

Azerbaijan National Day Special

Nation sees great achievements since independence

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AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF
AZERBAIJAN



It is my great pleasure to address the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of the national day of the Republic of Azerbaijan. I would like to extend my warmest greetings and sincere wishes to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako, the imperial family, the government and friendly people of Japan, as well as the Azerbaijani community residing in Japan.

This year we are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the restoration of our independence. Since regaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has become a prospering country owing to national leader Heydar Aliyev and President Ilham Aliyev. In addition to being an investor country and taking a leadership role in huge regional projects, Azerbaijan plays an important role in global energy security and is a reliable transit country in Eurasia.

Despite past global economic and financial crises, the COVID-19 pandemic and various conflicts taking place in the region, the successful development of Azerbaijan has not been affected. The main reasons behind the continued growth of Azerbaijan are its political and economic stability, the unity of the people and leadership and its pursuit of target-oriented policies. Azerbaijan's domestic and foreign policies enjoy the support of the people and our international partners.

Today, Azerbaijan accounts for 63% of the economy of the South Caucasus. Rich with natural resources, Azerbaijan is a main player in the energy sector of

the region, delivering its oil and natural gas to international markets via such huge energy projects as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Southern Gas Corridor, contributing to the energy security of Europe. Azerbaijan also shares the common concerns of global warming and other environmental challenges, which have prompted it to invest heavily in sustainable and renewable sources of energy.

Azerbaijan has proven itself a strong and safe transit country as transportation routes from Central Asia through the Caspian Sea and further across the Caucasus grow in importance. Azerbaijan's role as a corridor between north and south has also grown, allowing it to provide alternative routes to the northwest and southwest. Azerbaijan remains a strong promoter of regional and trans-regional connectivity solutions through the development of transport links, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, as well as strategic infrastructure, logistics hubs and free trade zones for transporting goods and people across Eurasia. At the same time, economic diversification, particularly in nonoil fields, is one of the main strategies of Azerbaijan's economic policy.

New challenges in innovation and information technology are ahead. To meet them, Azerbaijan is putting great efforts into becoming a digital hub for the region as a whole.

From the beginning of 2020 the world has been facing challenges due to COVID-19. Azerbaijan was one of the first countries to introduce early and effective measures to contain the spread of the virus and mitigate its negative impact on our country. While taking effective measures to combat COVID-19 at the national level, Azerbaijan has also been making a significant contribution to strengthening solidarity and cooperation at the global level by convening multilateral meetings to facilitate multilateral efforts

to fight COVID-19. Aliyev has repeatedly stressed the significance of close cooperation to jointly combat the coronavirus pandemic.

Under an initiative proposed by our president, the U.N. General Assembly held a special session in 2020 to strengthen global efforts to fight COVID-19. In March, a resolution titled "Ensuring equal, affordable, timely and universal access to vaccines against COVID-19" was adopted on the initiative of Azerbaijan within the framework of the 46th session of the U.N. Human Rights Council. Azerbaijan has provided humanitarian assistance to over 30 countries in the fight against COVID-19 and donated \$10 million to the World Health Organization.

Last year saw Azerbaijan emerge victorious in the Patriotic War. After 44 days of war starting in late September, Azerbaijan liberated territories that had been occupied for about 30 years. The restoration and development of the newly liberated territories is the top priority of the government of Azerbaijan. The restoration and renovation process will be carried out in accordance with sustainable urbanism, making Karabakh one of the best places to live. The process involves participation of state-owned and private companies, as well as investors from foreign countries. The opening of the Zangazur corridor connecting the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic will create economic advantages not only for Azerbaijan, but also for regional countries. The corridor will be an integrated part of existing routes and become an important element of north-south and east-west transport corridors going through the South Caucasus.

Japan was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Dec. 28, 1991. Diplomatic relations between our countries were established on Sept. 7, 1992. Since then, we have achieved significant devel-



Designed by British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid, the Heydar Aliyev Center houses a museum, a gallery and an auditorium. AZERBAIJAN STATE NEWS AGENCY

opments at all levels of our bilateral relations while building strong political ties and exchanging mutual high-level visits.

Bilateral relations are successfully developing in various fields. Shared economic interests are priorities on our bilateral cooperation agenda. Since 1995, large Japanese companies have entered our energy sector, and some of them are shareholders of our Caspian Sea oil fields and the BTC oil pipeline. Along with the Japanese giants involved in the leading energy projects in Azerbaijan, we now have small and midsize enterprises and joint ventures creating beneficial business in both countries. One can already gain access to such Azerbaijani products as wine, pomegranate juice and honey in Japanese markets.

Boosting trade between our countries necessitates reliable, affordable and high-quality connectivity. A new phase of engagement between our countries began in 2015, and the inauguration of

direct Baku-Narita cargo flights in February opens extensive opportunities in trade and economic cooperation between our countries.

On April 19, a memorandum of understanding on general cooperation, which was signed between the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Nippon Export and Investment Insurance, will give a new impetus to our bilateral relations and will create new opportunities for economic cooperation. It will generate a general framework to promote exports of goods and services from both countries and help Japanese companies to maintain their international competitiveness in Azerbaijan by providing insurance products to Japanese exporters, investors and financiers.

The priority of Azerbaijan apart from energy-related business areas is to promote the implementation of the best practices for Japanese technologies and attract direct investment in nonoil industries,



Top: The flag of Azerbaijan hangs from a building in Baku. Above: Baku at night. AZERBAIJAN STATE NEWS AGENCY

particularly in the fields of agriculture, information technology, tourism, services and high tech. The government of Azerbaijan is aspiring to see Japanese business circles become more proactive in the Azerbaijani market.

Diversifying our cooperation in different areas will bring our friendly nations closer for years to come.

In 2022, we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Japan. We are already working on implementing a number of projects and are confident that through joint efforts, we will achieve great success in all areas of relations.

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



Top: The Flame Towers are silhouetted in Baku at dusk. Above: Ulu Korpu (Great Bridge), an ancient historical monument in the Gakh region. AZERBAIJAN STATE NEWS AGENCY



Neft Daslari, also known as Oil Rocks, is the largest offshore oil city ever built. AZERBAIJAN STATE NEWS AGENCY

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