



公益財団法人 国際文化会館
International House of Japan

Event Report: Japan-India Distinguished Visitors Program 2026 (March 16–18, 2026)

Overview

The International House of Japan (I-House), with Shahani Associates Limited as a co-sponsor, organized the Japan-India Distinguished Visitors Program 2026 from March 16 to 18, 2026, in New Delhi and Ahmedabad. Originally launched to invite distinguished Indian intellectuals to Japan, the program has now expanded to promote truly bidirectional exchange. This year marked the first time a Japanese expert visited India under the initiative.

I-House was honored to welcome architect Kazuyo Sejima as the inaugural Japanese fellow. Recognized as one of Japan's most influential architects, Sejima's participation highlighted architecture as a field in which Japan holds a strong global presence. The program aimed to deepen Japan–India ties while addressing shared global challenges such as sustainability, disaster resilience, and environmental design.

The program, co-sponsored by Shahani Associates, was conducted in collaboration with the India International Centre and CEPT University, with support from the Japan Foundation. In addition, a special session by art curator and I-House Art & Design Director, Yuko Hasegawa was organized in cooperation with the Japan Foundation New Delhi office.



Shahani Associates Limited, a Shahani family enterprise, is a Tokyo-based talent advisory and executive search firm founded in 2005. The company provides recruitment and human resource advisory services, specializing in identifying and placing mid- to senior-level professionals and executives across various industries. Demonstrating its commitment to fostering cross-border exchange and leadership development, Shahani Associates has co-sponsored the Japan–India Distinguished Visitors Program since 2017, the Asia Pacific Young Leaders Program, and a webinar series featuring leaders from across the Indo-Pacific, thereby supporting initiatives that promote dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaboration among emerging leaders and experts from Japan and India.

The **India International Centre (IIC)** is a leading non-governmental cultural and intellectual institution in New Delhi, established in 1962 to promote international understanding and dialogue. Inspired in part by the International House of Japan, the Centre serves as a forum for policymakers, scholars, and cultural leaders to exchange ideas through lectures, seminars, and cultural programs. The IIC maintains longstanding ties with Japan and with the International House of Japan, including co-sponsored initiatives and a strategic partnership established in 2022 to strengthen Japan–India relations.

CEPT University, based in Ahmedabad, is a leading institution for education and research in architecture, planning, and design. Established in 1962, it brings together multiple disciplines related to the built environment and is known for its studio-based pedagogy and emphasis on contextual, sustainable design. The university actively promotes international academic exchange, contributing to cross-cultural dialogue in architecture and design, including initiatives relevant to Japan–India collaboration.

The **Japan Foundation** is Japan's principal institution for comprehensive international cultural exchange, promoting mutual understanding through arts and culture, Japanese-language education, and intellectual dialogue. Within its global network, the Japan Foundation New Delhi Office plays a key role in fostering cultural and academic exchange between Japan and India. In this context, the Japan–India Distinguished Visitors Program was launched in 2012, commemorating the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations, to strengthen people-to-people ties by inviting eminent Indian public figures for lectures and dialogue with Japanese counterparts. The International House of Japan organized the program jointly with the Japan Foundation and invited four distinguished fellows between 2012 and 2016.

Background of the Japan-India Distinguished Visitors Program

The Japan-India Distinguished Visitors Program was launched in 2012 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and India. The initiative was designed to strengthen people-to-people connections by inviting eminent Indian public figures from diverse fields who are proposing innovative ideas and new values to address societal challenges.

Since its inception, the program had brought leading Indian intellectuals, practitioners, and policymakers to Japan for approximately one week each. During their visits, fellows typically delivered public lectures and engaged in dialogue with Japanese counterparts, fostering mutual learning and collaboration. Through these exchanges, the program has contributed to building networks among thought leaders and promoting deeper understanding between the two countries.

In 2026, the program entered a new phase by expanding its scope to include outbound visits by Japanese experts to India. This development reflects a commitment to strengthening truly reciprocal exchange and creating sustained opportunities for collaboration. The visit by Kazuyo Sejima marked this important milestone in the program's evolution.

March 17 – Lecture by Kazuyo Sejima (India International Centre, New Delhi)

Kazuyo Sejima delivered a lecture titled *"Architecture & the Environment,"* reflecting on nearly four decades of architectural practice. The event attracted approximately 150 attendees, including architects, students, and members of the general public.

Beginning with early residential projects, Sejima highlighted her interest in openness, structural clarity, and the relationship between interior and exterior spaces. She illustrated how flexible layouts, terraces, and layered spatial arrangements can balance communal interaction with individual privacy.

As her work expanded to larger cultural and institutional projects, Sejima emphasized themes of transparency, continuity, and integration with landscapes. Museums, universities, and public facilities were presented as fluid environments featuring interconnected spaces, multiple entrances, and abundant natural light.

During the discussion, Sejima addressed materials and sustainability, stressing climate-responsive and regionally appropriate design. She also emphasized the importance of "intermediate spaces" that soften boundaries between interior and exterior environments.

She concluded by noting that architecture should create relationships between people, spaces, and landscapes, providing open frameworks shaped by human activity and evolving with their context.



