

Azerbaijan National Day Special

Strategic transportation hub and reliable energy partner

GURSEL ISMAYILZADA
AMBASSADOR OF AZERBAIJAN



It is my great pleasure to address the esteemed readers of The Japan Times on the National Day of the Republic of Azerbaijan. I would like to extend my warmest greetings and best wishes to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako, the imperial family, the government and the friendly people of Japan, as well as the Azerbaijani community in Japan.

This year we are celebrating the 33rd anniversary of the restoration of our independence. Since regaining independence in 1991, and under the visionary leadership of national leader Heydar Aliyev and President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan has flourished into a prosperous country. While becoming an investor country and having a leadership role in huge regional projects, Azerbaijan also plays an important role in global energy security and is a reliable transit country in Eurasia.

In 2023, under the president's leadership, Azerbaijan fully restored both its territorial integrity and state sovereignty. As the president stated, this was a historic event and it has a special place in our centuries-old history.

In a speech delivered in February, the president unveiled a comprehensive strategy outlining detailed action plans for both domestic and international policies. Azerbaijan initiated the signing of a peace agreement with Armenia based on international norms.

The top priority of the government of



The Palace of the Shirvanshahs is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. EMBASSY OF AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan is the restoration, reconstruction and development of liberated territories. The government is swiftly advancing these efforts, alongside the successful resettlement of former internally displaced persons back to their ancestral lands. Currently, approximately 5,400 of these people have already returned and the plan is to settle 20,000 in five cities and 15 villages by the end of the year. The first phase of the Great Return program will be completed by the end of 2026, when 140,000 displaced people will have returned to their ancestral lands.

Azerbaijan's economy has demonstrated robust growth, tripling over the past two decades. A strong socioeconomic infrastructure has been established, significantly reducing poverty — from 50% in 2003 to the current rate of 5%. In the first quarter

of 2024 alone, gross domestic product increased by 5% and in the nonoil sector by more than 12%.

Azerbaijan continues to be a reliable partner of the European Union in energy security, now exporting natural gas to eight countries, with plans to expand further across Europe. This expansion is aligned with the country's strategic goals to increase its footprint in the European energy market, thereby reinforcing its role as a key supplier and contributing to the continent's energy stability and sustainability.

Additionally, Azerbaijan's strategic position as a global transport hub enhances its significance. Our country maintains a fully operational transport infrastructure, including extensive railway networks, highways and maritime facilities, all con-



The Flame Towers illuminate central Baku. EMBASSY OF AZERBAIJAN

tributing to the growing importance of routes through Central Asia and the Caucasus. Azerbaijan's strategic position as a critical corridor linking north and south has become increasingly vital, thereby enhancing alternative transport routes to the northwest and southwest. The nation continues to be a prominent advocate for both regional and transregional connectivity, actively promoting the expansion and development of transportation infrastructure.

The threat of climate change, manifesting as increased heat, drought and flooding due to greenhouse gas emissions, remains a global challenge. Climate challenges represent a global issue that demands immediate action from all nations to effectively address to preserve our ecosystem. Azerbaijan is deeply committed to environmental sustainability, investing significantly in renewable energy sources. By 2030, the government aims to increase renewable energy's share to 30% of the national energy balance, cre-

ating approximately 5,000 megawatts of renewable capacity from solar, wind and hydropower.

In November, the Republic of Azerbaijan will host COP29, the 29th United Nations Climate Change Conference, in Baku. The year 2024 has been also proclaimed "The Green World Solidarity Year" in Azerbaijan. It is demonstrating the country's commitment to environmental protection and climate action. The presidential order Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development emphasizes our commitment to fostering a clean environment and promoting "green growth." Regions such as Karabakh, East Zangezur and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic are designated as "green energy zones," highlighting our strategic environmental initiatives.

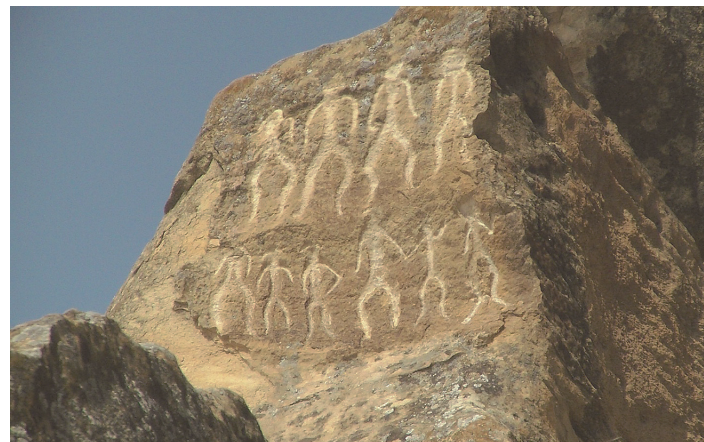
Japan was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Dec. 28, 1991. The diplomatic relations between our countries were established on Sept. 7, 1992. During

these past years, we have achieved significant bilateral relations, building strong political ties.

Relations between Azerbaijan and Japan are built on principles of common interest, mutual understanding and respect, which works to the benefit of our nations. Azerbaijan and Japan share common values such as democracy, a free-market economy, human rights and contributing to peace and stability in the world. From the first years of diplomatic relations, these factors created favorable grounds to develop our cooperation.

As we celebrate our National Day, we reaffirm our commitment to progress, sustainability and fostering strong international relationships, ensuring a prosperous future for Azerbaijan and contributing positively to global welfare.

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



Left: The consultation room in Shaki Khan's Palace features stained glass windows. Right: The Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape was declared a World Heritage Site in 2007 for its quality and density of rock art engravings. EMBASSY OF AZERBAIJAN

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FEC The International Friendship Exchange Council (FEC)
Landic Toranomon Bldg. No. 2, 3F
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Head Office 77-1 Kyomachi, Chuo-ku, Kobe Tel. 078-392-6988