

HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY, THE EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY SPEECH 2024

Lord Provost Robert Aldridge, Presiding Officer Alison Johnstone, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture Angus Robertson, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome all of you to our reception to mark the birthday of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor.

I will first touch on the Noto Peninsular Earthquake on New Year's Day in Japan. It caused many deaths and much destruction. I would like to pay tribute to those killed or affected by the disaster and to thank for the sympathy from friends across the globe after this disaster.

I would also like to mention the recent news concerning His Majesty King Charles' health. I hope His Majesty will make a speedy and full recovery and will return to public life soon.

Now I would like to focus on our relations with Scotland and the north of England, which are the jurisdiction of our Consulate.

Our relations continued to deepen in 2023. First of all, we are delighted to have the exchange of high level visits between us.

Last April, Mr Neil Gray, the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy, visited Tokyo and Osaka in three days of engagements where he promoted trade and investment links between Japan and Scotland. In turn Mr Akihiko Nishimura, then Japan's Minister for the Environment visited Edinburgh last August.

In June, Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado visited Scotland. I was honoured to host a reception she attended with some distinguished persons who have done much to promote Scottish-Japanese relations at my official residence.

In November, the Governor of Gunma Prefecture visited Scotland to find out more about Scotland's education system. It is hoped that a student and academic exchange programme can be developed between Scotland and Gunma Prefecture.

In terms of business relations, Japanese companies continued to invest in both Scotland and the north of England, some examples of which I would now like to mention.

One of the important investments from Japan here last year was by Sumitomo Electric, which was announced during Cabinet Secretary Gray's visit to Japan. This investment

would be the building a factory in Nigg near Inverness to make high end cables for the renewable energy sector.

In July, Mitsui acquired pipeline technology company STATS in Aberdeenshire. In December, it was announced that Mitsui's shipping company Mitsui OSK Lines have bought a share in Edinburgh-based wave energy technology company Mocean.

In the north of England, Nissan Motor Manufacturing continued its investment in its Sunderland plant. In November, it announced the plant will be the base for manufacturing three electric car models. This month will mark the 40th anniversary of when Nissan agreed to build the plant, which was officially opened in 1986.

Following on from this, this year will see the completion of the construction of AESC gigafactory in Sunderland. The UK government has been instrumental in providing financial assistance in the project. The factory is due to open in 2025 and will manufacture electric batteries for electric cars made at Nissan. It is estimated the new factory, when opened, will employ around 1,000 people.

I was honoured to attend the opening of the brand-new Komatsu Forest UK headquarters in Carlisle in September. The expansion of the company will see the creation of a number of jobs.

Meanwhile, collaboration between Japanese and non-Japanese companies here also continues. The most prominent is the collaboration between defence company Leonardo here in Edinburgh over several defence related projects. This shows a new frontier of the business collaboration between us.

Japanese business is also a valuable collaborator with many of academic institutions. For example, the University of Edinburgh has collaborated with Canon Medical, Sony, Hitachi and NEC in medical, electronics and computing science research. The university has also been working with Honda on robotics projects.

The University of Dundee is another institution with strong collaborative links with Japan. As you may be aware, the university has a reputation for drug research. Due to this, the university has collaborated with Japanese pharmaceutical companies Ono, Eisai and Takeda on drug development.

We expect new, further investment in service industries such as retail, food and so on,

over the next year

Cultural links between Scotland, the north of England and Japan have continued to strengthen too.

In the past year, our office continued with its promotion of Japanese culture. We are very pleased to see Japanese performers and artists at the Edinburgh International Festival and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The Consulate General hosted a showcase of some of the Japanese performers and artists in August. We expect even more performers and artists will participate this year.

The Consulate General also supported the annual touring Japan Foundation film festival which is being shown in several locations in our jurisdiction. This festival will continue this year.

This year, I am sure promotion of Japanese culture in Scotland and the north of England will continue in various areas. We have already been informed that various events and programs by Japanese communities, academic institutions, as well as citizens groups are planned and scheduled this year. We strongly believe that these efforts to promote our mutual understanding and friendship will strengthen the corporation and collaboration between Scotland, the north of England and Japan.

One event taking place this year will be a kimono exhibition at V&A museum in Dundee, titled “The Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk exhibition.”

This is a touring celebration of Japanese culture which looks at how the Kimono is a symbol of Japan both at home and internationally. The exhibition will include historical garments and modern takes on the Kimono by such renowned fashion designers such as Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto and Alexander McQueen.

I am honoured to mention the Japan Society of Scotland has worked closely with us to promote Japanese culture in Scotland. During the year, it held a number of seminars, lectures and events on Japanese history, crafts and nature as well as relations between Scotland and Japan.

We also continue to collaborate with the Orkney Japan Association with a number of events to strengthen relations between Japan and Orkney.

In terms of human exchange programmes, one of the important pillars is the Japan Exchange Teaching Programme, the JET Programme, which was launched in 1987. The purpose of the JET Programme is to assist in promoting internationalisation of Japan's community through improving foreign language education, developing international opportunities and deepening understanding between people of Japan and other of JET nationalities at schools, education bodies as well as local governments in Japan.

Our Consulate General started to be in charge of the JET Programme in 2008. So far, we have had more than 500 participants from Scotland and the north of England, and last year, the number of participants was 56, which was a record number.

In terms of sport, Celtic continues to have a strong contingent of Japanese players. Their star player Kyogo Furuhashi-san won the Golden Boot and Scottish league player of the year awards last year. Also last year the team completed a summer tour in Japan.

Away from Celtic, Yujiro Oda-san continues to play for Hearts and Kyosuke Tagawa-san also joined Hearts last year.

We are very happy to hear that Aberdeen and Sunderland are both seeking to sign Japanese players as well, but this may still be subject to confidential negotiations.

Finally, we would like to share joyful time with all of you tonight. Please enjoy the Japanese cuisine that is provided.

Thank you.