



JICA Alumni Association Annual Convention

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Guest of Honour's Speech

B. Shadrach

Director

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia

Commonwealth of Learning

bshadrach@col.org



On the outset, I wish to thank Professor O.P. Dewal, formerly a Professor at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and now, I understand, also the President of JAAI (JICA Alumni Association of India)! I have known him for the past three years since joining the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), and I have had many opportunities to interact with him. He has been a long-standing ally to CEMCA, generously offering his insights, expertise, and valuable advice.

My gratitude to Mr. Pradeep Gupta, the Honorable Secretary of JAAI, and warm greetings to Mr. Takashi Ariyoshi, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Japanese Embassy, and to Mr. Takeuchi Takuro, the Chief Representative of JICA in India. I bring greetings to each and everyone gathered here from CEMCA, an organization that represents the interests of over 2.4 billion people living in 56 nations of the Commonwealth.

First of all, I am not aware of any functioning alumni association formed from the grantees and trainees of an international agency. Usually, the idea of an alumni association is attached to educational institutions and the like. It is rare to see an association of this kind. Recently, I received an invitation from the ILO to be part of their alumni association for those trained in the international training center. We at CEMCA are also wishing to form an association of alumni who have undergone a training program or two under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Learning. I am sure we have a lot to learn from JICA, Mr. Takuro, and the office-bearers of JAAI, such as Dr. Dewal and Mr. Gupta.

I understand that the main objective of JAAI is to continue cultivating, fostering, and nurturing friendship among its members and to promote Indo-Japanese technical and cultural cooperation at all levels. Whenever I am asked to inaugurate any training program, I make it a point to tell all participants to first ensure that they get to know each other and become 'friends for life.' So, the idea of friendship promoted by JAAI is very close to my heart.

In addition to forming and norming, the idea of promoting cultural and technical cooperation allows for storming and performing. Therefore, I see JAAI's mission as forming, norming, storming, and performing at all levels. Those gathered here are surely a part of this culture.

When it comes to Indo-Japanese technical and cultural cooperation, JICA and the Japanese Embassy are the two main actors best placed to do this, and I thank Mr. Takuro and Mr. Ariyoshi and the Japanese people in India and Japan who are at the forefront of promoting this culture of cooperation.

Primarily, I have known Japan for its rich culture, its keenness on people-to-people interaction, language and cultural education, cultural events and festivals, media and film promotion, and youth exchange. When I was an undergraduate student, as part of the National Service Scheme program, I almost got selected to go to Japan on a student exchange program; however, at the last minute, for want of a passport, I could not do so!

Regarding technical cooperation, JICA and other agencies have been at the forefront of sharing expertise in infrastructure development, rural development, environmental conservation, human resource development, disaster management, and various other fields. Their expertise, of late, in climate change and the use of AI is of special interest to me and my organization. If all goes well, I might participate in the forthcoming GPAI innovation workshop in Tokyo on 28-29 May 2025, organized by the Tokyo Centre of the GPAI Expert Community. The Tokyo Centre of GPAI was announced at the Global Summit on Artificial Intelligence two years ago, and the center is now functional!

Japan's experience in spreading climate literacy is praiseworthy. The way climate consciousness has been integrated into the educational curriculum, from a very early age to their education for sustainable development (ESD) and their public awareness campaigns are well known. India can learn a lot from Japan's Education for Disaster Preparedness, be it community drills or Bosai Baggu! The idea of brining in emotional involvement in reducing disaster risks is unique to Japan.

That said, I wish to also touch upon the other area of collaboration. This is around Artificial Intelligence!

India, with over 80% of its workforce in the informal economy, stands to gain by working closely with Japan in spreading AI literacy and expertise among the half a billion people who sustain over 50% of India's economy. Japan's expertise in automation and robotics has shown the world how to improve efficiency, quality control, and predictive maintenance in manufacturing. In addition, the use of AI is apparent in Japan in areas such as healthcare, customer service, and smart cities. Japan's model of Industry-Academia collaboration and talent development is something India should emulate.

In Asia, Japan is steering AI alongside China, Korea, and India, especially in education, where personalized learning assisted by AI-powered virtual tutoring is well known. In this, my organization would like to see the role of teachers in the loop of AI and how we can empower them in preparing future citizens who, as part of the workforce, are also able to master AI rather than being subservient agents to it. I will be interested in seeing the JAAI community work towards empowering teachers and faculty members with the skills, expertise, knowledge, and technical assistance for exploiting AI to improve their efficiency, strengthen pedagogical approaches, promote adapting a learning culture, learn languages, translate, and, above all, ensure that human beings are supreme, not the other way around.

At the Commonwealth of Learning, we believe we stand to gain a lot by collaborating with non-Commonwealth nations such as Japan, and I do hope there will be a possibility to collaborate in areas such AI in Education and Community-centred Climate Literacy Campaign through Community Media and Social Media Channels.

Once again, I congratulate JAAI on this annual convention and thank the organizers for inviting me and my wife to take part in the event.