

Russia national day

Future ties can overcome the past

Mikhail M. Bely
AMBASSADOR OF RUSSIA TO JAPAN

I appreciate this opportunity to address the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of Russia's National Day. June 12, 1990, the day the State Sovereignty Declaration was adopted, marked Russia's turning point toward a new democratic society with a modern political system and true market economy.

I am highly pleased to see that Russian-Japanese relations have developed significantly in recent years, much of this based on the "Action Plan" adopted by our two countries in 2003.

An active political dialogue is under way. Our leaders meet regularly at inter-

national forums and during bilateral events. In February, Prime Minister Taro Aso visited Sakhalin where he met President Dmitry Medvedev. Just last month, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin had a highly productive working visit to Japan. In addition to these landmark events, regular contacts are being maintained between parliaments, government ministries and other official bodies, including law enforcement and the military.

During this same period, our economic cooperation has been transformed, with bilateral trade increasing rapidly to reach almost \$30 billion in 2008. To take some specific examples, the Toyota auto plant in St. Petersburg is operational while another Japanese auto giant — Nissan — has just inaugurated its plant in the same city. A number of other such facili-



Russian President Dmitry Medvedev

ties are under construction or operational. In the energy sector, the first shipments of liquefied natural gas have been made to Japan from the Sakhalin-2 energy project. We see this as the start of a long relationship demonstrating our role as a reliable supplier to the Japanese

market.

Cultural exchanges between our countries are also quite active. The festivals of Russian culture in Japan and similar Japanese events in Russia have become a tradition. These always successful festivals help our peoples to better learn and understand each other. In just a few days, the 2009 Festival of Russian Culture will open in Tokyo, including performances by the world famous Bolshoi Opera. Japanese opera-lovers will have a chance to hear two wonderful operas by Tchaikovsky: "Queen of Spades" and "Evgeny Onegin." I invite everyone interested in Russian culture to attend these performances and other events of the festival.

I would also like to say a few words about Prime Minister Putin's recent visit to Japan, which I believe was an important event in Russian-Japanese relations. During the very constructive talks, the two prime ministers were able to discuss ways to further promote bilateral political and economic cooperation, and steps our two countries can take to help overcome the global economic crisis. As a result of the meeting, a number of bilateral accords were signed, including an important agreement on cooperation in the atomic energy sphere. This agreement significantly enlarges the framework of our work together and opens new

True strategic partnership the ultimate goal

Yoshiro Mori
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-RUSSIA
PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE
FORMER PRIME MINISTER

On the occasion of "Russian Day," the auspicious day marking the birth of a "new Russia," I offer my heartfelt congratulations to the Russian Federation and its people.



Today, the Russo-Japanese relationship has been expanding steadily in a broad range of fields in accordance with the Japan-Russia Action Plan adopted in 2003. In particular, bilateral cooperative economic relations have been developing from mid- and long-term perspectives. In February, Prime Minister Taro Aso and President Dmitry Medvedev attended a ceremony marking the commencement of operations of a liquefied natural gas plant in the Sakhalin-2 energy project, and shipments of LNG to Japan have begun.

Aside from energy, the scope of bilateral cooperation is expanding markedly, encompassing transportation, the environment, communications and finance, among others. I

firmly believe that the development of Japan-Russia relations in diverse fields in a mutually beneficial and supplementary manner is conducive to the common strategic interests of the two countries.

On the other hand, it is regrettable that the negotiations toward the conclusion of a Japan-Russia peace treaty remain stalled, despite the accords in the Action Plan. To elevate the bilateral relationship to a higher dimension, we must overcome the actuality that Japan and Russia, mutually important neighboring countries in the Asia-Pacific region, cannot yet conclude a peace treaty. To this end, it is imperative for both countries to strive to move ahead toward the ultimate solution of the two countries' largest pending issue — the territorial problem.

This year, summit-level political dialogue between the two countries is under way. At the summit in February, the top leaders of the two countries agreed to embark on a concrete process to address issues in the Asia-Pacific region of interest to both countries. Prime Minister Aso and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, in their talks in May, reached accords on the importance of building bilateral relations as strategically

important partners and of addressing matters in the Asia-Pacific region of mutual interest. Japan and Russia ought to continuously facilitate the realization of matters of interest to both countries and conceive what will lie ahead of such collaboration. I wholeheartedly wish that Japan-Russia dialogue will proceed to that end.

