

Summary of Ambassador's Speech at the exhibition of Japan-Bhutan cooperation in the agricultural field

I am really happy to visit Bhutan for the first time. It is truly my pleasure to serve as the Ambassador of Japan to Bhutan, the land blessed with beautiful nature and rich culture.

I believe it is quite meaningful that I am here to attend an event focusing on cooperation in the agricultural field, which is the principal industry of Bhutan and has a deep connection with Japan. Dasho Keiji Nishioka, who was dispatched to Bhutan as the first expert of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) in 1964, is the enduring symbol of Japanese economic cooperation with Bhutan. Dasho Nishioka sowed the seeds of friendship with Bhutanese farmers, introduced Japanese white radish, Chinese cabbage, cabbage, and carrot, to the Bhutanese people, who were not accustomed to eating vegetables in their diets before, and helped improve the productivity of the rice crop by 40%. In response to a request by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King, Dasho Nishioka also made efforts to cultivate the fields in the south Zhemgang in Bhutan, by working together with the people there, and remarkably changed the way of 'slash-and burn' farming to rice paddy farming. It is well known among the people in Japan that he was eventually lauded the title of "Dasho" by Bhutan, in recognition of his valuable contribution towards developing Bhutanese agriculture, making him the first and only foreign recipient of the title of "Dasho".

Since 1984, Japan has handed over 3,186 power-tillers, which can be effectively used in the inclined fields in Bhutan, which is a mountainous country. I hear that these agricultural machines have contributed to increasing agricultural productivity by 5% and cut costs by 24%. Based on the result of the preparatory survey conducted recently, Japan will continue its efforts to provide power-tillers, thus contributing towards mechanization of Bhutanese agriculture.

In 2015, the decrepit Taklai irrigation system was repaired. As a consequence, the rice acreage in the dry season in Taklai drastically expanded from 10ha to 560ha, and the rice acreage in whole of Bhutan is expected to expand from 883ha to 1,120ha, i.e., an increase of approximately 25 percent.

I have also learnt that the Bhutanese people are highly appreciative of the activities of JICA volunteers and experts in the fields of horticulture and maintenance of agricultural machines. Among them, as a JICA expert, Mr. Yuichi Tomiyasu has been teaching useful skills in the field of horticulture in eastern Bhutan. The vegetables and fruits produced under his guidance have been highly regarded, and in 2014, he was

awarded the “National Order of Merit (Gold)” by His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, in recognition of his contribution towards the improvement of farmers’ life in Bhutan. It is through the “Integrated Horticulture Promotion Project in the West Central Region” that Mr. Yuichi Tomiyasu will teach these skills, and today’s ceremony also marks the commencement of that project as well.

I hope that this support from Japan would lead to further improving the incomes of the farmers here, greatly contributing to develop the Bhutanese economy and social activities. I would like to thank again the organizations concerned, who made efforts to hold the exhibition of Japan-Bhutan cooperation in the agricultural field.

This year commemorates the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bhutan. I am really happy that this event has kicked-off the year-long series of events to celebrate the 30th anniversary. As the Ambassador of Japan to Bhutan, I would like to do my best to make this memorial year a great success.