

St. Patrick's Day Special

Grounds in place for stronger relations

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Today, March 17, we celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

The annual "green festival" is observed in Ireland and around the world, where there is an Irish diaspora of some 70 million, comprising

Irish citizens and those of Irish heritage or ancestry. Many people the world over have embraced the Irish and have afforded them a platform from which to contribute to their adopted communities.

We are grateful for this acceptance just as we are proud of all the Irish have sought to contribute in culture, arts, business, education, science, technology and innovation and, of course to the community and political life of nations everywhere.

This year, there is a shadow as the world grapples with the unprecedented global challenge of COVID-19. Our sympathy and solidarity go to those nations which, so far have been most affected.

Here in Japan, which too has welcomed the Irish, we are thinking of our Japanese friends, neighbors and colleagues whose lives, like our own, are being significantly affected.

As in other countries this year, in Japan the

cancellation of many St. Patrick's Day events has been unavoidable.

All of us thank those tireless volunteers and partners who had been planning some 21 events in 17 cities — including the parade and I Love Ireland Festival in Tokyo. Together, these gatherings could have attracted some 200,000 participants and spectators; the biggest Irish event in Asia. We share their disappointment.

Nevertheless, some festival events will go ahead in limited format and we wish great success for all concerned.

The strong grounds for building an expanded partnership between Ireland and Japan remain firmly in place. Looking beyond the extreme global challenge of COVID-19, our future together is surely bright. English-speaking Ireland is a global center for innovation, scientific research, startups and growth companies. It is a safe, pleasant and fun place to study English.

Firmly within the European Union (EU) and its single market, Ireland, more than ever going forward, will be an ideal platform for global investment, including from Japan, in financial services, life sciences, information and communication technology and other sectors. Ireland has a unique and renowned culture that is both ancient and, at the same time modern and dynamic. Our cultural ties with Japan are close.

The country is near to having both the youngest and fastest-growing population in the EU. For four years and more, it has had

the strongest growing gross domestic product in the union — 5.5 percent in 2019. Its economy is approaching full employment. The national accounts have been in surplus for the past two years.

Ireland and Japan's ties are strengthened by our both being party to the Japan-EU economic partnership agreement. Opportunities abound, not least in the food and drinks sector.

Already over 6,000 people are employed in Ireland by Japanese investment companies, while approximately 2,000 people in Japan, mostly graduates, are employed by cutting-edge Irish companies in fintech, life sciences and other areas.

Bilateral trade between Ireland and Japan amounts to about €12 billion. Japan is the largest investor in Ireland from the Asia-Pacific region. Strong, existing Japanese investment in Ireland continues to grow.

In Tokyo, Ireland is developing a new Ireland House — a showcase platform from which to promote Ireland in Japan for decades to come.

And, Nov. 21 will see Ireland and Japan's Brave Blossoms play a friendly rugby match in Dublin. All of Ireland will warmly welcome an exceptional Japanese team and many expected Japanese visitors. Something great to look forward to.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.