

St. Patrick's Day

Exchanges ongoing in various arenas

Anne Barrington
AMBASSADOR OF IRELAND

Happy St. Patrick's Day to the readers of The Japan Times.

This year, St. Patrick's Day is being celebrated in over 15 cities around Japan, with a record 14 parades all across the country.

Asia's largest celebration of Ireland and Irish culture, the I Love Ireland Festival, is back for the fourth year running, and taking place over two days (March 18, 19) for the first time.

The iconic Tokyo St. Patrick's Day parade celebrates its 25th anniversary as it takes its 40 shades of green down Omotesando Dori at 1 p.m. on Sunday, March 19. Please come and join us for this wonderful and fun event. And then come to Yoyogi Park to celebrate a fusion of Irish and Japanese culture at the I Love Ireland Festival.

This year, Ireland's Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe, will visit Japan for the festivities. His visit coincides with the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Ireland and Japan that we celebrate this year. A 60th birthday marks the completion of one cycle of life and the beginning of another and this represents a significant milestone in the development of relations between our two countries. Over the next 60 years we look forward to further nurturing the excellent relations we have developed and finding new ways to strengthen the relationship between our two great countries.

Since the start of the year, Ireland's and Japan's foreign ministers have exchanged landmark visits. In January, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida visited Ireland to launch the 60th anniversary celebrations and to hold talks with his counterpart, as well as Ireland's Prime Minister Enda Kenny.

Ireland's Foreign Minister, Charles Flanagan, has just concluded his very successful official visit to Japan that included talks with Kishida in Tokyo.

While here, Flanagan had the opportunity to visit Hiroshima. He toured Peace Memorial Park, laid a wreath at the cenotaph,

visited the museum and met Mayor Kazumi Matsui. The minister also met and heard the testimony of Yoshiko Kajimoto, a hibakusha. In response to these encounters Flanagan said: "Hearing the powerful testimony of your living witness here today is a profound and humbling experience, for which I am most grateful. I believe that we should all be grateful to the people of Japan for their leadership role in raising global awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

"Your words and everything I have seen and heard here today present to the world the incontrovertible truth of what nuclear warfare really means. This is a place where the past asks the question of the present. Ireland will continue to work with Japan and with all states in the U.N., to ensure that the answer to that question is the right one. This must include the full and faithful implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty."

St. Patrick's Day 2017 is only one part of the extensive program of political, business, cultural and sporting exchanges planned for this year.

In May, Ueno's Tokyo University of the Arts will host an exhibition of 31 contemporary Irish artists in print-making and other media, responding to the poems of the great Irish Nobel laureate W.B. Yeats. This will be the largest exhibition of Irish artists ever held in Japan, and the show will be complemented by an exhibition of student work also responding to Yeats' work.



Kilkenny on the banks of the River Nore TOURISM IRELAND

One of the things Kishida and Flanagan did earlier this month was to exchange rugby jerseys. This was to mark the fact that everyone is looking forward to 2019 and the Rugby World Cup in Japan. And everyone in Ireland is hoping that, following on this summer's hosting of the Women's Rugby World Cup in Dublin and Belfast, our bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023 will be successful. In the meantime, Ireland's national rugby team will travel here to play friendly matches against Japan's national team in Shizuoka on June 17 and Tokyo on June 24. This will be an opportunity for everyone to get into the spirit of the Rugby World Cup.

These are turbulent times and global events, including the U.K.'s decision to leave the European Union, have caused strong reactions. Ireland will be uniquely affected by the decision of our closest neighbor to leave, not least because we are the only member state of the EU to share a land border with the U.K. We share Japan's desire that the process should be orderly and transparent. Once Article 50 has been triggered, Ireland will negotiate from a position of strength, as one of the remaining 27 member states and as a committed member of the EU.

Membership in the EU has been the cornerstone of social progress in Ireland over the last generation and more, and public support for our place in the EU remains high. Our belief is that international challenges — such as global conflict, climate change, terrorism and migration

— can be addressed only by nations working together. Ireland's interests are best served from within the EU, by helping from within to shape and influence the times ahead.

While working to limit the negative effects of Brexit, we are also looking to the future and expanding our trade and investment links with emerging and developed economies, and there is great interest in exploring how our relationship with Japan might develop.

Ireland continues to be one of the world's best countries in which to do business, as many Japanese companies testify. Post-Brexit, Ireland will be the only English-speaking member state both in the EU and the Eurozone. We share the same common law system as the U.K., we have similar employment and regulatory and employment environments and we will remain part of the EU's research and innovation program, Horizon 2020. For these reasons, I am confident that Ireland can continue to act as a gateway to Europe for Japanese business in the years ahead.

In particular, I believe there is great scope for increased Ireland-Japan trade in sectors such as financial services, IT and pharmaceuticals, where we al-



Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Paschal Donohoe

ready have recognized world-leading educational institutes and a rich talent pool. Our national trade agencies, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, have offices in Tokyo and are ready to discuss opportunities with new or potential partners.

There has been great progress in tourism over the last 12 months, and it was my pleasure to launch a Japanese-language tourism site, Ireland.com, in August. This, coupled with the announcement that Club Tourism will charter a direct Tokyo-Dublin flight for the first time ever later this year, demonstrates the positive trajectory we are on. With over 10 million visitors to Ireland in 2016, I am hopeful that more Japanese people will come and discover what makes Ireland such a great place to



Foreign Minister Charles Flanagan and his counterpart Fumio Kishida at their meeting in Tokyo on March 1 exchanged rugby jerseys to commemorate this year's 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Ireland and Japan. Ireland hosts the women's rugby World Cup in August and Ireland's national team will tour Japan for friendly matches in June. EMBASSY OF IRELAND

visit.

In parallel to our business relationship, we look forward to further building our people-to-people exchanges and I am delighted to see the success of the Ireland-Japan working holiday program. I would encourage more young Japanese people to avail themselves of this marvelous opportunity to see Europe; visit dfa.ie/japan to learn more.

Though separated by time, distance, culture and language, Ireland and Japan are close partners on the international stage. Our shared commitment to immutable values, our warm and

welcoming spirit and our belief in a better tomorrow, underscore the potential we see by working together to achieve our goals. I hope that all people in Japan will have the opportunity

to enjoy a St. Patrick's Day event this weekend. Help us to celebrate the things we have achieved and the development of our further friendship in the decades to come.

Happy Saint Patrick's Day

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