

Netherlands queen's day

400-year friendship holds promise of closer future ties

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AMBASSADOR OF THE NETHERLANDS

The official birthday of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix is celebrated April 30, in the middle of the tulip season. I took up my duties as Dutch ambassador in August last year, so this is my first spring in Japan. I have noticed the innumerable tulip festivals that are celebrated all over Japan during the month of April — usually related to a commemoration of Dutch-Japanese historical events.



This year it was especially lively on this front since in 2009 we will mark the 400th anniversary of our official trade relations. The long-standing friendship between Japan and the Netherlands is a fact many will acknowledge. Friendship takes energy, time and investment. It involves practical issues, like exchanging knowledge, trading and visiting each other. But it also occasionally requires something extra, to show that you still value the friendship. That is why Japan and the Netherlands are celebrating this year.

Japan leads the way

Nowadays it is hard to imagine that for many centuries, the Japanese archipelago was completely isolated from the West. Between 1639 and 1854, during the Edo Period, the

Netherlands was the only Western country that was allowed to trade with Japan. However, the small island of Deshima in Nagasaki functioned not only as a trading post, it also provided a window for the importation into Japan of Western knowledge, in the fields of medical science, flora and fauna, chemistry, physics and even engineering. Dutch studies, "rangaku," were synonymous with new knowledge and technology for two centuries.

These days Japan is an originator of knowledge, technological renewal and creative solutions for contemporary problems — and the Netherlands wants to receive the full benefit of this know-how. This will be the main theme of the official visits to Japan by Dutch ministers to mark the commemorations of the trade relations: The Netherlands attaches great importance to innovation as the engine of economic and social development. Therefore we will emphasize our wish to learn from Japan, and intensify scientific and technological joint projects.

During the visit to Japan by the Netherlands minister of transport, public works and water management in October, topics will be the ongoing exchange of know-how with Japan on intelligent transport systems, traffic management, public transport and railways; and the introduction into the Netherlands, using Japanese technology, of an ultrasilent



Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands

road surface.

On the occasion of the celebration of 400 years of trade relations between Japan and the Netherlands, the prime minister of the Netherlands, Jan Peter Balkenende, will head a mission of members of the Dutch Innovation Platform to Japan from Oct. 24 until 28. The mission will visit organizations that are involved in innovation in Japan.

The Dutch Innovation Platform was established in 2003 by the Dutch government to ensure that the Netherlands would regain its place among the international top 10 countries in higher education, research and innovation. The Innovation Platform aims to examine critically how knowledge and innovation systems function, and facilitate breakthroughs. It is charged

with the task of creating the conditions, establishing the connections, and developing the vision required to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship in the Netherlands. During its Japan visit, it will look for new impulses that can be applied to innovation processes in the Netherlands. The mission also hopes to give impulses to Japanese counterparts as well as establish new exchange relations that will improve innovative processes in both countries.

The prime minister, who is chairman of the Innovation Platform, will be accompanied by the two vice chairpersons of this platform: Minister of Education, Culture and Science Ronald Plasterk and Minister of Economic Affairs Maria van der Hoeven. They will lead a large group of members of the Dutch Innovation Platform to Japan. The Dutch Innovation Platform includes experts from the world of politics, business science and education.

Dutch contributions

In this way, the ties with Japan are important for my country. Nevertheless, the Netherlands has some significance for Japan as well: Like Japan, the Netherlands is densely populated and the area available for farming is relatively small. Like Japan, my country is facing the challenges of an aging society, concern for the environment, food safety and security. Nevertheless, we have managed to become the sec-

ond-largest exporter of agricultural products in the world behind only the United States. Entrepreneurship and innovation have made it possible to produce high-quality and safe food products in an environmentally friendly way, on less land area and with less people. Also in agriculture and fisheries, innovation is the key to development, and we are looking forward to further promoting cooperation and exchange of knowledge in this field.

Second, and importantly, the Netherlands is an excellent location for Japanese direct investment: More than 400 Japanese companies have established offices in our country — including around 80 European headquarters. The Netherlands offers a perfect corporate tax rate for Japanese corporations and furthermore a favorable tax climate; a well-trained and multilingual workforce; a high standard of living; an excellent infrastructure, not only for logistics (Rotterdam Port, Schiphol Airport) but also for data exchange.

Japanese companies have been welcomed by my country from an early date, and constitute one of the largest and most important groups of investors in the Netherlands.

Historical relations

Historical ties will be highlighted, not only in and by themselves but with regard to the way they have contributed to the present bilateral cooperation, for instance in the field of

water management and public works. Dutch engineers worked in this field in Japan in the Meiji Era and water still is an important element in our joint activities — recently strengthened by the friendship of the crown princes of our countries who are both active in international water affairs. There is a regular fruitful exchange of know-how, especially with regard to the rise of sea levels and water security.

This year will see a large number of activities: conferences on historical and contemporary topics, e.g., on the Dutch East India Company and Nagasaki; on water management; cultural activities such as jazz concerts and exhibitions of Dutch contemporary design; festivities in Hirado, where the first Dutch factory will be reconstructed. As an example of cooperation between Japanese technological know-how and Dutch creative talents, a mobile telephone game has been developed jointly with Taito Corp. for the Japanese market — centering on Dutch water management.

As for our shared cultural heritage: the Dutch minister for international cultural cooperation, who is also in charge of our shared cultural heritage, will visit the heritage sites in Japan in July. He will go to Nagasaki and Hirado to visit the most important sites of our shared past, and he will discuss how this shared past can be protected and developed in the fu-

ture to strengthen our present-day relations and exchanges.
Celebrations at home

The commemoration of our long-standing trading history will be extensively highlighted in the Netherlands as well. Exhibitions, festivals and sports events will all be featured. The official commemorative ceremony will be held at the end of August in the medieval Knights' Hall of the Dutch Par-

liament. Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino will travel to the Netherlands to attend this ceremony, thus symbolizing the friendly relations not only between Japan and the Netherlands but also between our royal families.

In short, our countries boast a long, shared past — and this bodes well for an equally long, shared future.

Sincere Greetings to Her Majesty Queen Beatrix On the Occasion of Her Birthday



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