
Address by the Ambassador of Japan, H.E. Mr. Takuji Hanatani, at the Reception to Celebrate
the Birthday of His Majesty, the Emperor of Japan, at 6:30pm, on Wednesday, 3 December 2014

*President of the Republic of Fiji, His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau
and the First Lady, Madam Adi Koila Nailatikau,*

*Governor General of Tuvalu, His Excellency Sir Iakoba Taeia Italeli
and Lady Koling Italeli,*

*Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Honourable Enele Sosene Sopoaga and
Madam Salilo Sopoaga,*

Honourable Cabinet Ministers,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Distinguished Guests,

Colleagues and Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Evening, Ni Sa Bula, Namaste and Konbanwa.

May I extend to you all a very warm welcome. Today, we are celebrating the 81st Birthday of His Majesty, the Emperor of Japan. I thank you all for sharing your time with us. We are indeed honoured to have His Excellency the President and the First Lady's esteemed presence with us this evening.

Actually, the date of His Majesty's Birthday is 23 December, which is a national holiday in Japan. We have brought forward the celebration because 23 December is very close to the festive season and

annual holidays, and we really wanted to share this occasion with all of you.

I must acknowledge that in the short time that I have spent in Fiji, I am deeply impressed by the beautiful and pristine nature of Fiji, but it is the genuine warmth of the people that makes this culturally and ethnically diverse country most attractive.

I take this opportunity to reiterate Japan's well wishes to the people and the newly seated government of Fiji for the successful implementation of the general election and Fiji's return to parliamentary democracy.

Undoubtedly, the post elections period will usher in a new momentum of nation building and a period of significant transition in Fiji. Indeed, such developments will provide fresh opportunities to further enhance Japan – Fiji relations.

Fiji and Japan established diplomatic relations in 1970. This year marks the 44th anniversary of such friendship. Today, Fiji is one of Japan's closest partners in the Pacific. I look forward to further strengthening the relations between the two countries and achieving new milestones in our cooperation.

This is also an excellent occasion for me to share with you all, the merits of the cooperation and partnership between Japan and Fiji. Currently, trade between the two countries is promising. Apart from the removal of the Nadi-Narita direct flights some years ago, Fiji remains a preferred holiday destination for many Japanese.

Japan also engages with Fiji through high level governmental visits, people to people exchange programs, youth and leadership training programs, scholarship programs, and our broader ODA program. I believe Fiji has certain sectors, where remarkable development can take place, and where Japan has the necessary strengths to contribute.

Furthermore, the PALM or the Pacific Island Leaders Meeting is held every three years in Japan where Pacific leaders are invited to meet with Japanese counterparts and work together towards enhanced cooperation, sustainable economic growth and addressing effects of climate change besides other key issues concerning the participating countries. Such a level of engagement has built a firm bilateral and multilateral partnership between Japan, Fiji and the Pacific Island Countries.

I am very pleased to say that in May 2015, PALM 7 will be hosted in Iwaki City, Fukushima, Japan. We look forward to welcoming the Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji, the Honourable Rear Admiral Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama and other Pacific Leaders to PALM 7 next year.

I also wish to elaborate on the shared passion for rugby between our two nations. I am sure the majority of you would agree with me on Fiji's likelihood of greater success in Sevens Rugby which is now an Olympic sport. For a long time, successive Fijians have been playing for the Japanese National Fifteens and Sevens Teams as well as for club franchises in Japan. This is Fiji's export of sporting talent to Japan.

Not to be deterred, Japan currently leads Asia in rugby. Japan is also ranked 11th in world rugby, just above Fiji, which is ranked 12th. I understand if you are surprised, Japan ranked above Fiji in world rugby?

In fact, I couldn't believe it myself. Then again, let's face it. It is one of the tough realities of life. Actually, Japan slipped from 9th to 11th in world rugby ranking after losing to Georgia in November this year. Japan has reached the good ranking thanks partly to Fijian talents.

Japan is looking forward to welcoming Fiji and the rest of the world to the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games.

In concluding, I wish to emphasize that in light of the encouraging progress between Japan-Fiji relations, I believe it is important for us to collectively build on the advantages of our friendship, for the greater benefit of our two peoples in the future. I also wish to convey my best wishes for a safe and happy festive season to all of you, the people and government of Fiji.

Last but never the least, may I propose a toast:

- To the continued good health and long life of His Majesty, the Emperor of Japan!
- To the everlasting friendship between Japan and Fiji!

Kanpai! Cheers! Bula!

Thank You, Vinaka Vakalevu, Dhanyavaadh, and Arigato Gozaimasu.

The End.