

Remarks

**Presented by NAITO Yasushi, Consul-General of Japan in Perth,
On the occasion of the 10th Perth Japan Festival at the Supreme Court Gardens
Saturday March 23, 2024**

- Mr Yaz Mubarakai MLA, representing Dr Tony Buti, Minister for Education, Aboriginal Affairs, Citizenship and Multicultural Interests Western Australia,
- Rt Honourable Mr Basil Zempilas, Lord Mayor of City of Perth,
- Mr Richard Cohen, Managing Director at Rio Tinto,
- Mr Mike Robinson, Vice President of Woodside Energy,
- Ms Sawako Nakanishi, President of Japanese Association in WA,
- Mr Ben Opie, representing Japan Festival Inc,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

Welcome to the 10th Perth Japan Festival. If you are interested in Japan, this is the day for you. You can enjoy and appreciate different aspects of Japan, from traditional and pop-culture, to martial arts and a variety of Japanese food, even a sushi making experience, all gathered here today. We are so fortunate to have many masters and practitioners of Japanese culture in Perth who are sharing their amazing skills honed throughout the year.

Thank you to the members of the festival committee who are coordinating these cultural ambassadors to showcase their shining performances on the stage, with more than 130 volunteers, including Japanese students studying in Perth, to guide you. This is a day for everybody to have fun. We have something for everyone in the family to enjoy. This is also a day for making friends and new connections.

Last year, we were amazed with the turnout of more than 16,000 people, marking it as the biggest ever Japan Festival in Perth. Since last year's festival, many more people have visited Japan as we saw the resumption of the ANA Perth to Narita direct flights, and thanks to the impact of the visit of Premier and Deputy Premier on the inaugural flight,

Tokyo has become the most popular holiday destination for Australians, overtaking Bali in December. A big thank you to ANA for its contributions and for becoming a sponsor of the Perth Japan Festival which is a clear commitment to your continued efforts of connecting people and bridging Japan and Western Australia closer together in the years ahead.

A special theme of this year's festival is the 50th year celebration of the sister city relationship between the City of Perth and Kagoshima City, which is Perth City's longest standing sister city relationship. The Government of Japan and the Japan Festival Inc invited three distinguished traditional music performers from Kagoshima. They are Ms Rumiko Setoguchi (shinobue flute), Ms Riko Hirata (taiko drumming), and Ms Mako Sakai (vocals and shamisen), who have arrived by the ANA direct flight. They are showcasing the beauty of Kagoshima traditions through their music performances. Their collaboration with local group is also something we cannot miss.

Perth and Kagoshima have common features, as both are full of sunshine and abundant nature, with special historical contributions to nation building, and even sharing the same latitude of 32 degrees north and south of the equator.

Today, we are delighted to host the Rt Honourable Mr Basil Zempilas, Lord Mayor of the beautiful City of Perth. Lord Mayor is a keen supporter of the sister city with Kagoshima, encouraging student exchanges, receiving them every time by himself and offered us a big support in organizing this Kagoshima-themed Perth Japan Festival. Later we have a recorded message by Mr Takao Shimozuru, the Mayor of Kagoshima City who is planning a visit to Perth later this year to advance the cities friendship even further.

Japan and Western Australia enjoy a longstanding relationship of over 140 years that began with Japanese pearl divers. Despite the difficult time, they loved the beauty of the land and people of Australia which inspired many including Japanese residents later. After World War II, forward-thinking politicians from Western Australia, such as Sir Charles Court, and business people here led new partnerships with Japan. It has unlocked the potential of our two economies and led to the remarkable success of both Japan and Australia, first with iron ore, and later with LNG, and contributed to the world economy on a massive scale, which economists describe as a rare model of success in the world, based on mutual trust. Today the partnership is advancing further towards our common challenges ahead.

Our close relationship, including many successful business relations, have always been supported by grassroots people-to-people friendships. We are humbled to know approximately 80 % of Australians find trust in Japan through a Lowy Institute survey last year, as well as through a Japanese Ministry Of Foreign Affairs survey this year.

After all, people-to-people bonds are most the important asset that bridge Japan and Western Australia. We believe events such as the Perth Japan Festival is an important opportunity that will further harness people's appreciation of various aspects of Japan while motivating a deeper understanding.

I would like to add that the Japanese community in Perth has a wonderful spirit of hospitality and passion, creating the Perth Ondo パース音頭, a Bon Odori dance dedicated to Perth for last year's festival. As I stood at the top of the Yagura stage, it was a moving sight to see the circle of dancers grow as both Australians and Japanese joined the Bon Odori, with participants tripling by the end of the day.

Today with Ohara-bushi from Kagoshima and a line-up of new dances, I look forward to seeing an even larger circle of friendship this year. Come and join us later at the Yagura stage to enjoy a sense of togetherness, which is essence of matsuri, Japanese festival.

Last but not least, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to all the sponsors. Without your support this wonderful opportunity for interaction would not be possible.

Let us all enjoy the 10th Perth Japan Festival.

Thank you for your attention.

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