

Check against delivery

SPEECH BY H.E. MR.SEIICHIRO OTSUKA, AMBASSADOR
AT THE SEMINAR IN COMMEMORATION OF
FIFTY YEARS OF BILATERAL RELATIONS
BETWEEN SRI LANKA AND JAPAN

25th April 2002

- Hon.G.L.Peiris, Minister of Constitutional Affairs and Minister of Enterprise Development Industrial Policy and Investment promotion,
- Deshamanya Dr.P.R.Anthonis,
and Mr.H.Tanaka, Vice Patrons of Lanka Japan Friendship Society,
- Mr.Daya Weththasinghe, President of Lanka Japan Friendship Society,
- Excellencies,
- Distinguished Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely happy to be present with you this evening and address this seminar organized by the Lanka Japan Friendship Society in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Sri Lanka.

I thank Mr.Daya Weththasinghe the President of Lanka Japan Friendship Society and the members of the Executive Committee for organizing this timely and significant seminar. Ever since I assumed duties as Ambassador of Japan to Sri Lanka two years ago, I have been eagerly looking forward to this most auspicious anniversary of the longstanding relations between our two countries spanning over 50 years. Now we are at

the threshold of this auspicious anniversary which I am sure will be conspicuously celebrated both in Sri Lanka and Japan.

My first duty at this seminar is to take you down memory lane to the early days of our relations. As you know very well, Japan was totally defeated and destroyed in the aftermath of the Second World War. The war brought havoc to Japan. In August 1945, after the atom bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nation stood devastated both spiritually and physically.

In the grim aftermath of the war, as Japan began to rise from the ashes and rebuild its nation, it was the government and people of Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, who extended their genuine hand of friendship to the Japanese people. At the San Francisco Peace Conference in September 1951, Sri Lanka's representative, the then Finance Minister J.R.Jayewardene renounced Sri Lanka's right for reparations from Japan. In so doing, he quoted the message of the Buddha.

"Hatred ceases not by hatred, but by love." In original Pali, the words are "Nahi Verena Verani. Sammantidha Kudachanan. Averenacha Sammanthi. Esa Dhammo Sananthano."

So, in the spirit of the noble words of the Buddha, Mr. Jayawardene appealed to the victor nations to give Japan independence and freedom, despite the opposing views expressed by the representative of the Soviet Union.

In the last paragraph of his San Francisco speech, Mr. Jayewardene stated. And I quote:

“This treaty is as magnanimous as it is just to a defeated foe. We extend to Japan a hand of friendship, and trust that with the closing of this chapter in the history of man, the last page of which we write today, and with the beginning of the new one, the first page of which we dictate tomorrow, her people and ours may march together to enjoy the full dignity of human life in peace and prosperity.” End of quote.

Japan and the Japanese people have been indeed grateful to Sri Lanka for the friendship and magnanimity extended to us at the time of our difficulties by the government and people of Sri Lanka. It is in this spirit that Japan has stood firmly and steadfastly side by side with Sri Lanka as a true friend and a constructive partner for Sri Lanka’s development. Indeed, 50 years of our cooperative bilateral relations has been guided, on our part, by this spirit which Mr. Jayewardene spoke of at San Francisco on September 8, 1951....friendship and trust.

Secondly, I wish to share with you my thoughts about three key dynamics of our relations since we established diplomatic relations 50 years ago. They are;

- 1) Economic and Technical Cooperation
- 2) Business and Industrial relations
- 3) Cultural and Educational exchanges.

First and most salient, among these three key elements of our relations is economic and technical cooperation. The Japanese cooperation programme to Sri Lanka first commenced in 1954. And since 1986, Japan has consistently been the single largest donor to Sri Lanka.

Japan has provided development assistance in six main areas. The six priorities are;

- (1) Constructing and improving the economic infrastructure essential to economic growth.
- (2) Development of the mining and manufacturing industries.
- (3) Development of the agriculture, forestry and fisheries.
- (4) Human resources development.
- (5) Improvement of health and medical care systems.
- (6) Finally, the protection of the environment.

Take for examples, highways, ports, bridges, hydropower plants, hospitals, schools etc. Japan's development assistance has filtered through, virtually every key sector of Sri Lanka's socio-economic development.

