

The Land of Rising Robots

The Robotics domain has always fascinated the Japanese. Cyborgs have been a part of Japanese Anime for many decades, but Japanese history would say that Robots are anything but fiction. The first ever robot was made in Edo period (1603-1867), Takeda developed a mechanical-puppet theater that flourished in Osaka's Dotonbori district. The Japanese craftsman Hisashige Tanaka, known as "Japan's Edison" created an array of extremely complex mechanical toys, some of which were capable of serving tea, firing arrows drawn from a quiver, or even painting a Japanese kanji character.

Japan has long been a powerhouse in robotics, fueled by its huge appetite for automating its automotive and manufacturing industries. But these kinds of old-school robots lack the cutting-edge machine-learning software that could help them

continuously improve on the job. With the field of machinelearning and artificial intelligence growing exponentially over the years, the standard of robots and their functionality have also seen a tremendous uprising.

This investment in technology was nurtured by Japan's ageing problem. For years now, developers in the already high-tech country have been working on simple robots to help caregivers grant the elderly the assistance they need. Now the world's third-largest economy wants to expand the range of possible applications for robots and AI. "The market is growing, we see increasing interest," says Aiko Takigawa, a Manager at Medtec, Asia's largest trade show for medical devices and care robots in Tokyo. The focus this year is not on two-legged humanoid helpers, but on high-tech solutions like AI for the entire medical sector. Japan's society is ageing at such a rate that it has already led to labour shortages.

One such invention is 'Vevo', a specially designed bear-shaped robot built to aid in the nation's child care crunch. Vevo can identify children in the nursery and record their body temperature using a thermograph. During the children's naptime, sensors embedded in their cots can monitor the heart rates and body movements. An alarm is raised in case of any abnormality in the child's vitals. "It's aimed at solving the understaffing problem in child care," says Nobuaki Nakazawa, an associate professor at Gunma University and an adviser of the project.

Another such brilliant idea was developed by Kentaro Yoshifuji, CEO of Ory Laboratory and developer of 'Orihime' robot, which he built to help address the loneliness he felt as a child. These Orihime robots can be controlled by a remote. The Dawn Ver Café in Tokyo is staffed with robot waiters controlled by remotes by people with a variety of conditions that restrict their movement. The robot's controller earn 1,000 yen per hour which is the standard rate of pay for waiting staff in Japan. The robots can be told to move, observe, talk to customers and carry objects, even if their operator can only move their eyes. These abilities have been adapted for use in the cafe.

As many would see this futuristic advancement as a threat to human jobs, Japan's labour shortage speaks a different story. The fear of robots taking over jobs is undeniable. Yet, history suggests just the opposite – the new technologies inspire new jobs. Jobs have been lost before to new technologies, but these very same technologies also create increased productivity and enhance efficiency, generating more jobs than before. Tech-giants like Japan also believe that robots are here to serve humans but can never replace or take over humans!

- Anussha Hariprasad



President's Message



Dear Friends,

I am happy to write to you after celebrating our Chamber's Day. We had Mr Masatada Fumoto, Executive Vice President, NSK Limited, as the Chief Guest. In addition, we had their partner in India, Mr L Ganesh, Chairman, Rane Group, with whom they

manufacture Steering Columns. Both of them spoke excellently and enriched the audience on successful Indo-Japan partnership and its ingredients. As a bonus, we also had Mr MAjit Kumar, Principal Chief Commissioner of Customs, Chennai who in his very humorous and jovial manner expressed how his department is becoming a partner with industry and eager to work more with industry to ensure timely and easy customs procedures.

I am happy that the recent elections were conducted peacefully throughout India. A great feat of a billion people casting votes! The verdict of the people in choosing a single large party, providing continuance not only reflects the confidence reposed in the Government but also the expectations on the leadership of Shri Narendra Modi. I am hopeful that our Prime Minister will fulfill the aims and aspirations of the Indian people and take the growth of the economy to great heights.

