

## Azerbaijan national day

## A look into the future of a nation

Development concept will create competitive country with services for all in 2020

Gursel Ismayilzade  
AMBASSADOR OF AZERBAIJAN

It is my great pleasure to address the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of Azerbaijan on May 28 and to extend my warmest greetings and sincere wishes to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial family, the government and the friendly people of Japan, as well as the Azerbaijani community residing in Japan.

Independence is the biggest asset and the greatest treasure. The formation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic on May 28, 1918, was a historic event. It was the first democratic republic declared in the Muslim world. Following its second independence in 1991, modern Azerbaijan has traveled a complicated and at the same time, honorable path in the last two decades of its independence. Azerbaijan is a secular country with a predominantly Muslim population that enjoys a centuries-long tradition of peaceful coexistence between a number of religions, cultures and ethnic minorities.

National leaders play key roles in maintaining independence, development and drawing the right path for the future progress of the countries. Just recently, on May 10, Azerbaijan marked the 90th anniversary of the birth of the great national leader Heydar Aliyev, the founding father of the modern state of Azerbaijan. He dedicated his life to the people of Azerbaijan and always faithfully served the nation.

Successfully continuing the domestic and foreign policy of the national leader, President



Iconic: The Flame Towers, the new landmark of the capital Baku, symbolize the eternal flame of Azerbaijan, the "sacred" land of fire. EMBASSY OF AZERBAIJAN

Ilham Aliyev has further developed the building of democratic institutions and establishment of a market economy. The establishment of stability and the rule of law combined with steady economic development created a solid ground for reforms and favorable conditions for the attraction of domestic and foreign investments.

Abundant with natural resources, in particular with hydrocarbon resources, located at

the crossroads of Asia, Europe and the Middle East, Azerbaijan plays a vital role in the region and has become an important international trade, commercial and transportation hub.

The country is a regional leader in economic growth and plays an important role in the formation of the global energy policy. Our economic development begins with the energy sector, and this sector is still quite attractive for foreign investment. But in the

last 10 years our main goal has been to diversify the economy. During the last decade it has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world. In the past 10 years, gross domestic product has tripled. In the World Bank's classification of per capita GDP, Azerbaijan entered the group of countries with "high average incomes" earlier than

other CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) nations. From 1995 to 2012 foreign di-

rect investments in Azerbaijan's economy exceeded \$130 billion. Even in the years of the global financial recession the key financial institutions such as Standard & Poor's, Fitch and Moody's upgraded our credit rating.

We are currently transforming oil revenues into human capital, and one of our main forward-looking objectives is education. All these factors indicate that Azerbaijan has stepped into a new stage of development. The achievements that have been

gained allow Azerbaijan to set even higher goals and determine the tasks that stem from these goals. The Development Concept "Azerbaijan 2020: A Look into the Future" is a new concept to overcome the challenges ahead of us. The main strategic view of the concept is to take into account the current opportunities and resources and attain a stage characterized by sustainable economic growth and high social welfare, effective state management and supremacy of the law, the full ensuring of all human rights and freedoms and the active status of the civil society in the country's public life. In 2020, Azerbaijan will be an economically and politically developed and competitive country. Even in the most remote villages of Azerbaijan, all communications required in the daily lives of citizens (communications, Internet, banking services, public utilities, roads and so on), health and education services will be provided.

The country's natural beauty, exquisite cuisine and hospitable people have created favorable conditions to attract tourists.

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With ICT a major priority, Azerbaijan achieves milestone with launch of first national telecommunications satellite

Ali Abbasov  
MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN

It gives me great pleasure as a minister of information and communications technology (ICT) of the Republic of Azerbaijan to address the readers of The Japan Times on the celebration of such a marvelous occasion.

From his first days in office, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev declared ICT the country's second priority after oil and gas strategy. Back in 2003, during his first official trip as a newly elected president, he declared ICT and development of human resources among the top priorities at the World Summit on Information Society held in Geneva.

Azerbaijan has shown a significant growth of its ICT sector, which has increased by seven to eight times in the recent 10 years, with an average annual growth rate constituting 25 to 30 percent. In 2012 the growth rate was 18.2 percent and the turnover of the sector has exceeded €1.5 billion. Eighty percent of the income falls to the share of the private sector and it is the result of expedient arrangements, carried out in the field of improvement of the business environment and strengthening of the activity of the private sector. The territory of the country has been entirely wired with telephone penetration, full digitalization of the telecommunications network and terrestrial TV broadcasting have been completed, banking-financial services have started to be provided by the postal departments.

We are proud that the first national telecommunications satellite was launched in February, marking a significant milestone of advancement of space technologies in the country. The satellite will upgrade the quality of TV broadcasting and telecommunications not only in Azerbaijan but throughout the Eurasia and CIS regions and will transfer Azerbaijan into a major relay site for signal transmission between Europe and Asia. The satellite's footprint covers Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Africa. Azerbaijan is going to use only one-fourth of the Azerspace-1 capacity, while the rest will be available for lease. Azercosmos plans to launch a second satellite, Azerspace-2, in 2015, which will further expand Azerbaijan's satellite capacity.

The Doing Business 2013 report, recently issued by the World Bank and International Financial Corp., is an obvious proof speaking in favor of the business and investment environment in our country. Azerbaijan has taken 67th place among 185 countries in the above-mentioned report.

The last year was very productive in terms of the international-level events held in Azerbaijan. The country hosted the seventh Internet Governance Forum, jointly held with the government of Azerbaijan and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).

