

Speech
Presented by His Excellency YAMAGAMI Shingo
Ambassador of Japan to Australia
Birthday Reception for His Majesty the Emperor of Japan
14 February 2023

1. Acknowledgements

The Hon Richard Marles, Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Minister for Defence

Senator the Hon Don Farrell, Minister for Trade and Tourism,

The Hon Tony Abbott, former Prime Minister of Australia

The Hon Scott Morrison, former Prime Minister of Australia

The Hon Peter Dutton, Opposition Leader

Mr Tony Smith, former Speaker of the House of Representatives

Mr Andrew Wallace, former Speaker of the House of Representatives

Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs

Senator the Hon Susan McDonald, Shadow Minister for Resources

The Hon David Littleproud, Leader of the National Party

Current and former members of the Australia/Japan Parliamentary Group, including Senator Catryna Bilyk, the Hon David Gillespie and the Hon Warren Entsch

Ms Jan Adams, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Mr Andrew Shearer, Director-General of National Intelligence

*Mr Mike Burgess, Director-General of Security, Australian Security
Intelligence Organisation*

General Angus Campbell, Chief of the Defence Force

Lieutenant General Gregory Bilton, Chief of Joint Operations

Lieutenant General Simon Stuart, Chief of the Army

Air Marshal Robert Chipman, Chief of the Air Force

Commissioner Michael Outram, Australian Border Force

*Mr Matsunaga Yoshiaki, President of the Chado Urasenke Tankokai Sydney
Association*

*Ambassadors and High Commissioners, including honourable members of
the Bikers*

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

2. Introduction

It is an honour and a pleasure to host you this evening amid the serenity of the Japanese garden – Darryl Kerrigan, eat your heart out!

We gather here, of course, to mark that most important occasion of the Japanese diplomatic calendar. And no, I am not referring to Valentine's Day, but a heartfelt *arigato* for choosing Japan to be your date!

The feeling is very mutual.

Tonight we celebrate the birthday of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor, who on February 23rd this year turns 63 years young.

To put this in local context, he is the same age as Hugo Weaving, Mal Meninga and Murray Cook, the original 'red Wiggle'.

His Majesty has long-standing ties with Australia, all stemming from time spent here during his first overseas trip as a youth during the 1970s.

As an avid tennis player, I'm sure he found much inspiration in watching some of the Aussie greats!

No doubt the efforts of Men's Doubles champs Rinky Hijikata and Jason Kubler did not go unnoticed when he tuned in to the Australian Open recently.

Well, I'm no Ash Barty, but I do promise to put on a show for you tonight!

In and around the Residence you will find a wide range of Japan-related exhibits and information, including hybrid, electric, and hydrogen vehicles from Japanese car manufacturers and a pop-up UNIQLO display.

In the spirit of fashion diplomacy, some of our Embassy staff have traded in their penguin suits for smart ensembles kindly provided by UNIQLO for tonight's event.

Inside the Residence there are also displays showcasing Japanese innovations and achievements in manufacturing, energy, transportation, tourism and technology.

This will all be accompanied by the best in Japanese cuisine courtesy of Chef OGATA, featuring top-notch ingredients from generous producers; including Yanchep Sun City, funded by Tōkyū Group, who have kindly provided the *beef*, so all our parliamentarian friends could leave *theirs* on the hill.

Before we get the party started, I'd like to share with you some developments in the Japan-Australia partnership since last year, and some exciting developments to look forward to!

3. Cultural relations

First and foremost, Japan and Australia surprised the world with their smashing performances at the FIFA World Cup.

And, of course, we cannot mention the World Cup without praising the incredible performance by team Argentina!

With the number of diplomats here, perhaps we can have a rematch or two? Though I can't say I've been training much, so it might get a little... 'Messi'.

We also have the Women's World Cup to look forward to later this year, co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand.

If these two countries can forget their famous rivalry for just a few weeks, I am sure they will discover that Japan - the 2011 Champions - cannot be discounted.

If we turn now from global to local, we have another important birthday coming up.

The sister city relationship between Canberra and Nara turns the big Three-O this year.

In my mind, Canberra and Nara share two key similarities. One – in both these cities you feel like you are living in a park. Two – you are surrounded by animals...Cute, brown ones, I mean!

So I am very excited to celebrate this significant birthday - and more, great sporting moments - from our countries in 2023.

4. Economic relations

In terms of the economy, it has certainly been an eventful year, but I won't bore you with doom and gloom this evening - I'd prefer to make like the RBA and keep your interest rates rising!

