



Gateway

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President's Message



Dear Friends,

As a country we are at yet another historic point in our continuing journey since independence. Elections to the 18th Lok Sabha started in India in all earnest and seriousness on April 19 and the seven phase

polling will conclude on June 1 with the counting process set for June 4. With 543 seats in the Lower House at stake all eyes will be on the magic number of 272; and then the mechanics of government formation. At this time both the ruling dispensation and the Opposition are confident of pulling it off based on the strength of their manifestos. With a raft of opinion polls saying different things, perhaps the only thing that will matter will be the people's determination on June 4.

The challenges facing India and Japan in the Indo Pacific are so obvious that the leaderships have put in place a coherent bureaucratic framework to manage issues not just bilaterally but from a regional perspective as well. As global players, New Delhi and Tokyo will have to take on issues frontally keeping in mind that hard decisions will have domestic implications. Global economic growth continues to be constrained by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and a conflict in the Gaza, now in its seventh month, showing no signs of tapering down. And after this will come the difficult task of rebuilding a war zone that has been literally savaged. Looking up to international financial institutions without generous cheques from donors is a self-defeating proposition.

The IJCCI wishes to place on record its profound regret on the passing away of Mr. B.S. Raghavan, former Chief Secretary of West Bengal and Tripura and a person who has served this country with distinction in many assignments at home and abroad. Mr. Raghavan has been associated with the IJCCI from its very inception and has played a crucial role as the Chamber has progressed through the years as a valued critic and mentor. Above all he will be remembered at the IJCCI for his simplicity and humility. May his Soul Rest in Peace.

Regards,
T.P. Imbichammad

New Consul-General Mr. TAKAHASHI Muneo



Mr. Takashi Muneo assumed office at the Consulate-General of Japan in Chennai on 11th April 2024, with the consular jurisdiction over Tamilnadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana and the Union Territory of Pondicherry.

He carries with him 4 decades of rich experience in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan, served in New York, Houston, Australia, Iraq, Tunisia and the Philippines, in various capacities before coming to Chennai. Mr. Takashi is accompanied by Madam TAKAHASHI Mitsuyo.

Mr. Takahashi is excited about the current assignment and says "There is so much to be gained from this historic nation and its noble people. Ten years after the Special Strategic Global Partnership agreement, the India-Japan relationship has expanded and deepened in many areas such as politics, security, economic cooperation, cultural and academic exchange. I would like to actively promote exchanges with students and young people who are interested in Japan to build a bridge for future ties between India and Japan.

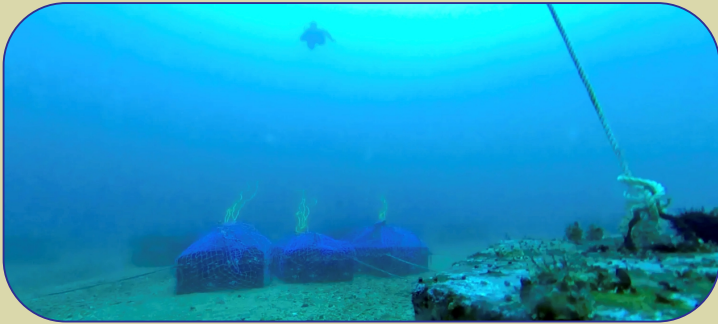
IJCCI extends a very warm welcome to the couple and wishes a wonderful tenure for Mr. Takahashi Muneo.



Japan adds four new industries to skilled foreign worker visa

The Japanese government on 29th March added four new industries to its foreign skilled worker visa program as it moves to address the nation's driver shortage by allowing more people access to stays of up to five years. The government said Japan plans to admit up to 820,000 foreigners under its skilled worker visa in the next five fiscal years from April 2024. After soliciting public opinions over the reform, the government will revise related rules, including Justice Ministry ordinances, to begin accepting skilled foreigners in the four sectors. As part of the addition of the road transportation sector, skilled foreigners will be accepted as drivers of buses, taxis and trucks by companies that have been certified by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. As drivers of buses and taxis often communicate with passengers, they are required to pass the N3 level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, the third highest in the exam's five levels and a condition stricter than required to work in other sectors. In the railway sector, skilled workers can be accepted for roles involved in the manufacturing of train cars and maintenance of tracks. They can also take on the role of drivers, conductors and station staff. The government also added operations related to textiles, iron and steel, and printing in the manufacturing industry, a sector already covered under the program. Foreigners with the No. 1 visa must have passed a test demonstrating professional and Japanese language skills enabling them to work immediately. The No. 2 visa allows for unlimited renewals, opening the door to permanent residency, and permits workers to bring their children and spouses to Japan. As of the end of December 2023, there were around 208,000 workers in the country on the No. 1 visa and 37 with the No. 2 visa, according to the Immigration Services Agency of Japan. The new program will allow trainees to switch workplaces in the same industry under certain conditions and gain skills needed for transitioning to the Specified Skilled Worker No. 1 visa. ©KYODO

