

Afghanistan | Afghanistan National Day Special

Domestic unity fosters stability and growth

Bashir Mohabbat
AMBASSADOR OF AFGHANISTAN



As the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan celebrates its 99th National Independence Day, on behalf of our people and the National Unity Government, I wholeheartedly thank Their Majesties the Emperor

Akihito and Empress Michiko of Japan, the Japanese government and the noble people of this great nation for the steadfast support and their essential role in further developing Afghanistan.

Thanks to the great support of Japan and the international community, 17 years ago, Afghanistan laid the foundations for democracy. Since then, multiple local and national elections have taken place. The latest display of this will be the parliamentary elections in October and the presidential election in April 2019. These milestones will serve as key steps toward the further embedding and maturation of our democratic system. Previous elections have taught us much, and we are equipped to employ reforms and deepen fairness and transparency.

Our last presidential election resulted in the National Unity Government's formation. One of its key priorities has been the economy. Thanks to the continuing support of prominent international partners such as Japan, Afghanistan has experienced a gross domestic product growth that is forecast to reach around 3.27 percent by 2020. A central fiscal policy objective has been raising domestic revenues. The resulting constant increase is highlighted prominently in 2017's nearly 13

percent increase in government revenues throughout 2016.

More and more, unity is defining Afghanistan. This year, Afghans witnessed several groundbreaking events that further strengthened peace and stability. At the Kabul Process II Conference in February, His Excellency President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani made amenable provisions to help reconcile with the Taliban. Also, the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan, joined by 20 countries and organizations, continued such talks and emphasized the need for Afghan-owned and led regional cooperation. Through such efforts, a three-day ceasefire agreement between the government and the Taliban was achieved during Eid al-Fitr in June (the festival marking the end of Ramadan fasting). I am confident that the goodwill extended by the government during this period can inspire eventual permanent benefits for all.

Positive progress has not only been domestically focused. Important steps toward greater regional cooperation were taken in February when a ceremony was held to celebrate the start of construction of the Afghanistan section of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline Project. The project will supply South Asia with Central Asian gas. It will also serve as an economic corridor of fiber optics and railroad networks. Afghanistan additionally opened air cargo corridors with more than six regional countries to boost trade. This cheaper, more effective means of reaching nearby markets contributed to Afghanistan's estimated \$784 million in exports last year; compared to around \$614 million in the previous year.

Slightly further abroad, Japan remains one of our nation's dearest friends and irreplaceable partners. The visit to Afghan-



H.E. President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani (right) and H.E. Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah AP

istan by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Masahisa Sato on April 6 reflects the ever-deepening of our relations and eagerness for us to continue our momentum. Our embassy was also fortunate to host a first-of-its-kind tea ceremony on June 29. Attended by Princess Hisako, the ceremony commemorated the ninth anniversary of the princess' gifting and planting of a friendship plum tree on our grounds.

Much like how the treasured tree has thrived and borne fruit, so has the deep-rooted friendship between our respective

countries. Japan and her people hold a place of immeasurable value in the hearts of all Afghans. Therefore, please accept our gratitude for your commitment to our nation and people, and may we forever stand side by side, helping realize greater peace and prosperity for all.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.

Old ties continue to prosper

Natsuo Yamaguchi
HOUSE OF COUNCILORS MEMBER

It is a great honor and pleasure to extend my sincerest congratulations to the people and government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the occasion of the 99th National Independence Day.

Cultural aspects emanating from Afghanistan and traveling across the Silk Road have become deeply rooted in Japan, resulting in the close affinity that the Jap-



anese people feel toward your nation. Today, I am full of hope regarding the stability and self-sustainability of your country, and I recognize the boundless possibilities of our two nations' future relationship.

It is my sincere hope that our bilateral friendship will continue to expand and flourish.

CONGRATULATIONS
on the Independence Day
of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan



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on the 98th Anniversary of
the Islamic Republic of
Afghanistan's Independence



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