Subsequently, the newly elected Government presented the Union Budget 2019-20 on 05th July 2019 advocating a long-term vision of the Government in building physical & social infrastructure and digital economy - an ambition to reach \$5-trillion GDP by 2024.

I am happy to inform you that IJCCI is in the process of establishing a Japan-India Business Partnership Facilitation Cell. We hope that Members will take advantage of this initiative. In addition, I am also requesting all the Chambers of Commerce and Economic Institutions in Japan, Prefectures & City Government offices and JETRO offices all over Japan to extend their support in realizing our goal.

I look forward to the continued support of our Members in the future also.

Regards,

N. Kumar

Hon'ble Union Finance Minister Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget for 2019-2020 at the Parliament on 5th July 2019.



Prime Minister Hon'ble Mr. Narendra Modi observing the proceedings.

Seminar on Automotive Industry : Potentials and Prospects of Japan-India Cooperation

Organised by IJCCI in cooperation with ACMA SR

Dr. HIROSHI OSADA, renowned TQM expert speaks on "TQM and the role of Deming Prize"



Two successful 2018 Deming Prize Winners and leaders in Auto Industry will be sharing their TQM Journey
On 14th September 2019 from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. at Hotel Savera Chennai

(Participation by prior registration only)

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Reminiscing Heisei Imperial Era and Ushering in Reiwa Imperial Era



IJCCI organized an event to commemorate the Japanese new Imperial Era 'Reiwa' and reminisce 'Heisei' Era on 24th May 2019 in Chennai. Hon'ble Mr. Kojiro Uchiyama, consul-General of Japan in Chennai was the Chief Guest and addressed the gathering. President IJCCI, Mr. N. Kumar welcomed the gathering and expressed his sincere wishes for greater cooperation in the new era. Mr. M.Gopalakrishna Gandhi, Former Governor of west Bengal (grandson of Mahathma Gandhi), Dr. V.L. Indira Dutt, Managing Director, The KCP Ltd., Mr. N. Ravi, Director, Kasturi & Sons Ltd. and Ms. Malathy Pandurang, Sensei, Sogetsu School of Ikebana, shared the dais. The speakers were extremely happy sharing their experiences of meeting their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress of Heisei Era and interacted with them a couple of years ago when the royal couple visited Chennai. Video films on 'duties and responsibilities of the Japanese Emperor' and the ceremonial functions of the abdication of Heisei Emperor and the enthronement of the Reiwa Emperor was enjoyed by a good number of audience. A Resource Paper on "Architects of Modern Japan" written by Secretary-General, Ms. Suguna Ramamoorthy was released on the occasion by Consul-General Mr. Kojiro Uchiyama.



IJCCI Chamber Day Event



The 30th Annual Day of Indo-Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry was celebrated on 02nd July in Chennai. Mr. Kojiro Uchiyama, Consul-General participated and appreciated the various activities carried out by IJCCI. Mr. Masatada Fumoto, Executive Vice President of NSK, Japan was the Chief Guest. Mr. Fumoto while appreciating close relations between Japan and India assured his support in bringing Japan and India closer in economic and cultural aspects. Mr. L. Ganesh, Chairman of Rane Group (Deming Award winner) shared his experiences of working with their Japanese counterparts and the secret of success behind their JV. Mr. M. Ajit Kumar, IRS, Principal Chief Commissioner of Chennai Customs appreciated the Japanese work culture and enumerated the various new initiatives introduced by him to provide efficient services and facilitate trade activities in a very conducive environ in the Chennai Customs Zone. Mr. N. Kumar, President IJCCI appreciated the closeness between our two countries and our Prime Ministers, and assured that IJCCI will continue to strive for greater bilateral cooperation in educational, cultural and economic fields. A new initiative by IJCCI - 'Japan-India Business Partnership Facilitation Cell' is being launched to foster ties between the Japanese and the Indian businessmen, was announced by Ms. Suguna Ramamoorthy, Secretary-General. Mr. R. Ramakrishna Raja, a Senior Director of IJCCI and Managing Director of Concord Arai offered the concluding remarks.



