

Speech
Presented by His Excellency Mr Yamagami Shingo,
Ambassador of Japan to Australia
On the occasion of the Emperor's Birthday Reception
Thursday 25 February 2021
Ambassador's Official Residence, Canberra

Dr David Gillespie, Chair of the Australia-Japan Parliamentary Group,
Minister Ley,
Senator Colbeck,
Eminent Members of Parliament,
Mr Ian McConville, DFAT Chief of Protocol,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentleman,

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we stand, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

For those of you I have not yet had the pleasure to meet, my name is Yamagami Shingo.

I won't tell you how old I am. I'm too shy. But I will tell you that I am the same age as this building I'm standing on.

The Embassy staff tell me it's structurally sound. But it's definitely not as solid as Osaka Naomi's play at the Australian Open.

And if my knees are anything to go by, we really ought to get down from here.

So I will be brief.

February 23rd marks the birthday of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Japan. Previously in my career, as head of the Intelligence and Analysis Service, I had the privilege to brief the then Crown Prince on sensitive matters.

Sorry, I'm not in a position to reveal any state secrets, but I can say that I sensed a great reservoir of goodwill towards Australia. His Imperial Majesty came to Australia at the age of fourteen on his first overseas trip. As such, he has fond memories of the vastness of the Australian landscape and the warm-hearted nature of its people.

The Embassy decided to go ahead with this event in the hope that the festivities would create some light at the end of the long tunnel that is this pandemic. If nothing else, it will be a golden opportunity for us to savour some top quality Australian wine. As a humble gesture of our commitment to the Australian economy, we've ordered heaps.

This reception is also an expression of gratitude to you all, for the ways in which you are each individually contributing to the advancement of the Japan-Australia friendship.

Now I would like to speak briefly about the nature of our friendship.

It was my priority before I left Japan to meet with the people who are most tangibly invested in our bilateral relationship: business leaders. I met with the heads of major banks, trading houses and manufacturing companies doing business in Australia.

The leaders of these organisations did not talk to me about balance sheets or regulatory hurdles. What they consistently expressed to me was the trust they have in Australia. It is this trust which gives them confidence in their Australian operations and an eagerness to invest.

I am happy to say that this sentiment is being echoed by the representatives of Australian companies whom I have been meeting with since my arrival.

We all know that the relationship between our two nations is well-established and stable.

Mitsui & Co, for instance, have been operating in this country since Australia became a federation. Indeed, Japanese companies' contribution towards Australia's prosperity through jobs and wealth creation is so pervasive, it has become as ingrained into the landscape as the cockatoos in this garden. In Queensland alone, Mitsubishi Development continues to support over ten thousand jobs.

As those in the Northern Territory would know, the Ichthys LNG project in Darwin is the single biggest Japanese investment amounting to forty billion US dollars.

But it is worth reminding ourselves that stable does not mean stagnant. New frontiers of cooperation are emerging in hydrogen, infrastructure and even space.

To name a few, Kawasaki Heavy Industries, J-Power, Marubeni Corporation and Sumitomo Corporation are making strides to efficiently produce and transport hydrogen from Australia to Japan, helping Australia towards its goal of becoming a global leader in the supply of clean hydrogen energy.

The development of Western Sydney has seen Japanese companies such as Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group, Hitachi and NEC sign agreements to partner with the New South Wales Government on a range of exciting infrastructure initiatives.

And, as Australia looks to grow its space sector, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency has been providing opportunities for cooperation, such as in the landing of its Hayabusa 2 capsule in South Australia last year. Japan Airlines contributed to the success of this endeavor by flying the JAXA team to Adelaide.

By the way, I wanted to make this speech like the Hayabusa 2 capsule landing; dazzling and over in a flash. But unfortunately I have come down with a bad case of 'diplomatitus'.

Sorry, diplomats tend to talk too long. Please bear with me for two more minutes.

It is not just in instances of commercial promise that Japanese companies have stepped up. Despite the pandemic, All Nippon Airways has continued to provide the sole direct flight between Japan and Australia. Its commitment has allowed thousands of Australians to return home safely.

Likewise, Australian companies have been there for Japan. Canberra-based Aspin Medical provided Japan with its services in the medical management of over two hundred crew members from the Diamond Princess Cruise ship.

Again, these examples speak to the trust in our relationship. Japan and Australia support each other in good times and in bad. Australia was there when Japan was dealing with the aftermath of the Tohoku earthquake and Japan was honored to have the chance to return some of the favour during the Black Summer bushfires.

Outside of the private sector, our strong mutual trust has also been a big enabler for our special strategic partnership. We have been fast developing security ties to respond to the complex strategic landscape in the Indo-Pacific. Over the last 15 years or so, our shared interests have led us to become natural partners in areas like security and intelligence.

In conclusion, that trust is our best asset was most vividly illustrated by Prime Minister Morrison when he visited Japan last year, despite the necessity of quarantine upon his return. In doing so, he became the first foreign leader to meet in person with Japan's newly appointed Prime Minister. We are now working hard to ensure that Prime Minister Suga can reciprocate by visiting Australia this year.

And so, as you can see, the future is bright for our bilateral relationship. Indeed, I would like to say that the sky is the limit for two great mates. But perhaps our friends from the Australian Space Agency would say that we can go even higher.

In any case, through rain and shine, with your kind support, I am resolved to do my utmost to achieve even greater heights for our partnership.

Thank you.
