

## News from under the Southern Cross - Edition 23

### The National Press Club

29 July

Last week, I gave a speech at the National Press Club. While nerve-wracking, I do want to share this experience with you.

#### **1. The National Press Club**

“The National Press Club” was originally created as a venue where members of Australia’s mass media could listen intently to speeches delivered by Australian prime ministers, cabinet ministers and senior bureaucrats. Every year the Prime Minister delivers a speech at the Club. It shows how prestigious the Club is considered. There aren’t many occasions for foreign ambassadors to give speeches there.



A line-up of photographs of successive prime ministers

#### **2. A precious chance to appear**

The reason the performance needle spun around to point at me was because of an invitation from a Club affiliate who wanted to listen to a speech given by the Ambassador of Japan. Of course, I assume they asked me because of the state of the region at present and the trade issues that Australia is currently

tackling. Given that this would be the first address by a Japanese ambassador at the Club in six years, it was an extraordinary opportunity not-to-be-missed.



With National Press Club President Laura Tingle, who also acted as moderator Source: ©NPC

### **3. Concentrating all of the Embassy's powers**

As I give speeches at the rate of around one a week since arriving in Canberra, along with interviews with the mass media, I generally have no difficulty in giving speeches. It's one of the important roles that diplomats must play as 'a bearer of words'. However, giving a speech at the "National Press Club" is naturally something altogether different.

For starters, not only does it feature a gathering of many grizzled, veteran journalists, the speech plus the Q&A session that follows it takes up the full allocated hour. And in addition to this, the whole thing is broadcast live on television across the entire nation of Australia.

Depending on the speech to be given, I prefer to speak in a more natural way without using a pre-prepared script. However it's clear that this simply wouldn't do when speaking earnestly for 30 minutes in front of so many journalists. Knowing that there was no place for complacency in preparations, I gathered

together the cream of the Embassy's diplomatic and local staff, constantly discussed things with them, and went over the script again and again (the speech script can be read [here](#)).

#### **4. Themes**

Given the opportunity in front of me, the theme of the speech became "Japan-Australia relations: Current situation and future prospects". It proposed to explain how far we had come over the past 15 years, and what to look forward to in the next 15 years. In terms of the areas covered, they focused on (1) economic cooperation in trade and investment (particularly trade, infrastructure development, and space cooperation), (2) cooperation in tackling issues related to climate change through the development of hydrogen etc., and (3) security cooperation in the theatre of the South China Sea and East China Sea. Ultimately I attempted to discuss all of these as comprehensively as I could.

One thing that I endeavour to do personally, in order to ensure that my speeches don't become monotonous and dull, is to intersperse each section with either a joke or an anecdote. So on this occasion, I went the extra mile in expressing my intellectual curiosity in and affinity with Australian society as a diplomat.

#### **5. "Don't make it seem rehearsed..."**

What really made a difference this time was the bit of "special practice" that I undertook after the speech script had been finalized. It reminded me of the university exam preparation I did so long ago.

I spent my weekend reading the script assiduously. I then practiced it three times in front of the Embassy's Australian staff. This increased my powers of persuasion and made the words flow more naturally, and I did my utmost to remember the key messages and the jokes by heart. I endeavoured to ensure that English words that are difficult for Japanese to pronounce were comprehensible, all while curling my tongue and biting my lips.

I then straightened my posture, and threw in some mildly embarrassing body language for good measure.

However at the main event – Oh no! – halfway through I made a mistake after skipping over some of the text and was forced to backtrack.

I had gotten carried away memorizing part of the script and trying to make eye contact with the audience, and so became a bit lax following along with the text. All of a sudden a cold sweat overcame me on stage. While cursing myself "after all of that practice....", my mind started to dissolve into a panic (video of this can be seen [here](#)).

## **6. Saved by smiling faces**

What saved me were the many people I knew who were present at the venue. Former ASIO Director David Irvine, the present ASIO Director Mike Burgess and his wife, Professor Rory Medcalf, Head of the National Security College at the ANU, and Thomas Fitschen, the Ambassador of Germany and my neighbour who, like me, is a member of the ‘bikers’ (weekend bike riders) - looking at the faces of friends and acquaintances allowed me to settle down a bit.

## **7. “Charm Bracelet”**

When I look back, another thing that really helped me was the bracelet that I wore to the event. This is a bracelet depicting the *Hinomaru* flag that I received from an indigenous artist during my official state visit to South Australia (see [News from under the Southern Cross Edition 15](#)), and which I treat with special care. I wore it as my “lucky bracelet”, and introduced it at the start of my speech.



Introducing my bracelet

Also, the Japan-Australia Olympic Softball match was played on the same day as my speech. So I wore an Olympic tie that I had received from Australian Olympic Committee Chairman John Coates.

## **8. The presentation learning curve is steep**

After everything was said and done, yet again I was reminded how difficult it is for Japanese people to give spoken presentations in English. This is one of the largest flaws in Japan’s school education system.

Whenever I look at the video of my presentation, my face is so red it seems like flames are ready to leap out from it. At the same time, whenever I think “oh, I should have said that”, I can’t get to sleep at night.

So I’ll continue diligently refining my technique to reform and improve little by little. This is because the material of ‘Japan’ and ‘the Japanese people’ that Japanese diplomats are tasked with selling to world is itself of such unsurpassed quality.

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