

King Charles III's Birthday Special

Working together to take on global issues

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This year, June 15 marks the official birthday of His Majesty King Charles III. As in previous years we are holding events in Tokyo and Osaka to mark this special moment in the life of our nation.

The celebrations this year are even more significant as we look forward to the state visit to the United Kingdom by their majesties the emperor and empress, at the invitation of the king.

The visit by the emperor and empress will continue a long tradition of friendship between our royal and imperial families. Contact between our royal family and Japan goes back over 400 years, to the letters and gifts of friendship exchanged between Tokugawa Ieyasu and King James I. Ties burgeoned in the Meiji Era (1868 to 1912) after Prince Alfred, the son of Queen Victoria, became the first foreign royal to visit Japan after its more than 250 years of isolation from the world. Those ties have flourished in modern times. When he touches down on British soil, his majesty the emperor will be following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, who paid state visits to the United Kingdom in 1998 and 1971, respectively.

This will be a special visit. The king has a deep fondness for Japan, developed over 50 years, five visits and many engagements with Japanese people and organizations. The emperor has spoken with great affection of his time studying at Oxford, describing that period as the happiest of his life in his memoir, "The Thames and I." We were honored that he and the empress traveled to London to attend the state funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, their first overseas trip after their enthronement.

The close personal bond between our royal and imperial families mirrors the strength of the wider U.K.-Japan relationship. This is a partnership with deep roots. It is founded in our affinities as island nations, in our shared values, shared interests and shared outlook on the world. Above all, it has at its heart our people: the businesspeople, thought leaders and

ordinary citizens who have shaped the relationship and influenced our collaboration. We are cultivating these ties, through expansion of our respective youth mobility schemes, agreements between local governments to cooperate and the introduction of new student and researcher initiatives.

The state visit will showcase these connections, and the closeness and trust between our peoples. The emperor and empress will experience the best of our rich and growing cultural partnership, including a special performance at the Young V&A museum of the award-winning stage adaptation of "My Neighbour Totoro." They will meet some of the talented individuals at the heart of our relationship, including Kew Gardens' first Japanese resident botanical artist Masumi Yamanaka, Nobel Prize winner and Order of the Rising Sun recipient professor Sir Paul Nurse at the Crick Institute, and internationally celebrated con-

temporary visual artist Marc Quinn. They will spend time with the next generation — the schoolchildren and young people who are the future of our bilateral relationship.

Our relationship may be rooted in history, but it is also one that is future-facing, dynamic and ever-evolving. Together, the U.K. and Japan are tackling global challenges through world-class science and research cooperation. Already this year, we have launched over £30 million (about \$38,037,000) of collaborative research opportunities for pioneering scientists and businesses. This innovative spirit will be in evidence during the state visit, including at the U.K.'s flagship biomedical research center, the Crick, a place where British and Japanese scientists are working together on understanding and treating cancer, and where discovery is encouraged to grow in the spaces between traditional science fields.

Ours is also a partnership that cares deeply about protecting our world for future generations. For more than five decades, the king has used his unique position to champion action for a sustainable future. In 1970, he gave a speech on the dangers of plastic pollution just ahead of his first visit to Japan. The emperor has devoted much of his life to promoting water conservation and sanitation. At a national level, the U.K. and Japan are collaborating on the deployment of clean energy. Japanese investment in the U.K.'s offshore wind sector has contributed to the U.K.'s success in halving carbon emissions since 1990. The emperor's visit to Kew Gardens, a UNESCO World Heritage Site carrying out world-leading science and conservation, will highlight this mutual commitment to delivering a better and more sustainable future.

I am delighted that the state visit is tak-



Empress Masako welcomes then-Prince Charles to a court banquet at the Imperial Palace on Oct. 22, 2019.

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ing place so early in the reign of both our monarchs, and at such a high point in the U.K.-Japan partnership. As a British diplomat, I have spent half my career working in jobs based in, or related to, this incredible country. I have had the privilege of welcoming a multitude of ministers, delivering hundreds of speeches and traveling the length of Japan. Working to support the

success of this visit is one of the greatest honors of my diplomatic career. As we toast his majesty the king on his official birthday and look forward to the arrival in the U.K. of their majesties the emperor and empress, we also celebrate our connections over the centuries and look ahead to the next 400 years of ever deeper partnership and close friendship.

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