

# sustainable japan

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Diplomat works to boost partnership with companies, skilled workers

## Indian envoy George links Himalayas with Fuji

**Name: Sibi George**  
**Title: Ambassador of India to Japan**  
**URL: <https://www.indembassy-tokyo.gov.in/>**  
**Hometown: Kerala, India**  
**Years in Japan: Less than 1**

### Leaders & Readers

**KERRY FURUKAWA**  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Indian Ambassador Sibi George wants to increase the current 1,500 Japanese companies in his homeland to 15,000. Arriving in Tokyo less than a year ago, he hit the ground running to achieve this target and has already had meetings and events in 30-plus prefectures. His aim is to get to all 47 by his one-year mark and forge the ties necessary for the big goals he has in mind.

"Huge, huge potential exists. See, what is India today? India is 14 billion people. India is the most populated country in the world. India is the largest democracy in the world. India has the largest youth population in



"Connecting the Himalayas with Mount Fuji. That is the theme of my being in Japan," said Ambassador Sibi George. HARUO MOTOHASHI

the world. And Japan is an advanced — technologically and scientifically advanced — country. There are great things which we can do together, and there are many things which connect us," George said.

A career diplomat, George quips that every ambassador is a salesman, and can comfortably recite a lot of numbers in the India-Japan relationship. There are, for example, 12 Japanese industrial townships in India, with facilities and infrastructure ready for Japanese investors to do business. A prominently displayed book in his office documents 70 success stories of Japanese companies in India over 70 years. The ambassador notes that the automaker Suzuki has been in India for more than 40 years, has a 40% market share and furthermore is building new plants in India to increase its production by a million vehicles.

George uses these numbers to underscore his view that India-Japan ties are crucial and will become even more so, given India's 7% annual economic growth. There is even more growth potential, he says, in a market with 800 million smartphones on which millions of transactions are performed daily.

Referencing a strategic partnership signed by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and reinforced by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, George said it will be beneficial for the entire Indo-Pacific region. But, as with any partnership, there are challenges — including, in this case, terrorism.

"Protection of the sea lanes is a big challenge. I was an ambassador in the Middle East before coming here. When I look at the

world map, 90% of Japan's oil comes from the Middle East. And which is the sea lane it takes? It comes by sea, from the [Persian] Gulf to the Arabian Sea, territorial waters of India. Then goes to the Indian Ocean, territorial waters of India; Bay of Bengal, territorial waters of India; Andaman and Nicobar Islands; Malacca Strait; South China Sea; Japan. It takes this route. This sea lane is not safe. It is not benign. One needs to be alert. Counterterrorism, piracy, natural disasters, multinational crimes — a series of problems that we face. So we need to be alert and cooperate for that sea lane to be safe. Any development in this part of the world has a direct impact on that part of the world, and [the] direct impact of any developments in the Indian Ocean also affects Japan, [and] the prosperity of our people. That's why we talk about the confluence of the two seas — Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, they are connected."

A native of the southern state of Kerala, George joined the Indian Foreign Service because so many around him were crossing waters. At least one member of every family, he says, had someone working abroad. But he did not merely want to travel, he wanted to know more about the workings of engagements between nations that allowed such travel to take place. He went on to study politics and international relations at university, and calls his move into the Foreign Service a natural progression. But it wasn't a statistically easy one. More than 1.5 million people apply to take the Civil Services Examination, from which government workers, including diplomats, are selected. Ten thousand make it to a second round, which is further narrowed



HARUO MOTOHASHI

down to 2,000. Of that number, 15 to 20 are selected for the Foreign Service.

"So imagine from that 1.5 million we come down to 15. Not bad. And I can tell you, this is one of the most successful selection processes anywhere in the world because of the scale."

Scale is what the ambassador is hoping Japanese businesses in India will capitalize on. But he also wants more Indian businesses and students in Japan. India is noted for having the largest overseas diaspora,

with 30 million Indians living outside of the country. Currently, there are 50,000 Indians in Japan.

"That is one thing which we need to work on, because there is a shortage of workforce in Japan. And India has a history of engineers, doctors, medical professors, nurses. We can work together. In fact, I have set up an India-Japan skill connect to tell my people in India that there are opportunities in Japan, and tell the Japanese companies and people that there are resources

available in India. Indian skilled workers are one of the most disciplined, honest, sincere, hardworking, dedicated."

### Winner of award in Foreign Service

Ambassador Sibi George is from Kerala on India's southwestern coast. He joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1993, and has served in various locations, including Switzerland, Kuwait, Washington and Doha.

