

Bulgaria National Day Special

A growing partnership of common values

EMBASSY OF BULGARIA

On the occasion of the national day of the Republic of Bulgaria — March 3 — the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in Japan has the privilege of extending to the readers of The Japan Times warm greetings and best wishes for good health, prosperity and happiness.

On March 3, 1878, Bulgaria reappeared on the political map of Europe and embarked on the road of independent development. Having experienced deep changes and overcome major challenges in its long history, today Bulgaria is a proud member of the community of democratic nations, active member of the European Union and NATO and a factor of stability in Southeast Europe.

In 2021, Bulgaria is taking the chairmanship of the Three Seas Initiative. The initiative is a platform to provide strong political support for accelerated economic development, enhanced intraregional and cross-border cooperation, energy security and connectivity among 12 European Union members located between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black seas and boost cohesion and unity in Europe.

Strategically located at the gateway between Europe and Asia, with political and macroeconomic stability, the lowest tax rates in the EU, a highly skilled competitive workforce and low operational costs,

Bulgaria is highly beneficial to investors, offering them free access to the large EU market. Bulgaria has significant expertise and capabilities in IT, business process outsourcing, automotive manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, agriculture and agro-based industries, as well as scientific research and innovations. Bulgarian rose products, yogurt, wine, honey and herbs are widely popular well beyond our borders.

With its rich history and culture, diverse landscape and traditional hospitality, Bulgaria attracts millions of tourists annually. Its seven cultural and three natural UNESCO World Heritage sites position Bulgaria among the world's leading and most versatile tourism destinations. Bulgaria and Japan successfully collaborated on the archaeological excavations at the site of the Thracian tomb in the Bulgarian village of Sveshtari, which was added to UNESCO's World Heritage list. Another similarity that our two countries enjoy is *onsen* (hot spring) culture. With its 1,600 natural springs, Bulgaria is second in Europe in terms of thermal mineral waters and curative mud deposits.

Bulgaria and Japan enjoy a long-standing relationship of traditional friendship, cooperation and partnership, based on common values and principles. This relationship has withstood the test of time and has deepened and expanded throughout the years.

In 2019 Bulgaria-Japan relations gained further momentum through the memorable celebration of the triple anniversary of bilateral relations and dynamic political exchanges. The President of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev, visited Japan to attend the enthronement of his majesty the emperor and held a fruitful bilateral meeting with then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The exchange of visits of the foreign ministers of Bulgaria and Japan, as well as the visits to Japan of Bulgarian delegations at the deputy-ministerial level on economics, defense and disaster management, strengthened cooperation on bilateral, regional and international matters and expanded its scope by starting Bulgaria-Japan joint collaboration in the Western Balkans.

As a follow-up to Abe's visit to Bulgaria in 2018 and Radev's visit to Japan in 2019, a Bulgarian-Japanese economic forum was held in February 2020 in Sofia, hosted by Radev. At the forum a Japan-Bulgaria Business Association was established as a platform to facilitate and foster stronger business ties and to promote investment and mutually beneficial partnerships. The high-level event also highlighted the willingness of both countries to utilize the full potential of the EU-Japan economic partnership agreement.

In 2020, Bulgaria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued consultations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan on global issues and cooperation on joint projects for disaster management and supporting small and midsize enterprises in the Western Balkan countries.

The bonds of cooperation between Bulgarian and Japanese municipalities and universities have continued to expand. The activities of the six host towns housing the Bulgarian national teams for the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games have further strengthened our friendship and new branches of the Japan-Bulgaria Association have been established. The Bulgarian language courses at universities in Tokyo, Kobe and Osaka reflect growing interest among Japanese students in Bulgarian language and culture.

The global spread of COVID-19 in 2020 highlighted the importance of international cooperation. Bulgaria is grateful that at a very crucial moment amid the pandemic, Japan generously provided the antiviral drug Avigan to COVID-19 patients in Bulgaria. The upcoming Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games will send a strong message for global unity, resilience and the ability to overcome difficulties.

In 2021, Bulgaria will continue working with Japan in addressing global challenges and further strengthening this long-standing bilateral friendship, deepening cooperation in various fields and building an action-oriented partnership.



The Ivan Vazov National Theatre of Bulgaria EMBASSY OF BULGARIA

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

President of Bulgaria H.E. Mr. Rumen Radev (sixth from left) hosts a meeting with representatives of 12 Japanese firms operating in Bulgaria in February 2020 with Minister of Economy Emil Karanikolov (eighth from left), in Sofia.

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Congratulations

to the people of the Republic of Bulgaria
on their National Day



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