

Azerbaijan national day

Development maintains bridge from Asia to Europe

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It is my great pleasure to address the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of Azerbaijan — Republic Day — and to extend my warmest and sincere greetings to Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial Family, the government and the friendly people of Japan, as well as all Azerbaijanis living in Japan.



On May 28, 1918, Azerbaijan was the first country in the East to establish a democratic republic with a functioning parliament, which unfortunately lasted very shortly and ended in 1920. Azerbaijan regained its independence in 1991 and became a member of the United Nations on March 2, 1992.

Today Azerbaijan stands as an embodiment of ideals and vision: democratic, actively pursuing integration with European and Euro-Atlantic structures, and a dynamic market economy supported by vibrant policies and an educated, young population.

Since its establishment, the Republic of Azerbaijan has been following a peaceful and balanced foreign policy, guided by principles of international law, respect of the sovereignty of states and human rights and supporting an international, cooperative environment.

Azerbaijan has direct access to the extensive and speedily emerging markets of the Central Asian states, the Caucasus as well as the Middle East. The Black Sea and the Mediterranean regions are of high importance to Azerbaijan. Since the historical Silk Road, taking its start from Japan, integrated Azerbaijan, the country remains a bridge from Asia to Europe.

For about 20 years, the Republic of Azerbaijan has been suffering from the consequences of neighboring Armenian aggression. As a result of the aggression, 20 percent of our territories — Upper Karabakh and seven surrounding districts — are under occupation and the number of refugees and internally displaced persons from the occupied Azerbaijani lands and from Armenia is more than 1 million.

It should be taken into consideration that 2009 went down in history as the year of recession. However, our economy grew almost 10 percent. The fact that growth was achieved is certainly a great success. Azerbaijan successfully is attending to economic diversification and this is one of our priorities.

The recent official visit to Japan of His Excellency Ilham Aliyev, president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in 2006, has given a boost to enhancing co-

operation in all the spheres of bilateral relations. Azerbaijan is committed to high-level exchanges to bring both countries closer.

During the last year, we carried out productive high-level visits from Azerbaijan to Japan, particularly visits by the ministers of Foreign Affairs and Education, and just recently we managed to hold important economic events in Japan: an Azerbaijan investment seminar and a meeting of Azerbaijan-Japan Joint Economic Commission. Thus we witnessed that both sides have mutual interests to enhance trade and economic ties.

In this regard, all appropriate institutions of both countries should contribute through

information dissemination and intensive dialogue to bring these intentions closer to reality. Azerbaijan is ready to receive and properly respond to all inquiries in order to ensure the above-mentioned goals.

Moreover, in close cooperation with our friends and partners, we are working on the development of the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey railway. Interlinking trans-Asian and trans-European railroads will improve the transportation between Europe and Asia and contribute to the growth of the countries concerned in international trade, as well as to the prosperity and well-being of their people.

During the last three years, the cooperation framework be-

tween Japan and the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development that comprises Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, known as GUAM, has been improving with firm dialogue and annual seminars in various fields of economy. This framework aspiration can further lead to long-term strategic partnership if all parties will show steady political interest.

We have recently received great news that the World Economic Forum, one of the world's major international organizations, has placed Azerbaijan at the top in the level of IT development of countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Last year, with the support of Japan, a draft resolution was put forth at the U.N. General Assembly on a Trans-Eurasian Information Superhighway project, which aims to integrate information communication networks crossing over the historical Silk Road, linking Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. Azerbaijan commits itself to become an information transit country by declaring several regional projects such as the construction of a trans-Caspian seabed cable line that will efficiently serve the trans-Asia-Europe line. Other major steps, including the construction of technoparks, are on the agenda.

Azerbaijan announced 2010 as a Year of Environment in the country. Azerbaijan is projected to outline new initiatives aiming to ease the challenges of climate change, increase the use of alternative energy resources and improve environmental cleanliness of the country. Japan is a priority for Azerbaijan in its efforts to cooperate to achieve this goal.

Recognizing the importance of tourism in mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples, I would like to invite all of our Japanese

friends to visit and discover Azerbaijan, located at the crossroads of many cultures and civilizations, which brings East and West together.

Last year saw several valuable cultural exchanges, particularly the opening of a Japanese garden at one of the most scenic places of Azerbaijan and a performance in Nara of Azerbaijan's "mugham" music, a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. These are just two of the remarkable events in terms of bringing closer together the cultural assets of both coun-

tries.

I have a firm belief that Azerbaijan and Japan share the same values and have common political and economic interests, and should develop a firmer and more dynamic relationship to strengthen bilateral ties in order to address various challenges to the international community.

With this conviction, in my capacity as ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan, I would like to reiterate my commitment to contribute to the further strengthening and enhancing of the ties of friendship and cooperation between Azerbaijan and Japan, and wish happiness and continued prosperity to the people of Japan.



Multicultural influences: Constructed in the 12th century, Maiden Tower in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. EMBASSY OF AZERBAIJAN

Congratulations

to the People of the Republic of Azerbaijan
on the Occasion of Their National Day



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