Global economic slow down and economic outlook for Japan 2019

According to an analysis from a dozen top Japan-based think tanks, which publish economic outlook reports at the end of the year, there is a broad consensus that the Japanese economy will grow by less than 1 percent in 2019, a decline from 1.9 percent growth achieved in 2017.

"The Chinese economy is slowing, the Eurozone is slowing, America is also approaching a slowdown - these are not good signs for the Japanese economy," says Hide Yoneyama, an economist at Fujitsu Research Institute.

Many analysts believe the broad economic slowdown can be partially attributed to the actions of central bankers around the world as they move away from easy-money policies after years of conducting monetary stimulus.

According to Yoneyama the potential global slowdown combined with other risk factors — a consumption tax increase, the U.S. - China trade war and the United Kingdom's potential no-deal exit from the European Union — create a perfect storm that is likely to slow Japan's own economy.

But not all of Japan's business sectors are exposed to equal levels of risk from these global trends. Technology industries such as e-commerce, mobile payments and artificial intelligence are expected to see robust growth over the next few years. Yet these nimble technology companies still represent a fraction of the overall economy and stand in stark contrast to many sectors, such regional banking and many small businesses, which will have less wiggle room to escape the intense pressures wrought by a shrinking population. If economic forecasters are on the mark, these new upstart companies will be unable to offset the crushing force of demographic pressures, making it likely 2019's slowdown in growth may be a new norm rather than a temporary setback.

The tax hike bite

The most visible threat to Japan's economy is the planned tax hike set for October 2019. Although many predict a surge in sales prior to the increase of the consumption tax to 10 percent from the current 8 percent, consumers are also likely to cut back in the immediate aftermath.

And many analysts believe that this will be a major headwind for the Japanese economy from 2019 and beyond. Estimates for economic growth in 2019 range from 0.4 percent, according to Fukoku Mutual Life Insurance Co., to 0.8 percent, according to separate

analysis from Nomura Securities Co., Meiji Yasuda Life Insurance Co. and the Daiwa Institute of Research.

According to a mid-November analysis from Nomura, the impact of the tax hike will push down private consumption by 0.2 percent over the long term, the byproduct of taxes taking a permanent bite out of household spending power.

Another deleterious effect of the tax increase is that business may be reluctant to invest in such an uncertain environment. A recent survey conducted by Teikoku Databank Ltd. showed that the tax increase is the leading concern for businesses in 2019, with over 55 percent citing it as having the potential to slow down sales.

While the government is preparing countermeasures, many forecasters believe its efforts will be unable to completely alleviate the negative effects of the increase. The Daiwa Institute of Research, for example, predicts that even as the government readies a slew of policies aimed at supporting the economy, the total income loss associated with the tax increase will be around ¥3.2 trillion.

A sliver of hope

Not all analysts are down on the prospects for growth in the Japanese economy. Hajime Takata, chief economist and managing executive officer at Mizuho Research Institute believes that the world economy is on the verge of returning to what he calls "a normal era." New technologies which have the potential to unleash productivity increases and growth, are reasons for optimism.

One of Japan's largest daily newspapers, the Nikkei financial daily, reported in mid-December that the number of start-up companies with a valuation in excess of ¥10 billion doubled from the year before. The largest of these firms were in artificial intelligence or financial technology, also known as fintech.

Japanese businesses and consumers also appear to be on the path to adopting mobile payments, a process that could be sped up as the government offers incentives to use these technologies as a part of its policy package intended to cushion the blow from the consumption tax increase. The Cabinet Office and other ministries are aiming to utilize financial technologies and other new industries, in a plan the government has labelled "Society 5.0," which they hope can push up economic growth.

(The Japan Times)