There is much to be optimistic about.

In terms of trade and investment, the Japan-Australia partnership continues to grow from strength to strength, supported by a long history

of complementary relations facilitated by many industry leaders and investors present tonight; from the large Japanese trading houses, to newer players like WOTA who have joined us all the way from Tokyo this evening.

They say a friend in need is a friend indeed, and particularly in the energy and resources sector, Japan depends – perhaps excessively so – on our Aussie mates.

With Australia now supplying close to 70 per cent of coal, 60 per cent of iron ore and 40 per cent of gas imports, I wouldn't be surprised if some accuse me of dropping the ball!

But to them I say, no worries, mate! As a true and trusted friend, I have every confidence that Australia would be the last country to resort to any kind of economic coercion.

Emboldened by our strong partnership, Japan and Australia continue to embark on new frontiers in the hydrogen, infrastructure and space sectors.

A hydrogen-powered future is certainly looking bright in Australia, with more than 30 hydrogen projects involving Japanese companies now given the 'green light'.

I hasten to add that Japan is actively pursuing all avenues for production of hydrogen and ammonia - both green *and* blue.

As I've emphasised on a number of occasions, the prospect of high-speed rail along Australia's east coast is also becoming less and less of a 'tell him he's dreaming' moment.

I felt this strongly during a recent 'pinch-me' moment of my own when I finally ticked the Indian Pacific Railway off my Australia bucket-list!

Inching across the Nullarbor under the starriest sky I've ever seen was an unforgettable way to experience the delights of slow-travel, but it also gave me renewed appreciation for the wonder that is Japan's shinkansen.

It's time to dream big, Australia! Why settle for the stars when you can shoot for the moon? Or perhaps even further still?

I am very excited to see how Japan and Australia's cooperation on the successful Hayabusa mission will be built upon as JAXA prepares for its next journey - this time to the moons of Mars.

5. Defence/security

On defence and security, Japan and Australia are now allies in all but name, including the signing of the RAA early last year.

Japan and Australia are here to uphold the international order based on the rule of law. This is not to antagonize anyone, but to preserve and protect our hard-won peace and prosperity.

Indeed Japan and Australia are looking at the *bigger* picture.

The past 12 months have starkly demonstrated how democracies must join together to defend our values and freedom, to hold fast against those who would seek to challenge the status quo by force and intimidation.

No nation personifies that struggle more than Ukraine.

(I acknowledge my Ukrainian friend Vasyl, and assure him that) Japan and Australia stand together with Ukraine, alongside other like-minded countries such as the US and the European Union in defiance of Russia's egregious aggression.

This year will be a crucial one, and Japan and Australia are in the driver's seat.

Japan will host the G7 in May and Australia will host the Quad Leaders' Meeting. In addition, Japan is back in the UN Security Council for the next two years.

Being elected for the 12th time is quite the feat and certainly the Guinness record, something my ambassadorial colleagues from India, Brazil and Germany – Manpreet, Mauricio and Marcus – know only too well!

6. Concluding remarks

As we look back on these developments, it is with bittersweet feelings that I note this will probably be my last time to address you for His Imperial Majesty the Emperor's birthday.

My time in Australia has disappeared faster than Chef OGATA's vanilla slice, but I don't think many will disagree that *I did it My Way!*

To be sure, just like Sinatra, *“Regrets, I’ve had a few. But then again, too few to mention”*.

As a humble diplomat from the Land of Karaoke, however, I’m not too shy to mention them:

- My first regret is enjoying Australia too much!

True to the lyrics, *I’ve lived a life that’s full and I’ve travelled each and every highway*.

It has truly been an incredible journey with both my literal and figurative cups overflowing. I thank each of you for your guidance and company along the way.

- My only other regret is sharing the journey through my newsletter – I have a lot to answer for at the foreign ministry with the line of applicants for this job now out the door and around the corner!

But you won’t escape me that easily.

Thanks to our good friends from All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines, there are more and more flights available each day and fewer reasons for you not to join me in Japan.

Until we can share another *‘kampai’* in the izakaya of Tokyo or Nagano, I hope you enjoy the taste of Japan we have prepared for you tonight.

Keep your eyes and ears out for the stunning symbiosis of kimono and Aboriginal art by WABORI, dynamic Aikido demonstrations, and even mysterious flights of a Yamaha drone.

To the defence and intelligence personnel present – if you happen to see a suspicious object floating in the sky, *don't shoot it down on these premises!*

So, ladies and gentlemen, enjoy the celebrations and thank you all for coming.

[Ends]