He has also held government positions at home, such as head of the Ministry of External Affairs' Administration, Establishment and Welfare divisions. In 2014, he received the S.K. Singh Award for excellence in the Indian Foreign Service.

During his free time he enjoys playing golf and traveling around Japan. To date, he has gone to more than 30 prefectures and aims to visit all 47 during his term.

He is married with three children and, in addition to English, speaks Arabic, Malayalam, Hindi and Tamil.

Particularly with regard to increasing the number of Indians studying at Japanese universities, the ambassador acknowledges that language is a constraint. He says, however, that in his meetings across the country, he has noted that universities are offering more programs in English. Importantly, he says, Indians are interested in Japan. India has developed a reputation for supplying tech talent, but so far there hasn't been much of a transfer of that to Japan.

"It is happening, but we need to accelerate it. It is a bit slow. There is huge opportunity, huge potential, for example in semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing. These are areas we are also working on. We recently signed an India-Japan semiconductor MOU (memorandum of understanding), so we are working on that."



## Old-growth paper company Oji renews forests, products, vision

### ESG/SDGs

**MAIKO MURAOKA**  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Oji Holdings, Japan's leading paper manufacturer, is also its largest corporate forest owner. It studies and develops paper products and related materials and is committed to the maintenance of healthy forests. In a recent interview with The Japan Times, the general manager of Oji's department on forest value creation, Motosaburo Saito, talked about the company's new efforts in pursuing its commitment.

"We are the first company that Eiichi Shibusawa, a renowned Japanese industrialist often referred to as the 'father of Japanese capitalism,' founded among more than 500 enterprises he established to contribute to Japan's modernization," Saito said.

Shibusawa was one of the vassals of the shogun toward the end of the Edo Period, and a rare figure who visited Europe at the time. Having witnessed the capitalist system and advanced civilization of European countries, he launched a great number of businesses as an entrepreneur while also working as a bureaucrat in the Meiji government. "He knew Japan's original strengths and used those in starting new things, maximizing the values of existing resources. That is an important clue for us in pursuing how to leverage our forest resources," Saito said.

To achieve its corporate purpose, "Grow and manage the sustainable forest, develop and deliver the products from renewable forests, and Oji will bring this world a brighter future filled with hope," Oji launched Saito's department in October 2022. It is dedicated to the research, development and execu-

tion of projects to examine and utilize the company's forest resources from diverse perspectives.

For the first time in the company's 150 years of history, the new department was staffed through an open recruitment process within the company, heading into its next 150 years. "There are people who joined the company because they are interested in forest conservation or they wanted to use their knowledge and experience about forestry. But not all of them were placed in departments directly related to forests. We wanted to give everyone a fresh opportunity," Saito said. Currently, four employees who joined via open recruitment and two forest specialists selected from other departments are working together under Saito, putting their hearts into exploring the values of forests to link them to new businesses.

Although forests are known to have value beyond as a natural resource, such as absorbing carbon dioxide, retaining water and preventing landslides and floods, Saito says they may hold untapped functions and the seeds of new businesses, which can be learned through communicating with various experts from industry and academia around the world who have different focuses and approaches. "For example, we tend to always look at trees when we talk about how to use forest resources, but underneath the trees is the soil. There are various technologies and research in progress in the field of soil, including a technology to genetically analyze the composition of soil microorganisms that can contribute to the faster growth of trees without diseases," Saito said, stressing the necessity of having broader views and liaising with specialists in diverse fields.

He also touched on the importance of communicating Japan's strengths to the world. "Some of the environmental efforts being made today, such as making fertilizer from sewage extracts, are not novel," he said — such ideas were created in the Edo Period, and there were times past when people practiced environmentally friendly lifestyles without realizing it. "Many of the regulations and frameworks related to environmental



Motosaburo Saito at the headquarters of Oji Holdings, a building that won the Wood Design Award. OJI HOLDINGS

measures were established abroad, but I don't think of Japan as a follower — we can be a leader if we reevaluate what we are good at and announce it to the world," he said.

That is one of the reasons why Oji joined the new International Sustainable Forestry Coalition, established in September. The organization's mission is "to assist in the transition to a more sustainable society, focusing on sustainable land use; conservation and restoration of nature; renewable materials in a circular bioeconomy; and rural economic benefits." Oji and the 10 other founding members are committed to sharing their knowledge and expertise in managing forests and forest resources in sustainable and ecologically conscious ways.

