

Remarks by H.E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK
At the Reception

to solemnly observe the 20th anniversary of the tragic loss of Ambassador Katsuhiko Oku and to support the Oku Memorial Trophy rugby matches
and
to the Bestowal Ceremony of
The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays upon Mr Reg Clark
for his contribution to promoting cordial relations between Japan and
the UK through rugby and education,
on Friday 24 November 2023

Distinguished Guests,

I would like to thank you all for coming this evening. I would say today's reception is quite a unique occasion because it has two closely interconnected but different objectives.

The first one is to solemnly observe the 20th anniversary of the tragic death of Ambassador Katsuhiko Oku, and remember him with great affection. The late Ambassador Oku, or Katsu, used to play rugby for Waseda University. He was a talented fullback with a bright future, but eventually left the club to concentrate on his diplomatic service examination. After he had entered the Foreign Ministry, he studied at Hertford College, Oxford and belonged to the Oxford University Rugby Football Club, where he became the very first Japanese "Blue". Later Katsu held a variety of positions in the Ministry, and served as a Counsellor at this Embassy, steering the cultural exchange project called "Japan 2001".

From April 2003, immediately after the fall of Baghdad, he made an extended trip to Iraq from his base in London. He played a central role in coordinating between the Japanese Government and the Office of Reconstruction Assistance and Humanitarian Aid/ Coalition Provisional Authority. He was a key figure in Japan's reconstruction assistance to Iraq and visited various parts of the country where he saw the future of Iraq in the shining eyes of its children. However, on 29 November 2003, he was tragically shot dead at the age of just 45. Katsu was a man of passion with an unparalleled sense of mission. It is no exaggeration to say that rugby was what shaped his passion. His legacy lives on in the hearts of many people, including those who once played rugby with him. In honour of his life, may I now ask all of you to join me in a moment of silence.

Thank you very much for observing a moment of silence together.

Now, may I move to the second objective of this reception, which is to celebrate the conferment of The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays (旭日双光章) on Mr. Reg Clark, CEO of Rhino Sport and Leisure, for his outstanding contribution to promoting cordial relations between Japan and the UK through rugby.

From 1980 to 1982, Reg worked and played rugby for Kobe Steel. In 1981 he was the first foreign player to be selected for the Kansai Elite Team, which played against the Japanese national team. Indeed, he was the pioneer who introduced the UK's sophisticated rugby culture, tactics and training methods to Japan. Following the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, Reg came up with the idea of turning rugby into a force for reconstruction. To this end he invited the world-famous Barbarians to Japan in June 1996 and organised two charity matches. Reg regularly arranges matches between the University of Oxford and Japanese universities such as Waseda, Doshisha and Kansei Gakuin, as well as having devised a 'World Cup' for students on the occasion of the 2015 and 2019 Rugby World Cups.

Reg's contribution has also extended to the field of education. In this regard, he has been promoting academic and research exchange between Japan and the UK. In fact, he played a leading role in setting up the Kobe Institute of St Catherine's College, Oxford, in Hyogo Prefecture. He also helped bring about the establishment of the 'Oxford Kobe Scholarship' in 1994, and continues to be involved in its administration.

Perhaps, many people here today remember Reg as the organiser of the Oku Memorial Trophy. He was one of Katsu's best friends at the University of Oxford. And since 2004, one year after Katsu was taken from us, Reg has started the Oku Memorial Trophy. I would like to extend my deep respect and sincere appreciation to Reg for his friendship with Katsu and for his dedication to keeping this much-loved event going for almost two decades. I can imagine that Katsu is now looking down on us from the heaven and singing the famous "Araburu (荒ぶる)" song of Waseda's rugby team to celebrate Reg's decoration.

As I touched upon, Mr. Reg Clark has served as a bridge between Japan and the UK by promoting mutual understanding and friendship through rugby and education, as well as promoting the Oku Memorial Trophy. Reg, on behalf of the government of Japan I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for your outstanding contribution. Congratulations Reg!