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Japan's trade minister visits southern India

CHENNAI, India, Jan. 10 -- Japan's Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano on Tuesday visited an auto plant operated by Nissan Motor Co. and its French partner Renault S.A. near Chennai, southern India, as part of Japanese efforts to strengthen ties with the rapidly growing Indian economy.

Chennai, known as the Detroit of South Asia, is a major production base for India's automobile makers as well as information technology industries.

Many Japanese companies have manufacturing and other facilities in Chennai given its strategic location as an export hub to markets in Europe and Southeast Asia.

Japan's Mizuho Corporate Bank and Japanese engineering firm JGC Corp. have teamed up with Singapore developer Ascendas to develop a world-class integrated township in Chennai amid strong interest from Japanese companies to venture into India.

Located 50 kilometers south of Chennai, the 1,500-acre township will integrate industrial, business, commercial and residential elements with lifestyle amenities.

"Many Japanese companies have already set up operations and more have shown keen interest to be located there," Ascendas said in a statement from Singapore.

The Japanese and Singapore partners signed a memorandum of understanding with the government of Tamil Nadu on Tuesday in a ceremony in Chennai attended by Edano and Selvi J. Jayalalithaa, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

Edano's visit to India is the latest by senior Japanese politicians as Japan eyes closer political and economic ties with India.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda visited India in late December, while former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda visited the country earlier this month.

Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Minister Takeshi Maeda also plans to visit India from Wednesday to pitch Japan's shinkansen bullet train to the country.

After India, Edano is scheduled to visit Thailand and Myanmar before returning to Japan on Sunday.