

Remarks by Mr Sumio Kusaka, Ambassador of Japan
Emperor's Birthday Reception
Wednesday 29 November 2017
Ambassador's Official Residence, Yarralumla

Dear Members of Parliament
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to the Residence.

Thank you for joining our celebration tonight to commemorate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor.

His Majesty turns 84 this year on December 23rd. Their Majesties have been actively performing their duties this year. In March this year, Their Majesties visited Vietnam and Thailand and just this month, granted an audience to President Trump and Mrs. Trump during their visit to Japan.

Of the many wonderful things which have transpired this year, I must first express my joy that we will be joined by Australia in the Soccer World Cup after a thrilling comeback to secure a final berth! I send my heartfelt congratulations to the Socceroos. And while I believe there may be some dual citizens within the team, this won't be an issue for us.

Now, it has once again been a busy year for Japan, including a snap election in the House of Representatives last month. This resulted in a resounding victory for the Liberal Democratic Party and Prime Minister Abe, guaranteeing further stability for Japanese foreign diplomacy. After forming government, Prime Minister Abe immediately embarked on a string of diplomatic endeavours.

The Prime Minister first received President Trump in Japan, and then flew off to Vietnam and the Philippines to attend APEC and the EAS. At those meetings, Prime Minister Abe attended the Japan-US-Australia Trilateral Summit Meeting while also holding bilateral meetings, including those with Prime Minister Turnbull, President Xi and President Duterte.

As for Japan-Australia relations, while many wonderful things have transpired this year, I would like to highlight 3 things.

The first is that the idea of the Indo-Pacific has finally come of age. I commend Foreign Minister Bishop for coining and advocating this term, which was recently featured in the

Foreign Policy White Paper published last week. It has been enshrined in the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” put forth by Prime Minister Abe in 2016, and this year, President Trump embraced the idea of the Indo-Pacific in his speech at APEC. Japan commits itself to the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific which must be kept open to all countries. The fact that the Japan-Australia-US summit meeting was held is testimony to such commitments by all three countries.

The second point I would like to highlight is that Japan and Australia are expanding their cooperation in the economic field in a new manner. This year happens to be the 60th anniversary of the Japan-Australia Commerce Agreement which was signed back in 1957. We were blessed to have the presence of Prime Minister Turnbull, former Prime Minister Howard, former Prime Minister Abbott at the same time to celebrate this occasion at the Residence, and Austrade did a wonderful job of highlighting many of the great but sometimes unnoticed stories of Japanese companies investing here in Australia.

I am grateful that this year again, Japanese companies have continued efforts to promote business, and here tonight we have been joined by the following companies: Asahi Holdings Australia; Central Japan Rail; Fujitsu; Hitachi Australia; Honda Australia; Honda Australia Motorcycle and Power Equipment; Ippin Australia; Ito En Australia; JFC Australia; Kowa Australia; Lion; Mazda Australia; Mitsubishi Electric Australia; NEC Australia; Toyota Australia; Yakult Australia. I encourage everyone to visit their displays both in and outside the Residence. These are beautiful cars parked in the front yard.

Obviously, a good strong bilateral economic relationship is the bedrock of a good relationship, there is a new development however, that I would like to highlight in the realm of regional cooperation. Japan and Australia have been trying to realise the TPP11, and worked in tandem towards achieving the agreement in principle at the Danang APEC Ministerial Conference. In the past, Japan and Australia were instrumental in bringing about APEC, and now we are working together on the TPP for future growth in the region.

Last but not least, it’s always good to have good personal relationships. Prime Minister Abe enjoys a good personal relationship with Prime Minister Turnbull. But it’s not only at the leaders’ level. It matters on every level, especially whether one goes the extra mile or not for his counterpart. Therefore I am very grateful to all of you for showing up today. You are both the conduit and the bedrock of our relationship.

And I am delighted that building personal ties continues with the next generation including through schemes such as scholarships, exchanges, working holidays. Just yesterday, I met with the new sixteen students going to Japan under the New Colombo Plan, and I believe this is another wonderful avenue to invest in our future ties. An important character of the

New Colombo Plan is that some students will have the opportunity to intern at Japanese companies, providing a link between academia and business. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to the Government of Australia in this regard.

Such efforts and others will continue to build bridges for our two nations. We have truly come a long way, owing to a lot of many personal episodes and relationships between us, since the very first time a Japanese set foot in Queensland 100 years ago. So I thank each and every one of you again for joining the celebration tonight, and I ask for your continued support in strengthening relations with Japan in your respective fields.

Thank you and please enjoy the rest of the evening.