

Remarks by H.E. Mr HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
at the Reception to Celebrate
the Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan
at the Embassy of Japan in the UK on 27th February 2024

Excellencies, My Lords, My Ladies,
Distinguished Guests,

My wife and I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of the truly esteemed guests we are welcoming at the Embassy this evening, comprised of representatives of British society and the Diplomatic Corps based in London. It is our great pleasure to celebrate with you the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor, who turned 64 years old on the 23rd of February.

Last May Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino attended the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III as the personal representatives of His Majesty the Emperor. In stark contrast, this year has begun with a more solemn tone in both Japan and the UK. In Japan, the Noto Peninsula Earthquake that struck on New Year's Day caused tremendous loss of life and devastation. Meanwhile, people in the UK had to come to terms with His Majesty the King's announcement that he was undergoing treatment for cancer. It was encouraging, however, to learn about the exchanges of warm and supportive messages between Their Majesties. These episodes are symbolising that the Japanese Imperial family and the British Royal family stand with each other both at times of joy and on heart-breaking occasions and representing the bond between the people of the two countries.

Today, I request that we all send out our thoughts for the continued good health of His Majesty the Emperor, the fast recovery of His Majesty the King, the prosperity of both the Japanese Imperial Family and the British Royal Family, and the further development of our relations.

Distinguished Guests,

While 2023 was a difficult year, in which the international community faced serious challenges, it was also a rich and rewarding year with numerous landmark developments for the Japan-UK partnership. Japan assumed the G7 Presidency, hosting the G7 Hiroshima Summit in May. On that occasion, Prime Ministers KISHIDA Fumio and Rishi Sunak announced the ‘Hiroshima Accord: An Enhanced Japan-UK Global Strategic Partnership’, reaffirming our strong relationship. Continued progress was also forged in the realm of security and defence cooperation, with the signing and entering into force of the Japan-UK Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) as well as the signing of the Convention to establish an international government organization for the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), involving Japan, the UK and Italy. In the multilateral arena, Japan and the UK have been cooperating to promote, in particular, the rule of law through the United Nations Security Council, of which Japan is now a non-permanent member.

On the economic front, the Protocol on the Accession of the UK to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) was signed and Japan has completed the domestic procedures ahead of others. Furthermore, last November our Foreign Ministers signed the ‘UK-Japan Memorandum of Cooperation on people-to-people exchanges’, which confirms that the issuance of visas to each other’s country under Japan's Working Holiday Scheme and the UK's Youth Mobility Scheme will be dramatically expanded.

Additionally, it is encouraging to see signs of subdued inflation in the UK and a recovering economy in Japan with the recent record of the highest share prices on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, vastly improving the respective business climate. Against this backdrop, I do hope to see strengthened cooperation and increased investment between Japanese and British companies in both directions, from Japan to the UK and also from the UK to Japan.

I am also grateful to be joined today by many members of both the House of Lords and the House of Commons, epitomising their active interest in Japan. As both countries enter a heightened political season, I believe the Japan-UK partnership will remain strong regardless of party politics. Exchanges between our judicial branches have also been progressing: President of the Supreme Court, Lord Reed, who is also here today, visited Japan last autumn, when he exchanged views with Japanese Supreme Court Judges and had an opportunity to meet with His Majesty the Emperor.

In the cultural sphere, Japan House London, which promotes the many multifaceted charms of Japan, celebrated its fifth anniversary in September last year and has received a total of more than 1.8 million visitors to date. Meanwhile, the Japan Matsuri, held for the first time in four years in Trafalgar Square last October, attracted more than 40,000 visitors who relished the opportunity to experience the diversity of Japanese culture. Outstanding Japanese artists and performers are also playing an active role in British cultural organisations such as the Royal Ballet, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and many others. Of course, the world of cinema is a given, but I must also mention the overwhelming popularity of Britain's renowned Royal Shakespeare Company's stage production of *My Neighbour Totoro*. In the realm of sport, we cannot take our eyes off Japanese players, especially in football, where both male and female players have been making their mark with British teams in increasing numbers.

When I cast my eyes back to February 2021, three whole years ago when I arrived here with my wife as Ambassador to the UK, I find myself deeply touched by the impressive degree to which our relationship has expanded in so many fields. I feel deeply privileged to welcome all of you, including Former Prime Ministers, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and a number of Ministers, as well as quite a few senior government and military officials, who have made indispensable contributions to the development of extensive collaboration between Japan and the UK, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all once again.

Distinguished Guests,

His Majesty the Emperor studied at Oxford University from 1983 for approximately two years when he was Crown Prince. In 1993, the first edition of the book he wrote about his experiences there, entitled *The Thames and I: A Memoir of Two Years at Oxford*, was published. In Japan last April, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of its publication, the book was republished in Japanese, complete with an ‘*Afterword*’ provided by His Majesty where his hope of revisit was expressed, together with Her Majesty the Empress, also an Oxford alumna, possibly someday before long. Today, we are delighted to be joined by the wonderful voices of Merton College Oxford Choir, representing the college His Majesty the Emperor was a part of during his time at Oxford.

For today's reception, we have prepared a variety of booths devoted to such activities as ikebana, bonsai and tea ceremony so that our guests can gain a sense of Japanese culture. We also have a variety of booths offering local specialties to give you a taste of Japan's acclaimed regional delicacies.

Last but not least, I would like to ask for your continued support as we strive to further strengthen the Japan-UK partnership in the world where we face many serious common challenges.

Thank you very much indeed.