

Mongolia national day

Seeking to build a strategic partnership

Today is the 90th anniversary of Mongolia's national day, when the country gained its independence from China in 1921.

For Mongolians, their national day on July 11 is the start of a three-day festival of sports and culture called Naadam, inscribed in 2010 on UNESCO's representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

For those outside the country, Mongolia is known recently for its wealth of resources.

Located in the northern Mongolian Plateau in Asia, Mongolia is a landlocked country bordered by Russia to the north and China. About 1.5 million sq. km in area with a population of around 3.1 million, Mongolia is the 19th largest and the most sparsely populated independent country in the world. Ulan Bator, the capital and largest city, is home to about one-third of the population.

Amid the tides of democratization influenced by the end of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, the first free parliamentary elections took place in Mongolia in 1990. Ever since, the country has rapidly moved on the path toward a new society and has undergone big changes politically and economically.

Mongolia's main industry is shifting from traditional cattle breeding to mining and manufacturing backed by its abundant mineral resources. Further development of the mostly untapped coking coal deposits and other mining sectors, such as uranium and rare earth metals, are expected to promote an economic boom in Mongolia.

Mongolia maintains positive relations and has diplomatic missions in many countries, such as Japan, China, India, Russia and the United States. The government has focused a great deal on encouraging foreign investment and trade.

In 2009, the Mongolian government signed an investment agreement with Canadian and British-Australian firms to develop the Oyu Tolgoi copper and gold mining complex, which is considered to be one of the largest such undeveloped mines in the world, with estimated reserves of 36 million tons of copper and 1,300 tons of gold.

Another large mineral deposit is the Tavan Tolgoi open-pit coal mine in the South Gobi, with estimated reserves of 6.4 billion tons of coking and thermal coal. The government carried out an open bid through January 2011 for the rights to operate as subcontractors of the mine, in which the world's leading mining companies, financial organizations and foreign consortia participated. From among 15 candidates, six entities, including companies from Japan, Australia, Brazil, China, Russia, South Korea, and the U.S., have been chosen as finalists.

Relations with Japan

Japan and Mongolia established diplomatic relations in 1972, but since Mongolia at the time was a socialist country, the differences in political systems between the two countries did not allow closer bilateral relations to develop. However, as Mongolia became liberalized in 1990, relations between Mongolia and Japan started to develop in numerous fields on the basis of mutual efforts to establish relations, a sense of ethnic affinity and vigorous economic cooperation from Japan, with a view to Mongolia's democratization and transition to a market economy.

Since Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu visited Mongolia in 1991, the two countries have conducted a number of high-level visits. The following are highlights of some of these meetings from 2010:

From July 29 to Aug. 3, Dash-

dorj Zorigt, Mongolia's minister of mineral resources and energy, visited Japan and had meetings with several officials, including then Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada.

On Sept. 24, Prime Minister Naoto Kan met with his counterpart, Sukhbaatar Batbold, during the U.N. General Assembly in New York, which was followed by a round-table meeting on Oct. 2 in Tokyo between the two, along with officials from leading Japanese companies. Batbold was in Tokyo at the time to attend the retirement ceremony for Mongolian sumo wrestler Asashoryu, the yokozuna, or grand champion, who left the sport in February 2010.

From Nov. 4 to 5, the second meeting of the joint study group for the Japan-Mongolia Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) was held in Tokyo, with the participation of representatives from government, industry and academia.

On Nov. 19, Prime Minister Kan had a meeting with Mongolian President Tsakhia Elbegdorj, who was on his working visit to Japan as an official guest.

After the meeting, the two leaders signed the Japan-Mongolia Joint Statement for Building a Strategic Partnership. Also, the exchange of notes on the Two-Step-Loan Project for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and Environmental Protection (Phase II) and other documents were signed by then Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara, Sadako Ogata, president of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, and Gombojav Zandanshatar, Mongolia's minister of foreign affairs and trade, in the presence of the two national leaders.

Both sides agreed to advance exchanges and cooperation to build a strategic partnership based on four pillars: promoting

high-level dialogues, advancing economic relations, revitalizing people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and strengthening coordination to address regional and global issues.

- Promoting high-level dialogues: Both sides confirmed the intention to promote summit-level dialogues and hold a foreign ministers' meeting annually. President Elbegdorj invited Prime Minister Kan to visit Mongolia. In response, Prime Minister Kan said that he would consider the possibility of such a visit.

- Advancing economic relations: Bilateral cooperation will be promoted to develop mineral resources in Mongolia, including coal, uranium, rare earth metals and other raw materials. To start the negotiations on a Japan-Mongolia EPA soon, both sides will accelerate the review process.

- Revitalizing people-to-people and cultural exchanges: Japan welcomed the visa exemption that Mongolia granted to Japanese visitors. The two sides will also collaborate in holding a ceremonial event commemorating the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2012.

- Strengthening coordination to address regional and global issues: The Mongolian side expressed support for Japan's vision on United Nations Security Council reform. Both sides will also strengthen cooperation on the issue of North Korea. The Japanese side asked for cooperation on the abduction issue.

Most recently, in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan, the Mongolian government immediately decided to assist Japan at an extraordinary Cabinet meeting on March 12.

Based on the Cabinet decision, the following occurred: a

12-member Mongolian rescue mission was dispatched to Miyagi Prefecture, relief supplies comprised of 2,500 blankets and 800 sweaters were delivered to Tome city in Miyagi Prefecture and \$1 million was donated to support victims of the disaster. Besides official assistance, all Mongolian civil servants decided to donate one day's pay, and donations from citizens and companies have also been collected.

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With information provided by the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
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Strengthening ties: Mongolian President Tsakhia Elbegdorj and Prime Minister Naoto Kan sign the Japan-Mongolia Joint Statement for Building a Strategic Partnership on Nov. 19 in Tokyo.

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