

# Albania flag day

## Celebrating nation's flag, freedom and unity

Bujar Dida  
AMBASSADOR OF ALBANIA

Nov. 28 is a happy day for all Albanians, wherever we are.

We call it Flag Day and it is the day that Albania was unified under one flag as one nation.

On this festive day, it is my distinguished

pleasure as ambassador of the Republic of Albania to extend, on behalf of the President of the Republic of Albania H.E. Bamir Topi, the Prime Minister H.E. Sali Berisha, the Albanian government and the Albanian people, the best wishes for health, peace and prosperity to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the honorable members of the Imperial Family, the government of Japan, the welcoming Japanese people and the Albanian community in Japan.

Nov. 28 is a very special day for Albanians. On Nov. 28, 1443, for the first time in the documented history of the Albanian people, led in their struggle for freedom by our national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti "Skanderbeg," opposed the Ottoman Empire and raised the bicephalous eagle banner in Kruja, declaring Albania independent. Exactly 469 years afterward, on Nov. 28, 1912, the Albanian patriot Isma-



il Qemali raised Skanderbeg's banner in Vlora, thus proclaiming Albania a sovereign state. From medieval times, Albanians have an elemental connection to the eagle, a connection reflected extensively in our culture, traditions, arts and national psyche, transcending centuries to the present day.

I am particularly honored today to address all readers of The Japan Times and to share with them a few words regarding bilateral relations between Albania and Japan, marking 88 years of our diplomatic relations, established in April 1922, and 78 years from the first economic treaty signed between our two countries. I would also like to thank the Japanese-Albanian Parliamentary Group, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for their continuous support.

The bilateral relationship between Albania and Japan is profound and includes cooperation in areas as diverse as politics, security, economy, trade, agriculture, tourism, culture and sports. Special emphasis is put on the energy sector, mining industry and tourism. To serve these mutually beneficial purposes, several joint activities, including promotional tours, presentations and seminars, were organized in cooperation with JICA, respective Albanian governmental bodies

and the embassy.

In September, an event on Mining Investment Promotion in Albania was organized in Tokyo, with participants from the Albanian Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy, JICA and JOGMEC (Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corp.). The focus of the activity was on the favorable Albanian business climate, improvements and facilitations in legal and physical infrastructure, and the efficient utilization of the rich chromium and nickel resources.

There are major investment opportunities in the mining sector for Japanese and international companies. A joint project of the Albanian government and Mitsubishi Corp. successfully finalized the electronic registration of all data of Albanian mineral resources.

The promotion of tourism remains a priority of the Albanian government. Substantial investment in roads and highways, major improvements in accommodation facilities, increased lodging capacity and the colorful mosaic of Albanian landscapes have resulted in a 12 percent increase in the number of tourists so far in 2010. Virgin beaches, evergreen pine forests, breathtaking lakes, the Alps, rare wildlife, UNESCO protected sites and traditional cuisine are but a few of what Albania has to offer to visitors. During the JATA World Tourism Congress and Travel Fair,

the Japanese public was introduced by Albanian agencies to a wide range of tours and opportunities to visit Albania, "the last mystery of Europe." It is expected that the number of Japanese tourists will noticeably increase, considering Albania's favorable position as a regional hub and our cultural heritage. Major tourist attractions remain the three UNESCO World Heritage sites of Butrinti, Berati and Gjirokastra. Very typical of these three places, besides the very good and large-scale preservation of the historical monuments, is their strong relation to major historical development in the Byzantine and Roman empires, while Gjirokastra was regarded as a fascinating city carved out of stone.

In addition, terrorism, organized crime, climate change and other global issues have accentuated the need for collective and human security, a concept formulated by Japan and strongly endorsed by the Republic of Albania, among other countries. Accession to the NATO alliance and the fast prospective of European Union membership not only indicate the successful set of reforms taken by the Albanian government, but also underline a warrant of security and factor of confidence for foreign investors, conducive to the investment of their capital in Albania, contributing to higher and sta-

ble socioeconomic development rates for the Albanian people.

Albania remains solid on the commitment to NATO and the aspiration to become an EU member. The Albanian government will continue to work in order to increase Albania's role in the region and beyond, turning into a producer of peace, security and stability. We believe that the further process of the recognition of the Republic of Kosovo until it becomes a U.N. member, full implementation of the Ohrid 2001 Agreement and the intensified regional cooperation and the advancement of diplomatic, political, economic and cultural relations with all the democratic countries is the only solution to peace and prosperity. The Albanian government is focusing successfully on Albania's full accession to the EU, and starting from Dec. 15, Albanian citi-

zens will be able to move freely within the EU zone.

The Albanian economy recorded growth of 2 percent in the first quarter of 2010, mainly driven by large public investments in the road network. Private sector activity benefited from strong, albeit slowing, credit growth, and from improved stability of the energy supply. So far, the international financial and economic crisis has resulted in lower demand for Albanian exports, a fall in net inflows of monetary transfers in the form of remittances and a marked slowdown in credit growth. Exports in total were 67 percent higher. The Albanian economy has continued to grow, at a slower pace, by absorbing the effects of the global world economic crisis.

Looking toward such optimistic development and the favorable business climate, we strongly believe that the condi-



**Picturesque: The Mangalem district in the UNESCO World Heritage site of Berati is renowned for its beautifully preserved Ottoman-style houses.** EMBASSY OF ALBANIA

tions are ripe for major direct investment from Japanese companies in all upcoming sectors of the economy. Japanese citizens can travel freely to Albania without visas, and we have seen an increased number of tourist and business visits from Albanian nationals to Japan. Albanian citizens are learning the Japanese language and showing consistent

interest in cultural and social trends.

At this point, I can proudly conclude that the bridge between our countries has been built; it should be the goal of future generations to strengthen and solidify it so that ideas, goods and values can move freely, in tandem with the best aspirations of peace and friendship.

### Congratulations

to the People of the Republic of Albania  
on the Occasion of Their Flag Day

**MITSUBISHI MATERIALS TECHNO CORPORATION**

1-14-16 Kudan-kita, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-8205, JAPAN

TEL: +81 (3)-3221-2471

URL: <http://www.mmtec.co.jp/>

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on the Occasion of The Flag Day

*Professor:* **Makoto Takizawa**

Dept. of Computers and Information Science,  
Faculty of Science and Technology, Seikei University  
3-3-1 Kichijoji-kitamachi, Musashino-shi, Tokyo 180-8633, Japan  
Tel. +81-422-37-3724, 3738 Fax. +81-422-37-3871