

Speech by Consul-General Matsunaga
Emperor's Birthday Reception
Official Residence, Thursday 13th February 2020 17:30

Introduction

Good evening everyone and welcome to tonight's celebration of the 60th birthday of His Majesty, Emperor Naruhito.

In May last year Japan celebrated His Majesty's enthronement. A new emperor means a new imperial era, and the name of this era is *Reiwa*, meaning beautiful harmony. I hope you enjoy the beautiful harmony of Japanese food including premium Wagyu beef over there, drinks, exhibitions, and conversation tonight.

As a lot of you would be aware, I have a habit of taking the rain with me wherever I go – I'm sure you all remember the terrible weather at this function two years ago.

On the day of the Emperor's enthronement ceremony last October, it poured with rain all morning in Tokyo. However, once the Emperor began his speech, the rain stopped and a beautiful rainbow appeared over the Imperial Palace. I think today's weather shows how much more powerful the Emperor is than I.

History

This year marks the 190th anniversary of the first contact between Australia and Japan. Recent discoveries have found there is a possibility that Tasmanian convicts aboard the Cyprus vessel were the first to make contact with Japan when they arrived off the coast of Tokushima prefecture in 1830. This was unfortunately a hostile encounter due to Japan's isolation policy at the time.

This year also marks 75 years since the end of the World War Two. Australia and Japan fought each other but have since reconciled to become the most reliable partners.

These two points in history demonstrate that the relationship between Australia and Japan has not been an easy journey. It has been made possible through the hard work of our predecessors building up our relationship step-by-step.

Natural Disasters

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the recent bushfires across Australia. It has been heartbreaking to see the loss of life, both human and animal, and the amount of land that has burned. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the Australian and international firefighting teams who have worked so hard to keep people safe.

Natural disasters are something that Japan knows well. In 2011, when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, Japan received tremendous support from Australia.

During the fires, Japan has assisted through the dispatch of its Self-Defence Forces and donations totalling more than \$5 million from Japanese companies and organisations.

Technologically -I am interested since I have an engineering background- Japan has shared data from its *Himawari* satellite every few minutes. These real-time infrared images show fire temperatures that inform decision making by management agencies before, during and after emergencies and help to prioritise resources.

I am a firm believer that a friend in need is a friend indeed and I know that the relationship between Australia and Japan will become even stronger by overcoming natural disasters together.

Economy

Through the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement that came into effect in 2014, and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2018, economic relations between Australia and Japan have grown closer.

In particular, Hydrogen - which is being utilized as a new form of energy, regenerative medicine - a new method of treating disease, and the utilization of the Quasi Zenith Satellite System providing global positioning information with centimetre-level accuracy, are fields of great interest and cooperation for the future of our two countries.

Melbourne and Emperor

Melbourne has a special connection to Emperor Naruhito. The Emperor has travelled all over the world but his very first overseas trip was to Melbourne in 1974 when he was 14-years-old.

He came here, the sports capital, on a homestay exchange to get a taste of life in Australia and was particularly interested in sport. He played tennis and golf, and enjoyed riding on a hand-me-down bicycle. What a wonderful connection!

Sports Diplomacy

Sports diplomacy is pivotal to international relations; through sports, people of different countries and cultures can unite as one through sharing a common interest.

Since 2018, our office has been working closely with Tennis Australia to bring junior wheelchair tennis players from Japan to a tennis camp in Melbourne. There were three Japanese junior wheelchair tennis players last year and eight players last month who attended, and both occasions turned out to be a huge success.

The junior players learned a lot from their Australian counterparts, and are grateful to those organizations that continue to show support for the program. I believe they think that Australia is a good country and that this experience will have a big impact on their future. I hope to see them in the Australian Open someday.

Promoting inclusiveness and diversity in society is something that Japan can learn from multicultural Victoria. I hope that Japan can use the Olympic and Paralympic Games to make diverse societies a positive legacy of Tokyo 2020.

Olympic and Paralympic Games

Have any of you visited Japan before?

You may have noticed that Japanese people complain if their train is delayed by just 30 seconds. NOT 30 minutes, but 30 seconds. We complain. We are too punctual.

On the bright side, we are on time with our preparations for the construction of the Olympic stadiums and the training of taxi drivers to communicate in English.

World Masters Games

The 10th World Masters Games will be held in the western part of Japan, which includes Melbourne's first sister city, Osaka. It will take place in May next year but the general entry commenced just under two weeks ago. The games are a chance for ordinary people to compete against Olympians and promote international exchange.

Is it difficult to participate? No. The only pre-requisite for the World Masters games is that you must be over 30 years old. I think I am overqualified. And I can see that many of you are, too.

Sister Cities

This year marks the 40th year of the sister-state relationship between Victoria and Aichi Prefecture. I hope that leaders and citizens will visit each other and further strengthen this relationship at both the administrative and grassroots levels.

Conclusion

To wrap up, the year 2020 is the starting point for the next ten years.

I know that incorporating the concept of beautiful harmony in the new Reiwa era across different levels of exchange will strengthen the Australia-Japan relationship in the next decade.

Thank you all for being here tonight. I hope you will stay and enjoy our hospitality and I wish you all a safe and happy 2020.

Thank you.