The institutional steps have been taken for the purpose of strengthening the ICT potential such as free usage of the state-of-the-art technologies by the society and beyond. It is important to underline that in the first months of 2013, three big agencies have been set up — IT

Foundation, High Technologies Park and IT University. Also, the ambitious Fiber to Home project kicked off this year, aiming to connect every single household with up to 100 Mbps.

Some incentives have been taken into account for the operation of small and medium-size entrepreneurship subjects in the territory of Techno Parks. The companies operating there will be provided with corresponding tax and customs discounts. Also the startups will be additionally provided with logistics and technical support. They will be advised with experienced lawyers, financiers, managers and IT experts and get an opportunity to obtain valuable advice and recommendations.

The project E-signature, which strengthens development of the small and medium-size entrepreneurship in the country, public activity and employment of the citizens, also gives an ample opportunity to fight corruption and provides transparency of the government.

The Fiber to Home project, to which we attach enormous importance, aims to deliver optical networks to all settlements of our country. High-speed Internet, radio, TV and other communication services will be delivered to residences and workplaces via the same channel, via fiber-optics embracing all the country. In Azerbaijan this project is drawn together with the State Oil Fund. Investment of half a billion U.S. dollars is required for the project approximately until 2015. As the project is highly profitable, almost 40 percent of the investment will be made through reinvestment during this period.

Another project, the Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM), is of wider regional importance, which aims to lay a transnational fiber-optic line covering the countries of Eurasia from Western Europe to Eastern Asia. The project envisages the creation of a major transit link from Frankfurt to Hong Kong. The line will combine the major centers of information exchange in Europe and Asia. The U.N. General Assembly gave two political supports through adoption of resolutions of which Japan is also one of the co-sponsors.

Azerbaijan considers Japan as a vital source for state-of-the-art technologies, cutting edge knowledge in the field of ICT. So far, important steps have been made to bridge our countries. The recent document signed between the ministry and Nakayama Laboratory of Osaka University to explore opportunities for collaboration in some research fields, such as carbon nanotube nanoelectronics for telecommunications and networking, photonics and optical communications, distributed sensor networks for real-time environmental monitoring, illustrates vast ranges of opportunities in which we can cooperate together. Moreover, from July 4 to 6, the international conference titled "Novel semiconductor materials and structures" devoted to the 90th anniversary of the famous scientist Hasan Abdullayev will be held in Azerbaijan, and Japanese scientists are invited to participate in the conference.

All in all, one of the priorities for the coming years internally and externally includes the ICT sector because the overall development of the world is moving in this direction. In the future, knowledge and competence will determine the place of countries in the world to an even greater extent.



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Glowing: A night view of the Baku skyline. EMBASSY OF AZERBAIJAN



# Azerbaijan national day



**Nature: Mount Shahdag resort areas offer visitors sports and leisure activities.** EMBASSY OF AZERBAIJAN

## Close cooperation with Japan

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Climate and terrain diversity, mountains, rivers, warm sea, as well as mud volcanoes, hot springs and oil treatments are just a few attractions to mention. Besides the first democratic republic in the Islamic world Azerbaijan is home to Oily Rocks — a unique city in the open sea — and the first opera and ballet in the Muslim world; its Maiden Tower and the Shirvanshakh Palace has been added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites; and its traditional form of music, Mugham, traditional musical instrument, tar (a long-neck lute), the art of Azerbaijani Ashiqs and traditional art of centuries-old carpet weaving have all been added to the list of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

2012 was a landmark in the relations between Azerbaijan and Japan as we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic ties. The years behind us demonstrated that we are closely bound by the economic cooperation and share common views in foreign policy issues. One of the recent pivotal frameworks of cooperation is the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) and Japan format, comprising strong political dialogue and practical steps toward using the best Japanese experiences in the wide range of capacity building areas. We are also pleased to witness that the number of tourists visiting Azerbaijan from Japan has been greatly increasing each year, which is a great possibility to expand people to people contacts. In this regard, cooperation should be intensified toward achieving the objectives of visa facilitations thus stepping

up further to a visa-free regime. The new trend of the relations opened up horizons of the sister cities-friendship cities idea. We are in the process of realizing this project between the city of Ito, Shizuoka Prefecture, and the Ismayilli region, one of the natural beauties of Azerbaijan, and are seeking the possibilities to enhance it among other cities in both countries.

Azerbaijan is steadily pursuing modernization of the country in all areas, and it is important that Japan, as one of our main partners, closely participates in this process. Hence, our cooperation should embrace all areas of common interest. In particular, areas of cooperation such as agriculture, health, culture, tourism and ICT (information and communications technology), which are of mutual interest, should be further explored and developed. Furthermore, Azerbaijan is highly interested in working deeper with Japan in the field of human capacity building, including education, research and youth development, as a foundation for our future development. Therefore, Japan's technical assistance is equally important as much as its financial assistance.

I feel privileged to serve as an ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the wonderful country of the rising sun and I would like to once again reiterate my dedication to contribute to strengthening and enhancing the existing friendly relations and the wide range of cooperation with Japan.

I take this opportunity to wish the friendly people of Japan peace, prosperity and sustainable development.



**Heritage: Icherisheher (the Walled City of Baku), with the Shirvanshahs' Palace and Maiden Tower, is the ancient historical core of the capital.** EMBASSY OF AZERBAIJAN

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