As a matter of fact, Sri Lanka has often been cited as a model case of Japan's successful development assistance. Some of these success stories are the Project for the improvement of the Faculty of Dental Sciences in the University of Peradeniya with the introduction of ultra modern technology and equipment and the Project type Technical Cooperation such as the Quality Improvement of Textile and Clothing Project. Also noteworthy is the Third Country Training Programme in Information Systems Engineering conducted by the Institute of Computer Technology of the University of Colombo, which successfully trained not only students from Sri Lanka but also from South Asia, South East Asia, Pacific and African countries.

What about the future prospects? I would like to cite three important points in this regard.

1. Good governance in Sri Lanka
2. Accountability and transparency in the implementation of the projects.
3. Sri Lanka's self-reliance in the face of declining trend of Japan's ODA to the developing countries.

These points need no elaboration here. Japan will continue to assist Sri Lanka as a constructive partner in the years to come. However, Sri Lanka must address these issues seriously.

The second key element in our cooperative relations is the area of business and industrial relations. I am happy to say that about sixty Japanese Companies have so far been established and are operating in Sri Lanka. These companies consist of varying categories ranging from manufacturing, construction, telecommunications, transportation etc. There have been ups and downs in their business activities. However, as good corporate citizens of Sri Lanka, they have made a substantial contribution to Sri Lanka's economy through creating employment, generating exports and transfer of technology.

What about the prospects of new investment from Japan? What kind of problems need to be resolved in this regard? That is what we would like to ask the Japanese business executives who are here today. Unfortunately, mainly due to the unstable security climate of the country, there has not been any new major investment coming from Japan in the past several years. In fact, some companies suspended their operations and returned

home. Other companies recalled their Japanese managers and have not sent their successors.

If new major investments are to be encouraged into Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka needs to address various problems. Some of them are;

- a) Further improvement of the security situation by resolving the ethnic conflict
- b) Improvement of the infrastructure such as an uninterrupted electricity supply
- c) Improved labour management relations

But, now the investment climate seems to be making a dramatic change. After the improved security situation and the commencement of the peace process, I am sure that prospects are better for investments from Japan. The Honourable Minister Mr.G.L. Peiris has already visited Japan in February this year with the view to promoting new investments from Japan. I am happy to say that a large business delegation from Japan is due to visit Sri Lanka possibly in November this year. So let us hope that Sri will have brighter prospects for new investments from Japan and other foreign countries.

The third key area is that of cultural and educational exchanges. Here, I must emphasize that the real strength of our relations comes from interpersonal relations, people to people, heart to heart contacts between the peoples of Japan and Sri Lanka.

The cultural and educational dimensions of our relations are very important. Let me tell you why I am interested to sing a Sinhala song like "Pitikotapan None", or "Kasade" or share a "punchi vihilu". Through songs and jokes I was indeed able to feel the day-to-day pulse of the Sri Lankan culture and people. It brought me closer to the people of Sri Lanka as is evident from the enthusiastic feed backs that have been pouring in from the Sri Lankan people. I am rather happy that I have come to be known as the "Sindu Kiyana" and Vihilu Katha Kiyana Thanapathi".

On a serious note, I am happy to say that there have been very significant exchanges over many years in areas of literature, drama, music and language between Japan and Sri Lanka. Some of the outstanding examples of such exchanges are the contribution made by the illustrious Professor Ediriweera Sarathchandra the author of interesting novels like "Malagiya Etto" and Malavunge Avududu Da". The love story between Noriko-san and Devendra-san, the Sri Lankan artist is so fascinating. These two novels have been translated into Japanese by Professor Tadashi Noguchi. Also, Professor Ediriweera Sarachchandra's famous drama called "Maname" displays a clear influence of the Japanese drama form popularly known as "Kabuki" and "Noh" especially in the facial make-up and the theatrical movement.