Opening Remarks by Jaikumar Shahani (Shahani Associates)



Welcome Remarks by KT Ravindran, Architect; Former Head of School of Planning and Architecture



Kazuyo Sejima (SANAA) delivering a lecture at India International Centre



Reception following the lecture



Participants networking at the reception

March 18 – Lecture by Kazuyo Sejima (CEPT University, Ahmedabad)

Sejima delivered a second lecture at CEPT University, further elaborating on architecture as a shared space fostering relationships among people, buildings, and the environment. The lecture drew a notably large audience of approximately 800 participants, reflecting strong interest from students, faculty, and professionals.

She reflected on her long-standing connection with India and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the program. Through early residential projects, she discussed her focus on structural clarity and continuity between indoor and outdoor spaces. Mid-scale works such

as dormitories and housing complexes illustrated her efforts to balance communal interaction with individual privacy through terraces, shared spaces, and flexible layouts.

In large-scale cultural and educational projects, Sejima presented architecture as a fluid landscape rather than a fixed object. Multiple entrances, interconnected spaces, and abundant natural light allowed users to move freely and encouraged diverse activities. These designs integrated buildings with their surroundings and reinforced her emphasis on transparency and continuity.

She reiterated the significance of “intermediate spaces” that enable flexibility and social interaction. Concluding the lecture, Sejima emphasized that architecture should provide frameworks shaped by human activity, fostering relationships between people, spaces, and landscapes.

The lecture concluded with an active Q&A session, offering participants an opportunity to exchange views with Sejima. Her responses on non-hierarchical spaces and user-driven experiences further enriched the discussion and reinforced her emphasis on architecture as a shared, dynamic environment.



Kazuyo Sejima (SANA A) delivering a lecture at CEPT University



Discussion with Kazuyo Sejima, Prof. Sameep Padora (Dean, Faculty of Architecture, CEPT University), and Yuko Hasegawa (IHJ Art & Design Director)



Large audience at Kazuyo Sejima's lecture



livestreaming arranged in a separate venue at CEPT

March 16 – Special Session by Yuko Hasegawa (New Delhi)

The program opened with a special lecture by Yuko Hasegawa titled “Crafting the Future: Japanese Art Between Tradition and Technology” at the NIV Art Center in New Delhi. Approximately 30–40 participants attended the session, including artists, curators, and cultural practitioners.

Hasegawa explored how contemporary Japanese artists reinterpret traditional craftsmanship through interdisciplinary collaboration and emerging technologies. Drawing on examples involving digital modeling, responsive textiles, and hybrid material practices, she demonstrated how historical techniques can evolve in dialogue with contemporary technological innovation. She emphasized that craft today extends beyond object-making to include spatial experiences and new material approaches. The lecture also examined animistic sensibilities in Japanese craft traditions, noting parallels with Indian artistic practices that connect nature, spirituality, and technology. In concluding, Hasegawa highlighted the transition from physical materiality to digital and AI-driven creativity, underscoring the importance of cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration. Her talk emphasized the potential of Japan–India exchange to generate new approaches to tradition, technology, and contemporary artistic expression.



(Left) Opening remarks by Koji Sato (Director, Japan Foundation New Delhi) Right) Lecture by Yuko Hasegawa (Art & Design Director, I-House)



Discussion among Yuko Hasegawa, Rajnish Chhanesh (Contemporary Artist), and Ruchika Wason Singh (Moderator / Visual Artist)



Post-lecture discussion with participants

Conclusion

The Japan-India Distinguished Visitors Program 2026 successfully strengthened intellectual and cultural exchange between Japan and India through architecture and art. The lectures by Kazuyo Sejima and Yuko Hasegawa attracted wide interest from professionals, students, and the general public, fostering dialogue on sustainability, tradition, technology, and contemporary design. The strong attendance—ranging from intimate expert discussions to a large university audience—demonstrated the breadth of engagement across different communities.

The program demonstrated the value of bidirectional exchange and highlighted opportunities for continued collaboration between the two countries in addressing shared global challenges through creative and interdisciplinary approaches.



Works by CEPT University students reviewed by Ms. Sejima

Future Outlook

Building on the success of this inaugural visit to India by a Japanese fellow, the Japan-India Distinguished Visitors Program will continue to expand its role as a platform for sustained bilateral engagement. Future iterations of the program aim to broaden participation across diverse fields—including architecture, urban planning, arts, technology, and public policy—while encouraging deeper collaboration between institutions and practitioners in both countries.

The program also seeks to promote long-term partnerships by facilitating follow-up dialogues, joint workshops, and collaborative research initiatives. In particular, areas such as sustainable urban development, environmental resilience, cultural heritage, and interdisciplinary design offer promising opportunities for Japan-India cooperation.

By fostering reciprocal visits and continued exchange, the program is expected to cultivate a network of thought leaders who can contribute to addressing shared societal challenges. Through these efforts, the Japan-India Distinguished Visitors Program will further strengthen people-to-people ties and support the development of innovative, forward-looking collaboration between Japan and India.