

News from under the Southern Cross – Edition 1. Visiting Sydney

From 21st to 23rd of January 2021, I made a business trip to Sydney. What caught my attention were the widespread use of masks, which is less common in the ACT, and the use of a QR code registration system each time I returned to the hotel where I was staying.

Meetings with notable Australians

First, I paid a courtesy call to former Australian prime minister John Howard OM AC. We discussed a wide range of topics including Japan's economy, the state of affairs in the Indo-Pacific and U.S. relations. Despite being the second-longest serving prime minister of Australia at over 11 years, I found Mr Howard to be open and friendly, even towards a new Ambassador like me. I was deeply impressed by Mr Howard's articulate analysis of a diverse range of topics.

I also had the opportunity to have in-depth discussions with Australian business leaders which were arranged with help from an Australian I knew through mutual contacts. I sensed a strong desire amongst Australian businesses to forge a new frontier by connecting and collaborating with Japanese companies.

In the evening, I joined the Chair of the IOC Coordination Commission for Tokyo 2020 and President of the Australian Olympic Committee, Mr John Coates AC and his wife for dinner at the official residence of the Consul General in Sydney, Mr KIYA Masahiko. It was great to see Mr Coates particularly delighted with the gift my wife and I brought for him and his wife from Japan, a *Karuizawa-bori* wood carving.



Presenting a gift to Mr John Coates AC

In addition, I held candid discussions with university and think-tank representatives. We spoke at length about the relationship between Australia and China, U.S. President Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy, the Japan-Australia relationship, and Japanese domestic politics. The discussions covered a wide-range of topics and continued well over two hours.

Meeting with Japanese Nationals living in Australia

Over 100,000 Japanese nationals reside in Australia and approximately 35,000 of them live in the Sydney region. I met with Mr ISHIKAWA Yoshikazu, Chairman of the Japanese Society of Sydney (Sumitomo Australia), Mr MOHRI Tomomi, President of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sydney (Nippon Steel Australia) and Ms Hisae Costello, President of the Japan Club of Sydney. I attentively listened to their explanations about the activities of Japanese nationals in Australia and the challenges that they face such as Japanese language education for children of Japanese expats. Their insights gave me good guidance for how the Embassy continues to provide support to the Japanese community.

Furthermore, I met with representatives from Japanese companies that are making great strides in Australia across the aviation, banking, trade and manufacturing industries to hear about their activities here. I will make utmost effort to make sure that the Embassy, including myself as “Principal Commercial Attache,” will speedily react when there are opportunities to be of assistance in enhancing the business environment.

The opportunity to meet with journalists from the Japanese press in Sydney was also a very valuable one. The exchange was very encouraging because we shared the common feeling about the importance of the Japan-Australia relationship, and had candid discussions on how to achieve the goal of increasing Japan’s presence in Australia and vice versa.

Visit to HMAS Kuttabul

One of the major reasons why I decided to visit Sydney so soon after my arrival in Australia and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic was to pray for the souls of the war dead. As a newly arrived Ambassador, I wished to pay my respect to the sailors who lost their lives during the midget submarine attack on the depot ship Kuttabul in Sydney Harbour during World War II. I laid wreaths alongside Rear Admiral Mark Hammond, AM, RAN (Commander Australian Fleet, Royal Australian Navy) at the HMAS Kuttabul Memorial and the Midget Submarine Memorial, housed within the RAN Heritage Centre.



Laying a wreath at the HMAS
Kuttabul Memorial



Paying respects at the Midget
Submarine Memorial

Reflecting upon the present peace and prosperity that has been built upon the extraordinary sacrifice they made, I expressed my gratitude to the souls of the deceased and bowed my head deeply before them. What was gratifying more than anything to see was that the Memorials' considerate gesture in honouring not only the lives of those Australian officers who perished on the Kuttabul but also the Japanese sailors including two whose remains are yet to be retrieved. While observing the midget submarine, which is so small that it can hardly accommodate two adults, I heard Australians praise the professionalism and bravery of the Japanese sailors. This made me feel strongly that their sacrifice laid the grounds for greater mutual understanding and the Japan-Australia relationship as it stands.

In recent years, Japan-Australia security cooperation has been strengthened and friendly port calls by Japanese Maritime Defence Force vessels have become a normal sight in Australian ports such as Sydney Harbour. I feel deeply moved that our two navies have been able to reach this level of cooperation in which they conduct joint exercises and joint navigations. The Embassy of Japan will continue to put our fullest effort to towards contributing to our strong bilateral relationship.

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