Another outstanding example is the contribution made by Professor Ariya Rajakaruna of the Sinhala Department of the University of Peradeniya. Professor Rajakaruna has translated numerous Japanese novels into Sinhala including novels by Kawabata Yasunari and Akutagawa Ryunosuke, to name a few. Through his untiring efforts, the latest Japanese-Sinhala dictionary was edited and published. The dictionary was

just launched on the 10th of April this year. I also wish to acknowledge the significant contribution of Prof.Kusuma Karunaratne, the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Colombo who herself has edited and published a book entitled "A glimpse of Japanese Culture" and has made a significant contribution in the promotion of cultural and educational exchanges between our two countries.

Furthermore, there are so many organizations and people who have made tremendous contributions in promoting cultural and educational exchanges between our two countries. The Lanka-Japan Friendship Society which is the longest existing association of its kind, the JICA Alumni Association under the inspirational leadership of Dr.P.R.Anthonis , who himself has been and continues to be a vital link between Japan and Sri Lanka in the past 50 years or more, the Japan Sri Lanka Technical & Cultural Association (JASTECA) which has gained prominence as one of the leading training institutes in Sri Lanka under the auspices of the Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship in Japan (AOTS) providing ultra modern training in the latest Japanese technology to Sri Lankans and the Japanese Graduates Alumni Association, (JAGAAS) are a few such organizations which have made significant contributions in promoting cultural and educational exchanges. If I were to enumerate on all these organizations and individuals, it will take me an hour or so. So let me stop by saying that their significant contribution has been vital to our friendly relations in the past and that their continued involvement and contribution in the future will be equally important.

I recall the most recent cultural event which took Sri Lanka by storm, namely, the Drummers of Japan-YAMATO, which was indeed a grand

success and which I am sure many of you had the opportunity to witness. But the most exciting moment of that performance was the resonance of the synchronized pulse beat of the drummers of Japan and Sri Lanka. The rhythmic beating of drums by both the drummers of Japan and Sri Lanka in unison brought the show to its fitting climax, commemorating the long standing friendship between Japan and Sri Lanka.

Before concluding my remarks, let me refer briefly to the current peace process. There is nothing more encouraging, invigorating, uplifting, and indeed welcome than the good news that the peace process is once again on course. With the new government under the visionary and youthful leadership of Prime Minister Honourable Ranil Wickremasinghe and ably assisted by Honourable Ministers Mr. G.L. Peiris and Mr. Milinda Moragoda and others, the peace process has proceeded vigorously. The cease-fire is already in place and negotiations are likely to commence soon in Thailand.

At long last, the light is now visible at the end of a long and dark tunnel of an 18 year old conflict. The Government of Sri Lanka , the LTTE and also the peace loving people of Sri Lanka must grab this opportunity and work together sincerely and tenaciously to transform this fickle flame into a glorious flame of durable peace and reconciliation. I am confident that the Government and people of Sri Lanka will indeed seize this golden opportunity with the wisdom, vision, fortitude and the spirit of reconciliation that have characterized this great nation of Asia.

Japan has whole-heartedly supported this peace process. Japan sincerely hopes that the peace process will commence on schedule and will

indeed lead to a durable solution thereby ushering in a new era of permanent peace and prosperity.

Let me emphasize one important point. When durable peace is restored in the whole of Sri Lanka, Japan would be ready to provide full fledged assistance to the North and East regions as Sri Lanka's constructive partner for development. Japan will spare no efforts in providing assistance not only for relief and rehabilitation of the war affected people but also for overall socio-economic development of the North and East, including assistance for infrastructure development.

Japan has indeed already begun to step up our assistance to the North and the East. "A friend in need is a friend indeed". In this spirit, Japan stands ready to extend our hand of friendship and cooperation to Sri Lanka.

In conclusion, I am happy to inform you that the day-after-tomorrow a 15 member delegation from the Japan-Sri Lanka Parliamentarians League led by Honourable Mr.Hosei Notora, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan will arrive in Sri Lanka in order to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Sri Lanka. The special anniversary falls on April 28th.

Incidentally, the 28th of April also happens to be my own birthday. I might venture to say that this was perhaps the most exquisite and farsighted diplomatic forward planning I have ever done in my life. In fact, I wonder whether I may have been a Sri Lankan in my previous life. A happy coincidence indeed ! On that personal note, I conclude my speech.

Thank you.

