unvaccinated increases the risk of new variants emerging on the continent before spreading to regions such as Europe just as governments there abandon mask mandates and travel restrictions. In a sign of possible

perils to come, cases of two omicron subvariants have shot up in recent weeks in South Africa, the continent's worst-hit nation, prompting officials there to warn of a fifth wave of infections.

To boost uptake, countries are focusing on mobile vaccination drives, in which teams visit communities and offer doses on-site.

However many African countries can't afford the vehicles, fuel, cool boxes and salaries needed for a national campaign, according to more than a dozen health officials, workers and experts across several countries. Meanwhile, donor funding has been slow to arrive, they said.

Rahab Mwaniki, the Africa coordinator for the People's Vaccine Alliance advocacy group, said it was a "big ask" for Africans to prioritize getting COVID-19 vaccines to help protect others around the world when infection rates at home were low.

"Many people say, 'you didn't help us.' They feel like the West never really supported them," she added, stressing that Africans should still get vaccinated to protect themselves and others from new variants.

Reaching out

Many African countries are long familiar with deadly diseases. Millions fall ill each year with tuberculosis.

Malaria kills hundreds of thousands annually, mostly children under five. Ebola springs up periodically in Democratic Republic of Congo.

West Africa is facing its worst food crisis on record driven by conflict, drought, and the impact of the war in Ukraine on food prices.

For many people COVID-19, which carries a far greater risk of severe illness and death for the elderly, is not the most pressing concern. The median age in Africa is 20, the lowest of all regions, and about half the 43 in Europe and 39 in North America, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.N. data.

"Let me ask you one question," said Mawule, a businessman in Accra. "Is COVID the biggest problem in Ghana right now? You think it's a bigger problem than inflation, the way people suffer for fuel?"

Now the continent has too many COVID-19 vaccine doses. Vaccination sites lie empty; millions of unused vials are piling up, and one of Africa's first COVID-19 vaccine producers is still waiting for an order.

At the Mamprobi clinic, health workers in

bright yellow vests have resorted to proactive measures.

They fan out across the busy market stalls and stores in the area, one with a cool box slung over his shoulder containing COVID-19 vaccine shots, asking wary shoppers if they would like to receive an injection.

After an hour toiling in the baking sun, the team had administered just four doses.

No money, no jingles

To boost uptake, countries including Ghana, Gambia, Sierra Leone and Kenya are focusing on mobile vaccination campaigns that visit communities. But finances are stretched.

Misinformation is tough to unlearn on a continent where big pharmaceutical companies have in the past run dubious clinical trials resulting in deaths. Health workers say they need funds to counter false rumors.

Ghana, one of Africa's most developed economies and one applauded for its early inoculation surge, has a funding gap of \$30 million to carry out another campaign, according to the World Bank. Irregular power supply jeopardizes the vaccine cold chain. Doses expire.

"We don't have any problem with the number of vaccines anymore. It's only a problem with uptake and the money to get those vaccines out to people," said Joseph Dwomor Ankrab, who manages the country's COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

Niger, where only 6% of the population is fully vaccinated, lacks enough cold storage for vaccines in its vast rural areas, or motorbikes to distribute them, according to the World Bank.

There have been some successes: Ethiopia has vaccinated 15 million people in a nationwide push since mid-February, for example. Yet uptake is "abysmally low" in the tiny state of Gambia, said Mustapha Bittaye, director of health services.

The African Union wants Gambia to take delivery of more than 200,000 doses, but the country is still working through an old batch and doesn't need more, Bittaye said.

In Zambia, where coverage is 11%, officials are planning outreach campaigns but worry they won't be able to cover the cost of feeding doctors working far from home or for their transport.

In Sierra Leone, where 14% of the population is fully vaccinated, radio stations sometimes refuse to broadcast the government's pro-vaccine messages because of unpaid invoices, said Solomon Jamiru, the country's COVID-19 spokesman.

A World Bank fund for vaccine purchases and rollouts has sent \$3.6 billion to sub-Saharan Africa. Of that, only \$520 million has been spent. Amit Dar, the bank's human development director for Eastern and Southern Africa, said outdated health systems had struggled to absorb the funding.

Health experts say more funding was needed at the start of the pandemic for logistics and training.

"The fact that we didn't invest heavily a year or 18 months ago is a big part of what we are seeing now," said Emily Janoch, a senior director at aid group Care USA. "These are the consequences of earlier failures."

A health worker sits in a clinic in Adukrom, Ghana. The perception that COVID-19 doesn't pose a significant threat is common in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa. REUTERS

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