

Sudan National Day

Strategic location offers many possibilities

YASIR ABDALLA ABDELSALAM AHMED
AMBASSADOR OF SUDAN

As Sudan celebrates the 62nd Anniversary of its Independence, *The Japan Times* recently had an opportunity to speak with Ambassador Yasir Abdalla Abdelsalam Ahmed and ask him some questions.



Do you have any messages for our readers on your country's national day?

At the outset, I would like to express my heartfelt and sincere appreciation to *The Japan Times*, which constitutes one of the most reliable and well-respected sources of information in Japan, for this opportunity. I wish to extend my wishes to the readers of *The Japan Times* of a joyous, zestful and vivacious festive season. On the auspicious occasion of the independence of Sudan, I have the singular honor to convey, on behalf of the people and government of Sudan, heartfelt wishes of health and happiness to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the government of Japan, as well as prosperity to the friendly people of Japan.

What is the sociopolitical situation in Sudan in general?

It might be useful to give an overview of Sudan in a rather historical perspective. One should borrow the spirit of Rudyard Kipling's poem "Fuzzy-Wuzzy," which praises the Sudanese Hadendoa for their martial prowess or to look at how Sir Winston Churchill described the Sudanese in his historical account of the Reconquest of the Sudan "River War." In a more contemporary exposition, David Hoile, an expert on Sudan, wrote in his book "Images of Sudan," "The Sudanese people are a self-evidently proud and fiercely independent nation, one of the very few African nations that, during the Mahdiyya, held the political and military might of the British Empire at its zenith at bay for more than a decade. The Sudanese have always had a tendency toward independence of mind, theological,

national and political."

Sudan's ethnic and cultural diversity remains one of the most complex in the world, thus leveraging the overall political landscape. Responding to this challenge, political forces have recently engaged in an all-inclusive dialogue that would respond to this complex sociopolitical situation and structure an enduring system that would embrace unity within diversity.

How is the socioeconomic situation in your country?

Sudan, which was the largest African country before the independence of South Sudan in 2011, is blessed with natural resources, most of which are untapped and yet to be explored and economically utilized. This is why the World Food Conference held in Rome in 1974, considered Sudan as the world's food basket. Given the availability of these resources, together with a strategic location between the Middle East and West Africa, as well as political stability, Sudan is destined to play an instrumental role in regional economic development. Recent economic indicators by reputed economic and financial institutions have shown an overall improvement of economic performance.

How do you expect Sudan will change now that the U.S. has lifted the economic sanctions?

The two-decade-old sanctions had put limits on international banking transactions and the exchange of technology and spare parts. Lifting the sanctions allows Sudan to return to international financial institutions and integrate once again in the global network of business. The decision is set to significantly improve the business environment and drive the growth of Sudan's economy, particularly in attracting foreign investment on the untapped and rich resources of Sudan. Of course the decision would lead to a positive increase in economic growth, but the process will be gradual.

How is the relationship between Sudan and Japan?

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1956, Japan and Sudan have maintained deeply rooted, friendly and

cordial relations. Both countries are exerting a considerable amount of effort to promote mutual understanding to augment economic, social and cultural exchange. I always feel obliged to express gratitude and appreciation for the development assistance Japan continues to provide to Sudan, with an emphasis on projects that address people's basic human needs.

There is still much work to be done to deepen the traditionally friendly relations and promote bilateral economic cooperation and trade, enhance mutual collaboration in the fields of investment, agriculture, industry, health and education.

In which areas do you expect Japan — both at the government and private sector levels — to further contribute to the development of Sudan?

As I indicated earlier, blending the untapped resources of Sudan with the technological advancements of Japan can create a perfect formula of vigorous and sustainable cooperation. Our unique location enables both parties to expand this cooperation to all African regions and to galvanize Japan's relations with African countries bilaterally and within the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) initiative. Bilateral fields of cooperation are numerous, with special emphasis on agriculture, industry, science, technology and education to name a few.

What do you see as the future of the bilateral relationship with Japan?

It is important to reiterate the fact that the mixture of the huge potentials of Sudan with the Japanese technology and expertise would pave the way for a mutually beneficial economic partnership. The revocation of economic sanctions imposed on Sudan provided ways and means of achieving that goal. Japanese officials are aware of the importance of Sudan in terms of economic capabilities. Both sides are also aware of the instrumental role Sudan can play in the security and stability of the region. Through bilateral cooperation, Sudan is well placed to enhance the principles of African ownership and international partnership that underpins the TICAD process.



Top: Royal Necropolis of Meroe. Bottom: Sahara Desert
EMBASSY OF SUDAN

Do you have any final words for our readers?

I can confidently say that *The Japan Times* has greatly expanded its readership through attracting well informed and remarkably distinguished readers. In an endeavor to encourage people-to-people contacts, I would humbly encourage them to explore the possibility of visiting Sudan. It is commonly known that visitors of Sudan invariably agree that Sudanese people are among the friendliest and most hospitable people on earth. Sudan provides a variety of touristic attractions from navigation tours of the Nile to wildlife and desert safaris and big game parks.

Congratulations to the people of the Republic of the Sudan on the Occasion of Their National Day



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JAPAN TOBACCO INC.

JT Bldg., 2-1, Toranomon 2-Chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-8422, JAPAN
Phone: (03) 3582-3111 Fax: (03) 5572-1463 URL: <http://www.jt.com>