From Hokkaido - specially for Alcoholic beverage lovers



One of the great things about drinks like sake, wine, and whiskey is the vast range of nuances in tastes achieved through their ingredients and production methods. This universe of experiences is made even vaster with the process of aging in different containers and environments. Now, Hokkaido KaiyoMatsuri is offering a new way to age alcoholic beverages at the bottom of the sea. Until April 19, they're accepting applications for those wanting to submerge their drinks off the shores of Hokkaido from June 30 to June 29, 2025. Hokkaido is surrounded by three different seas, each with its own distinct conditions but sharing relatively stable temperatures and a low rate of typhoons, making them ideal for storing bottles in. Hokkaido KaiyoMatsuri is offering a one-of-a-kind monitoring service, where a solar-powered camera is pointed at the cellar 24 hours a day and can be accessed from your smartphone so you can stare at it while imagining how it will taste, and maybe even see a crab scuttle by. Studies have shown that exposure to certain vibrations can significantly affect the flavor of drinks as they age. Even the minute ripples in the water caused by the wind, animals, or passing ships can create tastes unlikely to be achieved on the surface. In addition, as the bottles sit on the ocean floor, they'll develop a calcified layer and barnacles to become unique souvenirs all their own. This service was initially aimed at businesses like sake breweries and restaurants but now is open to the public. It doesn't come cheap though, at 105,600 yen per storage cage, which covers the submerging, monitoring, maintenance, wax sealing, and insurance. The storage cage can hold 12 bottles of any combination of whiskey, gin, rum, tequila, shochu, sake, wine, sparkling wine, champagne, or liqueurs. (Japan Today)

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India's Economy Projected to grow at 6.5 percent in 2024

In a recent report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), India's economy is forecasted to grow at a rate of 6.5 percent in 2024. This projection follows a growth of 6.7 percent in 2023, indicating a continued upward trend. The report highlights India's position as the fastest-growing major economy globally. According to the UNCTAD report, multinational companies are expanding their manufacturing operations in India to enhance their supply chain diversification. This move is expected to bolster Indian exports, contributing positively to economic growth. The growth observed in 2023 was attributed to robust public capital investment and expansion in the service sector. Several other institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Moody's, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), have also revised their estimates for India's economic growth upwards for the calendar year 2024. However, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has set a slightly higher estimate, projecting a 7 percent growth rate for the current financial year 2024-25. ➡

Japan launches E visa for tourists from India

Beginning April 1, 2024, Japan has initiated the issuance of eVisas to Indian tourists, also extends to foreign nationals residing in India, a system that eliminates the necessity for physical visa stickers in passports.

Applicants can now electronically apply for visas through designated Japan Visa Application Centres operated by VFS Global. Specifically designed for tourism, the Japan eVisa offers a single-entry short-term visa allowing a stay of up to 90 days in Japan.

Fujitsu to Develop AI-based System to Find Missing People with Dementia; Training System with Distinct Movement Patterns

Fujitsu Ltd. will begin developing a system using artificial intelligence to find dementia patients with footage from security cameras installed near streets and in stores.

The system would involve using the walking patterns common among dementia patients to train AI to identify them in video images. The AI-based system will be connected to security cameras near streets and in stores to find the patients soon after they leave their homes or care facilities. With the aim of utilizing it in or after fiscal 2027, Fujitsu subsidiary Ridgelinez Ltd. will develop it in conjunction with the National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center in Suita, Osaka Prefecture, and others. ➡

Dementia patients are said to unconsciously drag their feet or walk in short strides. The system would involve understanding these characteristics through the comparison of walking styles between dementia patients and other elderly people, as well as training the AI to learn the movement of about 20 body parts, including the heads, hips and knees of patients.

