

Ethiopia national day

Strong government, people-to-people ties

Markos Tekle Rike
AMBASSADOR OF ETHIOPIA

It is my great honor on the occasion of our national day to extend my heartfelt greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as to the government and people of Japan.



Ethiopia and Japan have maintained cordial relations, at both the government and people-to-people levels, dating back to the 1930s. It's been 60 years since our diplomatic relations were restored after a brief disruption during World War II. Since then, the diplomatic and people-to-people relations between our two countries have been strengthened by various exchanges and visits. The Japan-AU Parliamentary League, the Ethiopian Association of Japan, the Mocha Ethiopia Dance Group, as well as the Japan Association of Nilo-Ethiopian Studies have also served, and continue to serve, as a bridge to enhance people-to-people relations between our two countries.

At this time, commercial ties have been expanding, though more efforts are needed to broaden economic ties. Japan has demonstrated a real and reliable friendship in the significant role it has taken in helping our efforts in the fight against poverty. It has provided a wide range of development support in the form of grants and technical cooperation in the areas of agriculture, health and education, as well as in water resource, infrastructure and human resource development. Through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), we are making efforts to enhance the cooperation of both countries beyond bilateral levels.

Over the past year, a number of happenings, including the high-level visits of government officials and direct flights of Ethiopian Airlines to Japan, have played a significant role in deepening and strengthening Ethio-Japan ties. Official visits by the Hon. Abadula Gameda, speaker of the Ethiopian Parliament; H.E. Muktar Kedir, president of Oromia Regional State; H.E. Demitu Hambisa, minister for science and technology; and H.E. Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos, state minister of foreign affairs, have also further consolidated the bond and enhanced people-to-people relations. Another notable visit was made by a

Japanese government-led business delegation in August that not only cemented bilateral ties, but also paved the way for exploring opportunities for new business ventures — an area still unexploited and with huge potentials for Japanese companies.

Another noteworthy event believed to have reinforced people-to-people bonds was the marking of the 50th anniversary of the great athlete Abebe Bikila's winning of the gold medal in the marathon during the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964. A number of events were organized, including participation in the Aquiline Marathon in awarding the "Abebe Cup" to commemorate Bikila's victory. His triumph is still remembered among Japanese society and it is hoped that it will continue to play a crucial role in strengthening the ties of both nations.

Another milestone was the commencement of Ethiopian Airlines' direct flights to Narita International Airport. Regarding this, I would like to express my highest gratitude to the government of Japan for concluding the Air Service Agreement almost a year ago between the two countries that led to the commencement of direct flights from Addis Ababa to Tokyo. This is an important milestone for trade, investment, tourism and people-to-people relations between Japan and Africa in general and, Japan and Ethiopia in particular. This is one of those important steps for enhanced interaction, transaction and exchange between Africa and Japan. Africa will no longer be the far continent to Japan and the support from the government of Japan was invaluable for this success. The thrice-weekly flights, the only direct connections between Africa and Japan, are now operating through Hong Kong on the ultra-modern Boeing 787 Dreamliner. The start of this direct flight gives the passengers the best possible connectivity options. The flights also give special emphasis to the cut-flower business and now connect the biggest rose farms in Ethiopia with the Japanese market.

Above all, to broaden the economic relations of both countries, the government of Japan has encouraged Japanese enterprises to invest in Ethiopia, as this is a sector both countries need to further broaden. With the support of partners in Tokyo, the Ethiopian embassy has held successive business and investment seminars aimed at promoting untapped potential sectors for



Participants, from third left to second right, Narita International Airport Corp. President Makoto Natsume; Yetnaynet Abebe, son of marathon legend Abebe Bikila; Lower House member Tsukasa Akimoto; Ethiopian Airlines CEO Tewolde Gebremariam; Ambassador of Ethiopia Markos Tekle Rike; the ambassador's wife Hiwot Tuffa Doyicha; Japanese Ambassador to Ethiopia Kazuhiro Suzuki; and Shigeo Kimura, the head of the Narita International Airport office, Tokyo Civil Aviation Bureau, the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism pose at a ceremony celebrating the start of Ethiopian Airlines' direct flights to Japan at Narita airport on April 22. EMBASSY OF ETHIOPIA

Japanese companies such as the manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and mining sectors. As a result, many Japanese companies have shown interest in doing business and are closely assessing the opportunities Ethiopia offers. High-level policy dialogue is taking place between the governments of Ethiopia and Japan to improve industrial policy and investment climates with the aim to creating suitable conditions to enable speedy involvement by the Japanese business community in manufacturing and industrial park development in Ethiopia.

Currently, light and labor-intensive manufacturing is a priority for Ethiopia. Among the main reasons are an easily

trainable and industrious labor force; potential for cheap renewable electricity; a favorable legal and institutional environment; huge potential for raw materials for labor intensive industries (cotton, hides and skins, mines, cash crops and food products); access to developed markets; proximity to the Middle East and Europe; and political and social stability.

Ethiopia has registered an economic growth of more than 10 percent over the past decade — the fastest growing, non-energy driven economy. For this remarkable economic achievement Ethiopia is now widely considered by pundits as an "African lion." This economic growth is principally attributed to intense programs aimed at

becoming a middle-income country by 2025. We have developed consecutive five-year growth and transformation plans that foresee sustainable means of economic, social and environmental development. Such grand transformation plans are to strengthen the manufacturing sector of the country with the ambition of emerging as a manufacturing hub in the region, especially in regards to agro-processing, leather and textiles.

Ethiopia is carrying out the most ambitious infrastructure development program in Africa. Huge public investments on energy generation and road and railway network are to boost energy intensive industries and bring large swathes of

productive Ethiopia into the market economy. Railway construction, which is scheduled for completion this year, will connect with Djibouti and is expected to ease logistics issues. A huge energy generation program will not only satisfy our energy needs, but also serve as a catalyst in integrating the whole region as deals are already in place with neighboring countries for energy exports.

Ethiopia will continue as a force of peace and stability in the Horn of Africa in renewing its stance on democracy and good governance. The elections that were held Sunday in a free, fair and peaceful manner will send a strong message about Ethiopian people's commit-



Above: The Bole Lemi Industrial Park is currently under development. Below: Leather products made in Ethiopia



ment to peace, development, democracy and good governance.

While commemorating our national day, we are greatly saddened by the barbarous killing of innocent Ethiopian citizens in Libya. The government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia strongly condemns the killings, even more so when they were supposedly committed in the name of religion. Atrocities of this kind have nothing to do with religion; they merely illustrate the psychotic nature of terrorism and violent extremism. Ethiopia will remain ready and vigilant to ward off terrorism and extremism. I would like to express my gratitude for all friends and partners of Ethiopia

for your solidarity and compassion at a time the nation grieves for the fallen compatriots in such horrific act of terrorism in Libya.

In July this year Addis Ababa will host an international conference on financing for sustainable development. The Ethiopian government is finalizing preparations to successfully host this important event that sought to shape the post-U.N. Millennium Development Goals global agenda for advancement. The government of Ethiopia, in collaboration with organizers, has issued invitations and has called for the support and cooperation by all concerned members of the international community for the success of the conference.

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on the 24th Anniversary of
Their National Day

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on the celebration of the 24th anniversary of Ethiopian National Day.

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