

Emperor's Birthday Reception
Remarks by H.E. Hiroshi Suzuki
Ambassador of Japan to the UK
On Thursday 26th February 2026

Lord Reed,
Lord Hermer,
My Lords, My Ladies,
Members of the Parliament,
My fellow Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Distinguished guests,
And my friends,

Wow! What a fantastic performance! Let's give a big round of applause to the British Coldstream Guards Band. Thank you very much.

It is with heartfelt gratitude that I welcome all of

you to the Japanese Embassy this evening.

It is a great honour to celebrate with you all the sixty-sixth birthday of His Majesty the Emperor.

The Japan-UK partnership is underpinned by the warm friendship between the Japanese Imperial Family and the British Royal Family. It is a global partnership based on common strategic interests and fundamental values: freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Today, our partnership is critically important, because we live at a time of great turmoil. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has gone into its 5th year. As John Locke said, “Wherever law ends, tyranny begins.”

We are standing at a crossroads of history. We must not let the course of history turn backwards and regress into the dark age of the law of the jungle. Our generation has a responsibility to make sure that the rule of law, not tyranny, will prevail, so that our children's and grandchildren's generation will be able to live in a free and open world where they can pursue their dreams.

This is why Japan is imposing severe sanctions on Russia and extending £14.5 billion assistance to Ukraine, which stands as the fifth largest bilateral assistance.

One month ago, Prime Minister Starmer visited Japan and met with Prime Minister Takaichi. I flew back to Tokyo to take part in that meeting. It

confirmed that Japan and the UK are on the same page on all key issues.

Prime Minister Takaichi won a historic landslide in the general election.

Going forward, Japan and the UK will deepen our defence cooperation, symbolised by the GCAP. We will strengthen cooperation in cyber security.

We will deepen our economic partnership through the CPTPP. We will expand cooperation in economic security. And we will advance cooperation in next-generation industries such as AI and quantum technologies.

Last year's Grand Sumo Tournament in London was a phenomenal success. This year the "Samurai" exhibition at the British Museum is attracting

many visitors. The Japan national football team is coming to the UK in March. In the autumn, we will enjoy the Japan Matsuri. And in November, the Japan national rugby team will visit the UK.

I am pleased to note that the Sakura Cherry Tree Project is making great progress. Several years ago, we began with 1,000 as our target. By now, we have donated more than 9,000 cherry trees to 1,000 places across the UK. We are getting closer to our new goal of 10,000 trees.

Now, I would like to invite my better half, Eiko, to say a few words.

One year has passed since we arrived here. As you

all know, we love your culture, horses, plays, food and in particular, ales. Our refrigerator is filled with very weird and strange named ales, like Old speckled hen, Badger and Bishop's finger. And they are all good.

Hiroshi travels across the UK. When he is packing the night before, he always gets a message saying, "Would you please bring your Paddington?" When he arrives, people are so excited to meet his Paddington, maybe not the Ambassador. We are grateful to our little sweet Paddington.

Thank you so much for coming this evening and thank you very much for being our friends.

Thank you, Eiko.

My Dear Friends,

This evening, we have prepared Japan's finest food. Master Chef Murakami and Chef Hayashi, from my Residence, along with Chef Sawada from my Deputy's Residence, have prepared an exquisite array of Japanese culinary delights, such as premium Wagyu beef. Please enjoy the Japanese cuisine, Washoku, which is registered as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Please also enjoy Shizuoka musk melons, which

Ms Endo from my Residence has created in the shape of Totoro. For drinks, you can enjoy Japanese sake, sparkling sake, Japanese whisky, Japanese beer, and Japan's Koshu wine. Koshu is Japan's indigenous grape variety for white wine. Now, you have to make a tough decision to make: which one you are going to enjoy first!

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the Japanese companies, local governments and organisations who have provided their generous support for this occasion. A huge thank you to UK Bonsai Association and Twickenham Bonsai Club for providing amazing Bonsais. I hope that all of you will fully experience what Japan has to offer. So,

please enjoy this evening.

Thank you very much.