

Japan keen on friendship with northeast

Taking forward ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his wife, Akie, in Ahmedabad early in September. PTIPTI

Days after the visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan has begun its outreach for the northeastern region. At the fourth Northeast Connectivity Summit in Kohima from September 22 to 23, a representative of the Embassy of Japan said Tokyo would invest in the region's infrastructure, education and people-to-people sectors.

The next edition of the summit will be held in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, which borders China.

"Kenko Sone, Minister, Economic Affairs, Embassy of Japan, speaking at the summit, said the northeastern region is located at a strategically and economically important juncture between India and Southeast Asia as well as within the Bimstec (Bay of Bengal) community. Therefore, Japan has placed a particular importance on the cooperation in the northeastern region," said a press note by the Nagaland government on the summit.

Road network

The press release noted that for the northeast, Japan had undertaken works on road connectivity, energy projects, water supply and sanitation, forest resources management, Japanese language education and post-war reconciliation, which aimed to build a deeper understanding of the actions of Japanese forces in the region during the Second World War.

Mr. Sone announced that Tokyo would invite 25 young people from Manipur and Nagaland to Japan this year.

During the latest visit of Prime Minister Abe to Ahmedabad, Japanese officials said Tokyo was committed to undertaking two major road and infrastructure building projects in Mizoram and Meghalaya. But the event in Kohima provided a broader portrait of Japan's interest in the northeast.

The next Connectivity Summit in Tawang is expected to take Japan's representation into the strategically located region that borders China. It was noteworthy that during Mr. Abe's visit, Japanese officials had declined to spell out if Tokyo would be interested in acquiring projects in Arunachal Pradesh.

Myanmar's interest

The summit also indicated Myanmar's interest in the potential of the region. Speaking at the event, Myanmar's Minister of Cultural Affairs Sai Kyaw Zaw urged people from Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur to forge closer ties with Myanmar as the country shared long borders with all four States.

Nagaland's Chief Secretary Pankaj Kumar also urged improved connectivity with Myanmar for unlocking the regional trade potential. The summit included diplomatic participation from Bhutan, Russia, Bangladesh, Laos and Thailand.

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