

Two Democracies Meet at Sea: For a Better and Safer Asia

Remarks of Shinzo Abe, Former Prime Minister of Japan, at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) and Japan Institute for National Fundamentals (JINF) joint seminar, 20 September, 2011, New Delhi, India

Thank you so much for inviting us to this wonderful occasion. And thank you very much for having me as one of the speakers.

Now my friends, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I must start by saying how pleased I am to be back again in New Delhi and speaking with you.

My thanks go to all the people, every one of you, from both sides, who made it happen.

As you see, those of us from Japan are a mixed group of people, from the LDP, and from the DPJ.

About the new administration that took power earlier this month in Tokyo, I can tell you, there is no consensus among us.

But there is an absolute consensus that we can aim for something very big in the India-Japan relationships, which is why all of us are glad and excited to be here and learning more about India.

Personally, ever since I left India last time in 2007, I have long wanted to come back.

I have missed one or two opportunities in the meantime, but I am back, finally.

I am glad, because I have always felt the responsibility to pursue the goals I set out four years ago in my speech, Confluence of the Two Seas.

More urgently, I wanted to come back and extend my gratitude, on behalf of the Japanese, to the Indian people for the help you gave us after the tsunami.

When word came to us that the Indian government would send its rescue team to Japan, and that it would be the first ever overseas dispatch for the team, my wife Akie and I were deeply touched.

"We must thank the Indian people," we said to one another.

When the rescue team folded camp, their leader told the media that they had learned from the Japanese as much as they had helped the victims.

The courage of the Japanese, he said, had made a lasting impression on them.

Having heard such kind words, once again, my heart was warmed.

So, thank you all very much for the support you gave us when my country was suffering tremendous hardship. You were with us, side-by-side, when Japan was down.

But, no less importantly, I have two reasons to celebrate, and do so with you.

Firstly, as I promised four years ago, our two countries are now bound by the comprehensive economic partnership.

Let us take a moment and applaud for the long way we have come in such a short time.

I know that your diplomatic missions in Tokyo and Osaka have issued more than 10,000 three-year work visas for Japanese corporate workers in the last two years alone.

That is a very encouraging leap. And let us hope for more.

Indeed the Japanese need your market and human power; the

Indians need our technology and investment.

Prime Minister Singh and I had no doubt that Japan-India relationship has the largest potential for development of any bilateral relationship, anywhere in the world.

We were also in perfect agreement that "a strong India is in the best interest of Japan, and a strong Japan is in the best interest of India."

For our economic cooperation, the sky is the only limit, and once again let us jointly celebrate that both of us have made a wonderful start.

Secondly, over the last four years, India and Japan have taken a big stride on the front of community building.

My own principle is that when we build a community in Asia, maritime democracies should lead the pack.

It is because Asia is bound only by the sea. It is also because Asia represents young and growing democracies.

That is why India as the biggest democracy, and Japan as the oldest in the region, are always obliged to jointly play a leading role, hence the title of my speech four years ago at the Central Hall.

That is also why, now with the United States fully on board, both of us must

celebrate that the East Asia Summit has gained more and more importance for the free, open, safe and strong Asian community.

This is also the most dynamic region in the world.

Vietnam is growing fast. Indonesia has made a huge stride for democracy.

And yet, ladies and gentlemen, Japan remains, and will continue to remain, strong and vibrant, honest and sincere, and therefore a country you can always count on.

So here, my request number one to you for today.

Let us work even more closely together, with the U.S., Australia and other maritime democracies, to invest into building a robust, open, liberal, safe and stable, EAS-led Asia.

Please remember. No other duo can make an alliance that is as natural as India and Japan. That is because there is mutual affinity between us.

This affection dates back to the days your great poet and philosopher Tagore was alive. I know you are remembering him once again this year.

You may find it interesting that in my country, the translated anthology of his poems has never gone out of print.

Strategically speaking, India and Japan are natural allies because we share so much in common.

Of critical importance, we regard the sea lines of commerce and communication as a common good that is vitally important.

No political regime other than open democracy should be responsible for safeguarding the common good.

India and Japan are both freedom loving nations. Both are seasoned liberal democracies. And both take pride in their navies.

Let me tell you again, as natural allies, India and Japan must work even harder to keep our great maritime asset open, free, and safe.

Hence my request number two for today.

Please let your navy meet the Japanese naval force more often at sea.

The populist government of the Democratic Party of Japan washed their hands of the refuelling activity in the Indian Ocean.

Luckily though, our proud navy is still engaged in anti-piracy, off Somalia.

Let us both be creative. You may want to send your naval ships whenever the Japanese navy passes across the Indian Ocean either on their way for duty, or on their way home, so they can perform simple exercises.

Our two navies can exchange flag signals. They can speak with each other using traditional light signals.

Even to run in formation can make a good exercise. It will not cost us a lot. It will not cost you much either.

The Americans may watch us performing small exercises, which is OK with all of us. Even the Chinese may fly over us to see what is going on, which is more than welcome.

My country is now running a small base in Djibouti.

Although small, it is the first military base Japan has ever had since the end of the war in a foreign country.

I am certain that everyone at the base would be glad if you could send them your navy officers.

Your gorgeous stars from Bollywood would be even more welcome.

On our part, the Japanese navy can be much more creative, too.

Very few officers of our navy have ever visited your joint base on the Andaman Nicobar islands.

I doubt many of them are even aware that those islands belong to India.

