From long-lasting bonds to new frontiers

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It is a great honor to address readers of The Japan Times on the 108th anniversary of the Republic of Latvia.

On this day, I want to share a personal story. Thirty years ago, Zuze, an elephant born in Riga, left for Kobe. Like many Latvian children, I was sad to see her go. I did not yet understand the greater role she would play. Her journey was a gesture of friendship after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Arriving in Japan three decades later, I fully realized the meaning of that gesture. Beloved in Kobe, Zuze-san is a living bond between our peoples.

This year marks 105 years since Japan recognized Latvia de jure and 35 years since it recognized our restored independence. The promise of our strategic partnership must now be translated into practical cooperation.

Far apart geographically but increasingly close in outlook, Latvia and Japan find common ground almost instinctively. Security in Europe and the Indo-Pacific is interconnected, and without security, there is no lasting prosperity. As Latvia serves on the U.N. Security Council, we are working with Japan to uphold the rules-based international order.

Japan's 17 strategic fields across industry and society sectors show where our strengths can meet. Latvia's agile technology sector and dual-use innovators complement Japan's engineering excellence and industrial scale. Together, we can pursue joint projects in drones, quantum technologies, photonics, artificial intelligence and renewable energy, strengthening both security and prosperity.

These ties deepen when people and places become curious about one another. Rujiena, near where I grew up, and Higashikawa in Hokkaido offer a vivid example. Japanese sakura bloom in Rujiena, while Latvian lilacs bloom in Higashikawa. Their friendship turns twenty in 2028, showing how local ties take root and endure.

Let us build more such connections. Liepaja, a European Capital of Culture in 2027, shows how a smaller city can reinvent itself, attract people and ideas, and rival capitals in ambition and excellence. I invite readers across Japan to discover many of Latvia's transformations for themselves.

Today, I extend my warmest greetings to Latvians and Latvia's friends across Japan. Let us carry our friendship forward with generosity, imagination and ambition.

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