"The 11 founding members have a total of about 10 million hectares of forests in 28 countries. We are aware of our responsibility as forest owners to lead the global community in addressing climate change and the conservation of biodiversity," Saito said. The ISFC had a presence during the New York Climate Week in September and is now preparing to undertake activities at the U.N.'s COP28 climate talks in Dubai. "The world is headed for the realization of natural-capital accounting and is in the midst of creating a global standard to ensure that business practices that are good for the environment bring about positive economic value," Saito said. In line with this, he has renewed a commitment to make an impact both as a new team specialized in utilization of forest resources and as a core member of the ISFC.



## NTT sustainable smart city effort is developing tools for well-being

### ESG/SDGs

**MAIKO MURAOKA**  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As envisioned in its new fundamental principle, "Innovating a sustainable future for people and planet," the NTT group has been contributing its strength as Japan's leading telecommunications company to the realization of new values and a sustainable society using the power of data and technology.

One effort, the Sustainable Smart City Partner Program (SSPP), started in 2020. It is an initiative offering a set of tools and information useful for the achievement of regional development that ensures sustainability and people's well-being.

Among the various projects that the SSPP has engaged in, one of the most recent notable achievements is its contribution to the acquisition of Level 4 "leading smart city" certification over a development project in the central Nagoya district of Higashisakura conducted by NTT Urban Solutions and other NTT companies. The SSPP's role has been to provide consulting and coordination on the acquisition and utilization of the certification.

Yojiro Onaru, senior manager of NTT Corp.'s Alliance Department in the R&D Market Strategy Division and director of the SSPP, explained in a recent online interview with The Japan Times that the international certification standard can be used as a pattern to refer to in the process of making a smart city. "Of course, each area has its own characteristics, so the point is not to squeeze every city into the same pattern. The pattern, which is comprehensive and flexible, is there to provide clues for how to proceed

and continue the development of smart cities," he said. He said the beauty of this certification system is that it places importance on the continuation of the "plan-do-check-act cycle" for each element of the certification requirement, ensuring that efforts will not be temporary.

The project had acquired Level 3 certification as a collaborative smart city in 2022. The major difference between the two levels lies in whether the achievements of the processes implemented on Level 3 have been measured and are successful. Higashisakura became the second case in the world to acquire Level 4, after the South Korean city of Sejong. In Higashisakura, various ideas and technologies have been implemented, including common workplaces and a system showing how crowded each is, a security system powered by artificial intelligence, and an application to share useful information about what is happening in the district. The data for all of these is based on actual usage. Achievements are also measured based on the data and on surveys conducted several times a year on various parts of the community, including tenant owners and workers as well as residents. What makes Higashisakura a leading smart city is the continuity of growth and improvement made possible by learning from the data and people's wants and needs.

Another example of a recent project that the SSPP engaged in was a workshop for junior high and high school students who visited an open campus event of the University of Fukui in August. It was held in collaboration with other organizations to increase youths' interest in the attractions of Fukui and discuss how the city's local characteristics can be used to enhance the well-being of its residents.

The workshop had three main parts. The first focused on understanding the concept of well-being using a set of cards invented by NTT Communication Science Laboratories. There are 32 cards that represent different types and levels of well-being, grouped into four categories: "I," "we," "society" and "universe." Each participant chose cards and talked about them based on what well-being



Group photo after an NTT smart city was certified Level 4. NTT URBAN SOLUTIONS, INC.

means to them. The second part was aimed at recognizing the characteristics of Fukui using Sugatami, a data-driven platform that facilitates the evaluation of a community both subjectively and objectively to visualize both its strengths and areas where more can be done.

In the last part of the session, students shared their thoughts about what kind of well-being they want to realize in Fukui. NTT's Onaru considered the event, which gathered a total of 67 participants, a great success. "From positive feedback received from the participants, I feel that we managed to give them an opportunity to think about other people's well-being as well as their own, stimulate their motivation to know more about their own hometown and learn how to interpret data, all at the same time," he said.

To deepen learning from examples of smart and sustainable urban development that is focused on people's well-being the SSPP is planning to hold an online forum on Nov. 22. "We hope that many stories about projects of the SSPP's member municipalities will be shared in the forum, encouraging participants to collaborate with each other in creating the process of learning and thinking about the development of their communities," Onaru said.

Oji Holdings and NTT are members of the Sustainable Japan Network, a group of companies that cooperate to spread information about sustainability. You can also be part of the network; scan the QR code for more details.



The Hokkaido Sarufutsu forest. OJI HOLDINGS



Students share ideas on what kind of well-being they want in Fukui. UNIVERSITY OF FUKUI

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