I held my 14th conference with Prime Minister Putin on the occasion of his visit to Japan in May, and had a meaningful exchange of views on bilateral cooperation in the Far East and

East Siberia area, the construction of the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean oil pipeline, cooperation in the field of transportation, the territorial issue and the problem of infectious diseases. For me, further advancement of relations with Russia is my lifework as a politician and I am determined to address in earnest the development of future-oriented Japan-Russia relations.

On this auspicious occasion, I sincerely wish the Russian Federation and its people peace and prosperity.



Old friends: Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin meets former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori on May 12 in Tokyo during his visit to Japan. AP

Relations vital to Asia-Pacific security

Yukio Hatoyama
CHAIRMAN, JAPAN-RUSSIA SOCIETY
MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

On the 19th anniversary of the Russian Federation's declaration of sovereignty, I, on behalf of the Japan-Russia Society, would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations. The Japanese and Russian economies are facing difficulties, due largely to the global recession triggered by the U.S. subprime loan issue. Plummeting crude oil prices in particular have dealt a serious blow to the Russian economy.

Russia is a big power with immense reserves of natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas and minerals. I have no doubt that Russia will overcome the economic crisis and will be on the right track to prosperity. So will Japan, I believe.

On May 11, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin came to Tokyo,

accompanied by some of his Cabinet ministers, Russian regional governors and business people. The following day, the prime minister participated in a meeting of Japanese and Russian governors, held in cooperation with the Japan-Russia Society. At the May 12 meeting they agreed to promote more regional cooperation in trade, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges.

On June 3, Nissan Motor Co. opened a car manufacturing plant in St. Petersburg at a ceremony attended by Prime Minister Putin. Nissan President Carlos Ghosn said at the ceremony that he believed in the great potential of the Russian market, presenting a bright prospect for bilateral economic ties.

The Japanese-Russian relationship has increasingly become close. For the peace and security of the Asia-Pacific region, it is of great importance to deepen friendly relations between Japan and Russia while maintaining favorable relationships among the United States, China, Russia and Japan.

Russia is a neighboring country with which Japan has a history of some 300 years of exchanges. It is a great cultural country with superb arts and literature. I would like to see the people of the two countries promote good will and friendship through mutual understanding and reciprocity.

At present, however, there exists the unsettled territorial issue and the absence of a peace treaty between the two countries. We need to solve these issues as soon as possible and further raise the level of the relationship in every respect.

The Japan-Russia Society, founded in 1965, has been conducting goodwill and friendship activities, including cultural, science, economic and political dialogue, at a nongovernmental level. The society is determined to continue to conduct various activities to further promote the relationship.

In conclusion, I sincerely wish the Russian Federation and its people peace and prosperity on the auspicious occasion of their country's national day.

Russia: as far as the eye can see, and beyond

Russia is about 1.8 times the size of the United States, occupying the vast area between Europe and the North Pacific Ocean. It has an area of 17,075,200 sq. km and a population of almost 150 million people.

Occupying a large territory in Europe and Asia, Russia is spread over all climatic zones except tropical. It takes over eight hours by plane to reach Vladivostok on the Pacific coast from Moscow. West of the Ural mountains from the Black Sea in the south to the Arctic Ocean lies a broad plain with low hills where the historical core of the Russian nation is located. East of the Urals from the border with Kazakhstan, China and Mongolia to the Arc-

tic coast lies Siberia — a scarcely populated area covered by coniferous forests, swamps and tundra in the north, and mountainous terrain in the south.

The country possesses a wide array of natural resources, including major deposits of oil, coal, natural gas, many strategic minerals, diamonds and timber. The economic zone along the 37,653-km-long coastline (Arctic and Pacific Oceans, Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas) holds significant reserves of fish and oil, and natural gas on the sea shelf.

Most of the country has a so-called harsh continental climate characterized by a big difference between summer and

winter temperatures (it gets very cold in Siberia during winter, but it is also very hot in summer). Russia's geographical location presents a significant obstacle to development — dry or cold climate, terrain, distance and remote location from major sea lanes, all these factors contribute to large parts of the country having almost no population and development. Russia has only 8 percent of arable land.

The country stretches 2,500 km to 4,000 km from north to south and another 9,000 km from west to east. Russia's westernmost point is on the Polish border; its easternmost point is situated on Ratmanov Island (Bering Straits). The southernmost point is on the Russian-Azeri border and the northernmost point is on the Franz-Josef Land islands. Russia's borders stretch for 58,562 km (with 14,253 km bordering other states and 44,309 km bordering the sea).

