

His Excellency Ambassador SUZUKI Kazuhiro's op-ed on the 50th Anniversary of the Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Japan and Australia

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The most important treaty you've never heard of

The decision to elevate relations between two former wartime adversaries to such a special level demonstrated remarkable foresight and statesmanship on both sides, says Japan's ambassador.

Today marks the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Japan and Australia, better known as the NARA Treaty.

Before the treaty, our two countries had already achieved a significant milestone through the 1957 Commerce Agreement, which paved the way to normalised postwar trade relations. As economic interdependence deepened, however, both governments recognised the need for a broader framework to guide an increasingly important partnership.

Following a proposal by Australian prime minister Gough Whitlam in October 1973, negotiations continued for nearly two years and eight months before the treaty was formally signed during prime minister Malcolm Fraser's visit to Japan on June 16, 1976.

The NARA Treaty was remarkable because it was unprecedented for both countries. For Japan, its scope extended well beyond the traditional treaties of commerce and navigation that it had concluded with countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States.

For Australia, it was the first agreement of its kind with any country, extending most-favoured-nation treatment beyond trade in goods to include the entry, stay and business activities of each other's nationals.

For both countries, it represented a fundamentally new approach to bilateral relations.

Covering political, economic, labour, legal, scientific, technological, social, cultural, sporting and environmental fields, it established a comprehensive framework for co-operation and formally affirmed the enduring peace and friendship between the two countries and their

peoples.

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In retrospect, the treaty represented a historic act of vision and trust.

It reflected Australia’s growing acceptance of Japan as a long-term strategic partner and symbolised the deepening reconciliation and expanding mutual understanding between our peoples, made possible by the selfless and persistent efforts of many individuals in both countries.

The decision to elevate relations between two former wartime adversaries to such a special level demonstrated remarkable foresight and statesmanship on both sides. As a Japanese diplomat, I pay tribute to those pioneers whose vision, courage and leadership laid the foundation for this remarkable partnership.

Fifty years later, Japan and Australia have become indispensable partners. Today, few countries are as strategically aligned with one another as Japan and Australia.

Successive governments have built upon the foundation laid by the NARA Treaty, elevating the relationship to a special strategic partnership encompassing economic security, security and defence, critical minerals, energy security, advanced technology and diplomacy.

The importance of the relationship today extends well beyond our two countries. The international environment is becoming increasingly volatile and unpredictable. Geopolitical competition is intensifying, technological change is accelerating and the rules-based international order faces unprecedented challenges.

In this context, co-operation between Japan and Australia – two of the region’s most stable, prosperous and advanced democracies – is more important than ever.

The vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific, first advanced by the late prime minister Shinzo Abe, and recently updated by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, reflects this reality. The objective is not merely to preserve stability, but to strengthen the resilience of countries across the region and enhance their ability to determine their own futures, including in the

economic, social and security spheres. Japan and Australia are uniquely positioned to work together in advancing this vision.

We are already doing a lot together in the Indo-Pacific. Co-operation on critical minerals and rare-earth supply chains is strengthening economic resilience. Joint efforts on undersea cables, particularly in the Pacific Islands, are helping to build secure and reliable digital infrastructure. Defence co-operation, including the Mogami-class frigate project, contributes to maritime security and deterrence. Collaboration through the CPTPP and other multilateral institutions helps uphold an open and rules-based economic order.

Yet, there is scope to do much more. During Takaichi's recent visit to Australia, the two leaders announced the launch of the Japan-Australia Leadership Dialogue, bringing together leaders from government, business, academia and civil society to generate fresh ideas for the next stage of the partnership.

As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the NARA Treaty, we should remember that the strength of today's relationship rests upon the wisdom and courage of those who looked beyond the challenges of their time and invested in a shared future.

The greatest tribute we can pay to them is to demonstrate the same vision, determination and confidence in shaping the next 50 years of Japan-Australia co-operation.