

# Intercountry business flourishing

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Forcing each country and every human being to confront deep, profound questions of our ways of life at all levels, the coronavirus pandemic brings to light numerous environmental,

social and economic implications.

This pandemic can be considered to be a test for all of us as human beings. It's a test of whether we are ready to be transformed based on the core value of life, sustainable community, not short-term, but long-term goals, purpose, happiness and prosperity.

Attending to urgent situations by implementing various and necessary policies such as rapidly expanding health infrastructures, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the same time, calls for a self-reliant community, which is the foundation of the Gandhian principle of Gram Swaraj — a social and political belief on the human values of truth and nonviolence. With this principle, every village should be, as Gandhi said in 1942, "Independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary."

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization found that the pandemic will significantly increase risks to food

security and hinder humanitarian assistance operations, due to the disruption of international supply chains.

Rural farming toward self-sufficiency in domestic food production can be at the center of every country's plan for a sustainable recovery. This will require a reversal of previous trends toward ever greater urbanization, while promoting domestic manufacturing and having lesser exposure to the global production chain will be critical for each country under the pandemic situation.

India has two advantages. These are agriculture, which has about 60 percent of its population engaging in it, and information technology. These make it possible for local distant and local rural area communities to survive and flourish with human values, as the prime minister said on June 1, 2018, "As we went through the centuries, there was innovation, but in all this at the heart of this was ethics, values and human values. ... Technology can contribute in a big way if it is also combined with values."

For roughly 250 years during the Edo Period (1603 to 1868), Japan was self-sufficient in its resources even as Edo was the largest city in the world at that time, estimated at 1 million to 1.25 million people, compared with London 860,000 (1801) and Paris 670,000 (1802). During that time imports were rare due to the national policy of isolation, whereas today Japan depends on imports from other countries for 78 percent of its energy, 60 percent of its food in caloric value and 82 percent of its timber. Another remarkable feature in this period was the flourishing cultural devel-

opment of Japanese unique origin.

According to a wage list of carpenters hired by the Edo feudal government, it took 200 years for wages to double, implying an annual economic growth rate in those days of almost 0.3 percent. According to today's numbers, the economy of the Edo Period did not grow much. Can we still say that systems of the Edo Period, with repeated reuse and recycling, were lesser than our modern systems?

The Vedas, an ancient Indian philosophy of Sanatana Dharma (eternal righteousness and truth) explicitly shows the wholeness, oneness of nature and human beings, king and people, and how effective and efficient it is to develop social and economic structure without harming nature and without exploiting others to build sustainable, resilient and harmonious societies.

Japan-India innovation initiatives based on shared values and cultural proximity between the countries may jointly develop excellent strategies to overcome the challenges of this pandemic-stricken world.

The Indian Commerce and Industry Association Japan (ICIJ), celebrating its 100-year founding anniversary next February, serves as an apex body to provide support, guidance and offer consultancy and advisory services to all interested parties enabling them to fully develop the economic potential and investment between Japan and India.

While felicitating India's independence and freedom, on behalf of all ICIJ members, I convey our deepest appreciation to all who have contributed to India's cause and to readers of The Japan Times.