

Benin National Day Special

Bridge to West Africa and beyond

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AMBASSADOR OF BENIN



Today, Aug. 1, marks the 60th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Benin. I am honored to share this special occasion with readers of The Japan Times, our partners, and friends.

On behalf of President of the Republic of Benin H.E. Patrice Talon, his government and the Beninese people, I would like to extend my heartfelt and healthy wishes to Their Majesties Emperor Naruhito, Empress Masako and the entire imperial family.

My gratitude goes also to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Cabinet, members of the Diet, members of the Japan-Benin Parliamentary Friendship League and the Japan-Benin Friendship Association, as well as the governors and mayors of cities cooperating with Benin, for their continued support, especially during this difficult time of coronavirus, which calls for more concrete solidarity and partnerships.

This year is special for the Republic of Benin. It marks one of the most important days in Beninese history and also a significant moment for reflection that should provide each of us, citizens of

Benin, a renewal of our collective hope and optimism.

Fundamental change

Since 2016, the president has nurtured and implemented a vision to remake our nation into an innovative hub, a prosperous land characterized by effective and transparent governance, as well as industrial transformation — a nation to be counted among the best. Under the president, we have moved from an era of aspirations to an era of achievements. With the creation and implementation of groundbreaking reform, Revealing Benin, and its associated Government's Action Program (PAG) for the 2016 to 2021 term, Benin has been on the move. Our economy has shifted from being dominated by transit services to being a vibrant and diverse economy, taking into consideration and putting into focus its heritage, agricultural and tourist assets.

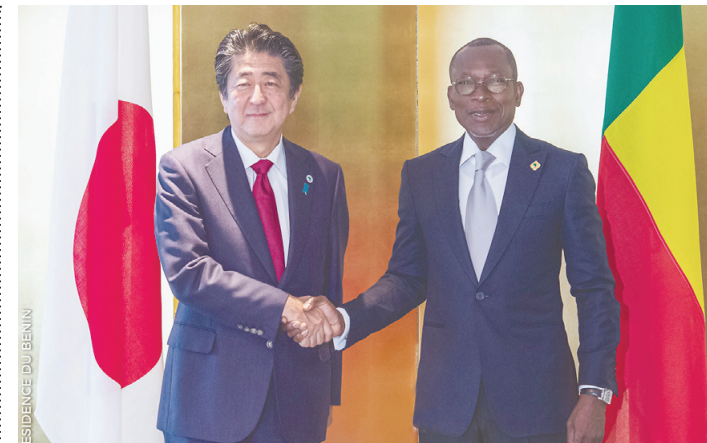
The overall development of Benin and the fundamentals of its socioeconomic outlook are better and have been progressively improving. A series of measures, such as improving the regulations governing the establishment, operation, and closure of businesses, were introduced through the PAG and have fostered a better climate for companies wanting to do business in Benin. We have seen a sharp increase in the annual number of new businesses created, which can be attributed to the improve-

ment of the business climate and attractive opportunities the country offers to the private sector. The combination of good security, stability and governance makes Benin the staging ground for anyone wanting to expand influence or investment into West Africa.

A country in good health

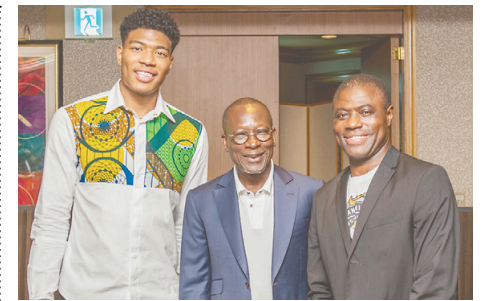
As shown by a variety of indicators, there is no doubt that Benin has benefited from the new set of reforms. Economically, Benin's real gross domestic product has grown by over 6.7 percent in 2019, up from 5.4 percent in 2017. In several areas, the fast-acting impact of Revealing Benin is already clear. From energy to infrastructure to public spending, significant improvements have been noted. More specifically, the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Agricultural Sector Development (2017 to 2025) has considerably improved agricultural productivity and developed agriculture value chains (cashews, pineapples, cassava, corn, rice, meat and milk).

On July 1, new figures from the World Bank show Benin moving from a lower-income to a lower-middle-income category, owing to its gross national income per capita reaching \$1,250. Furthermore, Benin's Standard & Poor's credit rating stands at B+ and is among the top five best African countries in many areas (governance, growth, debt management and progress on the U.N.'s sustainable develop-



Beninese President Patrice Talon meets Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during The Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Yokohama in October 2019.

PRESIDENT OFFICE OF BENIN



Beninese President Patrice Talon with Rui Hachimura of the NBA's Washington Wizards (left) and his father Djahirou Zakari (right) who is Beninese, during TICAD7 in 2019.

PRESIDENT OFFICE OF BENIN

ment goals). For Benin, the positive outlook is a further demonstration that the reforms under the PAG are fruitful.

Despite the global negative impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the GDP, Benin is maintaining its development path through reforms and the transformation of its economy for sustainable and inclusive development. With a focus on inclusive growth, the government has established plans to support the most vulnerable spheres of the population and help limit the economic impact of the virus on businesses in severely impacted sectors.

Forward together

The president's pledge to take the country forward and the achievements so far have not been without pressures and challenges. The extraordinary nature of the pandemic has put to the test the country's health infrastructure and the macroeconomic prospects indicate a potential slowdown of the economy.

While few of us can truly predict what Benin will look like after this crisis, the government's steadfastness will continue to prop up the economy through the coronavirus crisis. Despite the widespread disruptions and uncertainties, let's not forget the opportunities this crisis also offers. This is an opportune time to foster enduring collaboration and partnership like never

before. For the Republic of Benin, we continue to put the highest priority and belief in the potential of the formidable relationships between Benin and Japan. I reaffirm here once again that we attach the highest importance and commitment to cultivating increased private-public relationships and positive trade and investment between Benin, Japan and the rest of the world.

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

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to the People of the Republic of Benin
on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of
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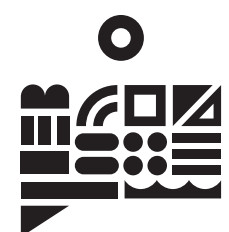
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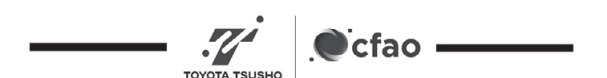


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