Vast plains cover most of Russia's territory. The Eastern European (Russian) Plain, replete with low plateaus, is found in western Russia. The Mid-Siberian Plateau, which is gradually transformed into the Central Yakut Plain, can be found between two rivers, the Yenisei and the Lena.

Mountain ranges are mostly located in Russia's eastern regions and in some of its south-

ern areas, as well. The Ural mountains, for one, constitute a natural boundary separating European and Asian Russia. Various ranges making up the northern slope of the Greater Caucasian mountain range are located in southern Russia. Another mountain chain, including the Altai range, is to be found in southern Siberia.

Russia boasts 120,000 rivers each with a length of 10 km or greater. The majority of all local rivers, major rivers included (Ob, Irtysh, Yenisei and Lena), are located in the Arctic Ocean Basin. The Amur, Anadyr, Penzhina and some other rivers flow into the Pacific Ocean. The Don, Kuban and Neva rivers flow into the seas bordering the Atlantic Ocean.

Russia's main river, the Volga, flows all the way to the Caspian Sea. Generally, Russian rivers stretch for 3 million km, dumping nearly 4,000 cubic km. of water annually. Around 2 million fresh- and saltwater lakes are scattered across Russia. The largest lakes are the Caspian, Baikal, Ladoga, Onega and Taimyr. Lake Baikal, which attracts scores of foreign environmentalists, is the largest freshwater lake in the world, having an average depth of 730 meters (and a maximum depth of 1,620 meters).

Forests cover some 40 percent of the Russian land mass, with total timber reserves of 79 billion cubic meters. The largest forests can be found in the Siberian taiga, the Far East and the northern European territories. Coniferous trees (fir, pine, cedar, larch, etc.) are the predominant tree varieties there. Mixed forests are typical of mid-Russian regions.

Moscow, which is Russia's largest political, industrial, research and cultural center, is located on the banks of the Moskva River (between the Oka and Volga rivers) and has a population of around 9 million. Moscow was first mentioned in medieval chronicles in 1147, becoming the seat of an appanage principedom in the 13th century. Moscow's Prince Ivan Kalita, who ruled between 1325 and 1340, became one of the first Russian rulers to start the re-urbanization process.

Under Kalita, Russian metropolitans transferred their residence from Vladimir to Moscow, which thus became a political and clerical center, serving as the main force in the Russian reunification process and independence struggle.

Peter the Great moved the Russian capital to St. Petersburg many centuries later, though the people continued to

regard Moscow as Russia's heartland. Russian emperors were crowned here, with local authorities founding the first national university in 1755 on Mikhail Lomonosov's initiative. In fact, education was free for talented youths of all categories of the population.

The number of enterprises soared dramatically in Moscow after the abolition of serfdom and was further facilitated by the construction of railroads. At the turn of the century, 10 railroads linked Moscow to the rest of the country and continue to operate today.

Moscow became the capital of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic on March 12, 1918, and on Dec. 30, 1922, it became the capital of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

St. Petersburg is the nation's second major industrial, research and cultural center after Moscow. In 1914, the city was renamed Petrograd and from 1924 to 1991 it was named Leningrad. It has a population of about 4.5 million.

St. Petersburg became Russia's capital in 1712, during which time all government organizations were relocated there. The population grew quickly as the city continued to develop. St. Petersburg had a population of 95,000 by 1750. By 1853, over 500,000 people inhabited the city.

The first Russian railroad linking St. Petersburg with Tsarskoye Selo was opened in 1837. Another railroad connected the city with Moscow in 1851. St. Petersburg has now become a major Russian railroad junction, serving as the end port of the system of inland waterways that snake their way through European Russia's northwest region.

It also serves as the country's most important Baltic seaport. The maritime academy was founded here back in 1715. The engineering school was established in 1719 while the miners school sprang up in 1773. Road engineers and forestry institutes were established in 1809 and 1811, respectively. As of today, the city has about 50 colleges and 15 professional theaters.

St. Petersburg also boasts quite a few world-famous architectural structures — the Peter and Paul Fortress, the Alexander Nevsky Laura, the Palace Square and Winter Palace, the Decembrists' Square, where a monument to Peter the Great stands, St. Isaac's Cathedral, the Admiralty, the Academy of Arts, as well as numerous bridges.



Woodlands: Forests cover some 40 percent of the Russian land mass. NOVOSTI

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the Russian Federation's
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to the People
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of
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