Fujitsu has jointly developed an AI-based system with the International Gymnastics Federation that analyzes the performances of gymnasts to help evaluate their performance, and the system has been used at international competitions. Fujitsu plans to utilize this expertise to establish AI-based analysis technology by 2025 and increase its accuracy for practical use.

(Yomiuri Shimbun)

Yen Hits 155 Per Dollar, Weakest Since 1990

The yen fell on 24th April to its weakest levels against the dollar since 1990, with markets alert to any signs of intervention from the Japanese authorities to prop up their currency. The dollar reached as high as 155.17 yen, its strongest since 1990, before falling back in choppy trading, a sign of market nervousness around the 155 level. It was last at 154.97, up 0.09%. The decline in the yen comes after a string of strong U.S. inflation data pushed the dollar to five-month highs and reinforced expectations that the Federal Reserve is unlikely to be in a rush to cut interest rates this year.

The yen's slide against the dollar has revived anticipation of currency intervention. Japanese Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki and other policymakers have said they are watching currency moves closely and will respond as needed. The strong dollar prevailed at last week's International Monetary Fund/World Bank Spring meetings in Washington too, and the United States, Japan and South Korea issued a rare joint statement on the issue.

Speaking after the Group of 20 (G20) finance leaders' meeting in Washington, Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda said the Japanese central bank may raise interest rates again if the yen's declines significantly push up inflation, highlighting the dilemma the weak currency has become for policymakers.

Technology Developed by Japan Students Receives Attention at SXSW World Tech Event in Texas

Digital technology developed in Japanese universities garnered attention at South by Southwest (SXSW), one of the world's largest information technology-related events held in early March in Texas in Austin city known as one of the leading high-tech cities in the United States. There is a growing enthusiasm among students for starting a business, and many are actively traveling abroad to gain experience while young to make a big leap forward globally.

“By converting an athlete's movements into 3D images, we can check if there are any problems in their decision-making or in the way they move,” said a member of a research team made up mainly of former members of the University of Tokyo soccer team. At SXSW, the team demonstrated its technology where cameras capture the movements of goalkeepers or other players and convert them into 3D images that can be analyzed to help improve their performance.

The research team got to exhibit this technology at SXSW after winning the university's selection contest. During the U.S. event, officials from several prestigious European soccer clubs visited the booth and showed interest, the team said. “I was able to have an experience that I would never have had if I had stayed in Japan,” said Taiga Someya, 25, who had been a candidate for the national youth soccer team. “By participating, we got momentum toward commercializing our technology in the future.”

In addition to the University of Tokyo, teams from Tohoku University, Gifu University and the Nagoya Institute of Technology set up SXSW booths. One such booth demonstrated technology that uses ultrasonic waves to replicate the sense of touch for 3D images, and another demonstrated technology that automatically dubbed dialogue for anime using artificial intelligence. Some booths saw long lines of visitors who were keen to try out their offerings.

According to the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, the number of university-launched startups reached 3,782 in fiscal 2022, more than double the number in fiscal 2014. Behind the increase is a growing support from universities as well as an increased awareness of entrepreneurship among students. Taketo Sugawara, director of the University of Tokyo's Startup Incubation and Entrepreneurship, which has been sending students to SXSW since 2014, said, “The level of students has definitely improved over the past decade.”

(The Japan Times)

Tokyo exhibition looks at what technology will be like in 2050



Flying cars and the latest in robotics. These are some of the attractions of an exhibition now on in Tokyo to showcase advanced technology that might be widespread in 2050.

Among items that visitors can try out are walking robots that children can operate as well as a simulated ride on a “flying car” helped along with the use of virtual reality technology.

About 120 items are scheduled to go on display. Organizers are hoping that 500,000 people will visit. The exhibition continues until May 26, 2024. As one of the sponsors of the exhibition, the Tokyo metropolitan government is looking for possible solutions to issues like traffic congestion in major urban areas as well as global warming, startup companies from both Japan and overseas are encouraged to submit their business ideas ranging from social infrastructure to environmental protection.

(Asahishimbun)

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