That being the case, Japanese naval ships could from time to time make visits to the islands.

Of course we should take pictures and movies about the exercises at

sea, your visits to Djibouti, and our calls to the Andaman Nicobar and publish them to the world because allies should not be shy about such things, and for alliance management, publicity counts.

May I say the following as a friend of India?

You plan to have an ocean-going navy that is capable of operating as many as three aircraft carriers and their battle groups.

India is the biggest democracy. You are more entitled than anyone else in the region to make the best of your naval assets to help keep the ocean safe, and our sea lines stable.

You can assure the Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, Indonesians, Australians and the Americans, if not the Chinese, once you have chosen to use your naval assets for the "confluence of the two seas," and for the freedom and prosperity therein.

I am saying this with a view that the United States is about to undergo a period of financial stress.

You may have very mixed emotions about America. So do the Japanese.

I know very well that your parliament has never, ever, failed to hold a moment of silence each and every year for the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for which I am thankful from the bottom of my heart.

It is equally true, though, that the safety and stability of the sea lines of commerce that the U.S. has provided across the oceans lifted all of us from wartime devastation and poverty, starting with Japan from the 1950s, Korea and Taiwan from the 1980s, and China and India for the last two decades or so.

Unlike in Europe, it is in the Indo-Pacific region where the theory of "hegemonic stability" fully holds.

My concern is that the hegemon may get skinny and its muscle weaker.

I shall put it the following way.

Why don't we let "Popeye" eat spinach for a while.

In the meantime, let us India and Japan work together, with the Americans, so that there will be no strategic void.

And we must always remember, when both of us, India and Japan, work hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, the Indonesians will join us, not to mention all other freedom loving nations.

It is therefore vital for our two navies to work together more.

Before moving on to the next topic, may I say, that I should like to pay tribute to the people with the Indian Navy who have continued their bilateral naval exercises with the U.S., which has given a great deal of trust to both parties over the years.

It was a pity that the Japanese Navy could not join it this last spring, as it was right after the earthquake.

I believe many of you should like to see more such trilateral exercises.

My friends, ladies and gentlemen,

I cannot end my remarks without making reference to my grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, the Japanese prime minister who made the first post-war official visit to your country.

As a young boy, seated on his knee, I would hear him telling me that Prime Minister Nehru introduced him to the biggest audience he had ever seen in his lifetime, of a hundred thousand people.

He told me that it was India that came forward before any other country to accept the ODA Japan wanted to extend as a proud member of the international community.

For all that, he remained deeply thankful throughout his life.

When he was young, my grandfather dreamed of building Manchuria as an ideally governed industrial country.

As a member of the wartime cabinet, he was arrested by the U.S. Occupation Force.

So he was a man whose mixed emotions toward America ran deep, perhaps deeper than anyone else of the day.

Still, as a leader of a poor country that was only about to grow, he knew he had to be pragmatic, which is why he had no doubt whatsoever that America was the first, second, and the third most important country for Japan.

But to establish good relations with America, and as a result to amend the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty to make Japan safer, he did not choose to go to Washington, D.C. directly, and beg for anything.

That was not in his genes.

Instead, he chose to come to India before setting foot on the soil of America. Why?

As a pragmatic politician he knew that India would give him some political capital.

India did indeed give my grandfather a great deal.

When he met later in Washington, D.C. with Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon, he was more confident, knowing that Japan was not alone but backed by India, already the biggest democracy in the world.

Now, my friends, ladies and gentlemen, China will remain both

an opportunity and a risk for a long time to come.

America, meanwhile, is destined to become weaker in relative terms.

But let us not be confused. Let us not jump onto the wrong bandwagon and choose a wrong partner.

In America, we see the oldest democracy. In China we see an autocracy both the oldest and the newest as it is still in the making.

There is no question which side we, Japan and India, should take.

Yet in times of financial challenge, the United States needs us, as much as we the Asians need America.

Hence the third and last request I am humbly making to you.

You are a proud people. You are also realists. In building your economy, you have already come farther than Japan had in the late 1950s, when my grandfather was in office.

You can shelve your America-shyness for a moment and let your realist-pragmatist side prevail. After all, America dropped no bomb on you.

And what is the best way for you to do that?

Use us.

Use Japan.

We are ready and willing to be used by India to enhance your ties with America.

In the end, Japan has been America's ally for sixty consecutive years.

That is to say, longer than one fourth of the entire history of the USA.

There have been good times and bad times in the bilateral relationship.

The alliance has weathered stormy times, and has recently been strengthened further, after the tsunami.

I have made three requests in my remarks so far. Let us together build an open, liberal, free and vibrant Asian community by committing ourselves more in the EAS.

Please make the best use of your naval assets, which is my second request, so that sooner rather than later, Japan's navy and the Indian navy can become seamlessly interconnected.

Third and finally, please make the best use of your friend, Japan, in order for India to widen its strategic position in general, and to deepen your ties with America in particular.

Four years on from my last visit, I see India still growing at a remarkable tempo.

The buzz I hear on the streets is most encouraging.

As a democracy, your noble experiment of achieving economic growth while maintaining social stability is a shining example for the developing world.

If that is called Delhi Consensus, I would like to be its salesman.

There is nothing to be apologetic about, in your pursuit of growth. Please grow, grow, and grow with confidence, and we will all be better off.

A strong India is in the best interest of Japan, and a strong Japan is in the best interest of India.

Thank you all very much, and let me say again how pleased I am to be back here in India, with you all.

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