



CSS EVENT REPORT

“JAPAN’S INDO-PACIFIC PERSPECTIVE ON INDIA-JAPAN RELATIONS”

**Speaker: Mr. Rikuto Ito, Administrative Attaché, Embassy of
Japan, New Delhi**

On 13th September 2023, the Center for Security Studies was honored to have Mr. Rikuto Ito come to OP Jindal Global University for a special event. Mr. Ito is the Administrative Attaché in the Embassy of Japan, New Delhi, India, and he spoke on ‘Japan’s Indo-Pacific Perspective on India-Japan Relations’. Introductory comments were given by the Director of CSS, Dr. Pankaj Jha. Dr. Jha mentioned the broadness of the concept, that is, Indo-Pacific, in terms of its identity as a strategic concept, an alliance, and a collaboration. He highlighted how the Indo-Pacific is also being synonymized often with QUAD which is a security framework between Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. Dr. Jha pointed out that one of the underlying themes of QUAD is that all the countries possess high-technology, and hence, are preferred and desired partners of India. Lastly, he touched upon the relationship between India and Japan, how both countries have a lot to share and collaborate on different domains like maritime security, disaster management, development or transfer of technology, investments, etc.

Mr. Rikuto Ito was invited to the podium to enlighten the audience regarding Japan’s perspective on Indo-Pacific and India-Japan relations. He began his presentation with an introduction to the history and concept of the Indo-Pacific. For Japan, the Indo-Pacific is a free and open concept, he reiterated the political philosophy of Japan’s former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Japan was one of the first pioneers to have introduced the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ into the realm and study of international relations which, he pointed out, was established for a rule-based order and to consolidate the principles of free trade. Mr. Ito presented three major pillars of the Indo-Pacific, namely: (i) usage of strategic communication, (ii) pursuit of economic prosperity, and (iii) disaster relief and management. He pointed out that Japan has been involved greatly in implementing all three of the pillars.

After the introduction, Mr. Ito briefed the audience about the history of the Indo-Pacific. He opined that Indo-Pacific is a political term that replaced the term Asia-Pacific to intentionally leave out some countries. He used surfing as a metaphor for diplomacy wherein one must gauge the right moment to push to be able to ride the waves. Consequently, he provided us with the

timeline of this push from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific through speeches of various world leaders. He began with Shinzo Abe's 2007 speech which used the terms Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, followed by Hillary Clinton's speech and papers in 2011 which used the term Indo-Pacific.

He noted how India-Japan relations between the years 2014 and 2016 have been crucial in cementing the concept of Indo-Pacific. In 2014, with a bonhomie between the two leaders – Shinzo Abe and Narendra Modi – Japan was able to bring in approval from India on the cooperation with Japan-U.S.-India and Japan-Australia-India cooperation which eventually followed up with the formation of QUAD.

Then officially, in 2016, the concept of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) was announced in Nairobi. In 2018, India under the leadership of PM Modi released its Indo-Pacific policy. Japan too shifted its Indo-Pacific approach by changing it from 'strategy' to 'vision' due to certain controversies surrounding the term 'strategy' and because two of its desired partners in Indo-Pacific – India and ASEAN – had more modest views towards the concept of Indo-Pacific. Japan showed support for China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2017, prioritizing regional connectivity over security concerns.

On India-Japan relations, Mr. Ito propounded that Japan has been investing considerably in the Northeast region of India as it is resource-rich and provides connectivity to Southeast and East Asian regions. This proves to be a strategic point due to its proximity to China as well. On his recent visit to India in 2023, PM Kishida Fumio delivered a speech entitled "The Future of the Indo-Pacific – Japan's New Plan for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific" wherein he proposed multilayered connectivity for the region. Japan has plans to connect Northeast and Bangladesh along with the development of an industrial value chain. Efforts are also extended for security and safe use of sea and air through various military exercises like Malabar and JIMEX.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Ito postulated that Japan and India are natural partners in the QUAD grouping. Throughout history, there has been a strong bonhomie between the Prime Ministers and the diplomats of the two countries. QUAD also becomes an important platform for Japan to maintain its strategic autonomy. However, he stated some of his concerns. For instance, Japanese enterprises face various challenges due to the business environment in India. India ranks considerably low in the Ease of Doing Business Index at 63, while China is at 31. Also, even though, the Indian national government has been pushing for investment in the Northeast, however, there is no clear indications or vision as to what industries can sustainably function in the region. Another one of his worries was limited people-to-people exchange. According to a report, only 1000 people have travelled to Japan from India.

Mr. Ito's remarks on Japan's Indo-Pacific Perspective and India-Japan relations were very well-received by the audience as it provided a unique opportunity to gain valuable insights into one of the most important bilateral relationships in the Indo-Pacific. His remarks were followed by a curious set of questions from the audience to which he replied eloquently. The session ended with Mr. Ito receiving a token of appreciation from Prof. Pankaj Jha, the Director, and Prof. Gitanjali Roy Sinha, the Assistant Director of the Center.