

JAPANESE EMBASSY MARKS 55 YEARS OF JAPAN-T&T RELATIONS

After arriving in Trinidad and Tobago on January 16, 2019, Mr. Tatsuo Hirayama, officially took up his new assignment as Ambassador to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on January 22, with his presentation of credentials to Her Excellency Paula-Mae Weekes, ORTT, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ambassador Hirayama's arrival this year comes during an important period for relations between Japan and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This year marks the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

January 1, 2019, also marked 40 years for the Embassy of Japan in Port of Spain as a resident mission in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

During this period, both countries have maintained friendly relations, sharing the common values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and market economy.

Bilateral Relations

Reflecting on the two countries' relations, Japan has enjoyed lasting ties with Trinidad and Tobago. The strengthening of these ties has been demonstrated by the high-level exchanges and official visits between the two countries.

In Trinidad and Tobago's earliest days as a new Republic, the Government of Japan welcomed Dr. Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of T&T, in 1974 and again in 1975, and later received Prime Minister George Chambers in 1985.

The official visits of Trinidad and Tobago's Head of Government would be further supported by the visits of various ministers of government on fourteen separate occasions in the intervening years.

Likewise, Trinidad and Tobago has hosted several Ministers during the same period, with the most significant visit occurring in July 2014 with the official visit of His Excellency Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, to attend the first-ever Japan-CARICOM Summit, in Port of Spain. This event was held at a time when 2014 was designated as the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year.

Since this historic event, there has been a marked increase in the number of visits by Japanese government officials to Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region.

Economic Cooperation

Japan began offering technical training to T&T nationals in 1975 to contribute to enhancing knowledge in areas such as sustainable recycling, fisheries and solid waste management.

A total of one hundred and eighty-two (182) trainees from Trinidad and Tobago have benefitted from this technical cooperation training in Japan.

Since the first dispatch of a Japanese expert in 1987, experts have visited Trinidad and Tobago on seventy (70) occasions to share their expertise in the field of fisheries.

The Government of Japan has also offered economic assistance in the form of its Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP). The first GGP funded project in Trinidad and Tobago was executed in 1999.

Last March, the Government of Japan approved the Project for the Rehabilitation of Disaster Risk Management Center in Tobago, which aims to strengthen the Community Emergency Response Team base in Speyside.

Japan continues to honour its commitment to development cooperation with Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean, as first outlined by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2014.

Subsequently, Japan has been a leading voice among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states, supporting the removal of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the measure for determining graduated status of a developing country, as well as its access to Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Trade Relations

Japanese companies' interest and investment in Trinidad and Tobago have remained robust with reputed brands like Toyota, Fujitsu, Marubeni and Mitsubishi establishing a presence in the local market.

Notably, Caribbean Gas Chemical Limited (CGCL), a joint venture between the Mitsubishi Gas Chemical Company (MGC), Mitsubishi Corporation (MC), Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI), the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago (NGC), and Massy Holdings Ltd. (MHL), was created in 2015 and embarked on a project to establish a natural gas to petrochemicals complex in La Brea.

The project will utilise natural gas to produce methanol and di-methyl-ether, contributing to the further advancement of Trinidad and Tobago's downstream economy. The complex is expected to be completed at an estimated cost of about US \$1 billion, and will become fully operational by the end of 2019.

People to People Exchanges

Japan and Trinidad and Tobago have also continued to engage in people-to-people exchanges through the Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) program. JET has attracted an increasing number of young Trinbagonians who seek to experience Japanese culture while teaching English in Japan.

To date, one hundred and fifty-one (151) T&T nationals have enrolled in the JET program.

Language & Culture

Over the years, the Embassy of Japan has been engaged in various promotional activities to expose Trinbagonians to Japanese culture.

In 2017, an exhibition was held at the National Museum in Port of Spain, showcasing Japanese culture, tea ceremonies, as well as screening films.

The Embassy has also been offering a taste of Japan's film arts with annual film festivals.

Most recently, a Japanese Language Proficiency Test and a Japanese Language Speech Contest were both introduced in 2018, and are set to continue on a yearly basis.

Japanese language classes are currently offered at the Centre for Language Learning at the University of the West Indies (UWI).

Since the UWI began offering the course in 1999, there have been 1,420 enrollments.

Academic Exchanges

Trinidad and Tobago nationals have also received scholarships to study in Japan for post-graduate research through the Government of Japan's Monbukagakusho (MEXT) scholarship program.

Concurrently, the University of the West Indies and Sophia University in Japan have been engaging in academic exchanges over the last 3 years.

Japan's National Decoration

In 2017, the Japanese National Decoration, "The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette" was conferred upon Mr. E. Gervase Warner, President and Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Massy Holdings Limited, for his outstanding contribution to strengthening economic relations between Japan and T&T.

Mr. Warner is the first T&T citizen to receive the Japanese national decoration.

Future Events

On April 30, 2019, His Majesty will abdicate his position as the Emperor of Japan, after loyally serving as Emperor for 30 years.

The Emperor will be succeeded by His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince, who will officially ascend to the throne on May 1, 2019.

This will be the first imperial changing of the guard from one living emperor to another in 200 years.

In June of 2019, the Government of Japan will be hosting the Group of 20 (G20) Summit in Osaka as the current chair of the Group.

In September, twenty nations will compete in the Rugby World Cup to be hosted in Japan over a period of six weeks.

In the following year, the city of Tokyo will host the most prestigious of sporting events when the 2020 Summer Olympic Games commence in July.

Moving Forward

Under the stewardship of Ambassador Hirayama, the Embassy of Japan is set to fully engage in its efforts to enhance and promote relations between Japan and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.
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