

**Summary of Speech by Ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu,
at the Reception on the occasion of the closing of the celebration of 30th
Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and
Bhutan, and the Celebration of the Birthday of His Majesty Emperor of Japan
On 23 December, 2016**

Thank you very much for taking your time today to attend the closing reception for the 30th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between our countries.

Today, December 23rd marks the 83rd Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. It is our great pleasure to visit Bhutan and celebrate our friendship with all of you in this very special day.

Throughout this anniversary year, a wide variety of events have taken place both in Bhutan and Japan. I have met a lot of people through these events, and I realized every time that the Japan-Bhutan relationship has greatly flourished and the people from both countries feel ever closer to each other now.

In May, we held an exhibition named “Bhutan Exhibition: “A Hint of Happiness” in Tokyo. Her Majesty the Queen Mother Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck graciously attended the opening as the Guest of Honour. It was a very successful event with an enormous number of visitors.

In June, Japan participated for the first time in the annual Royal Bhutan Flower Exhibition with the presence of Japanese Bonsai master and a Japanese garden from Miharu-machi of Fukushima.

In summer, the number of Japanese tourists increased five times, thanks to a highly successful “Friendship Offer”, special offer for the Japanese tourists by the Tourism Council of Bhutan.

At the Japan Week in Bhutan, which we organized in September, we welcomed the Hon’ble Lyonpo Jigme Zangpo, Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan and Mr. Katsuyuki Kawai, Special Advisor to Prime Minister Abe. The opening ceremony with marvelous dance and music was truly magnificent.

For a long time, the Japan-Bhutan relationship has been cultivated through the interaction between the Royal Family of Bhutan and the Imperial Family of Japan,

and also through the cooperation in the field of agriculture. Now, after this memorable year, this relationship became much closer and more tangible to the people of both countries.

This afternoon, I had a joy of watching the Japan-Bhutan 30th Anniversary Table Tennis Camp match. We had 7 excellent Table Tennis coaches and players from Japan and the games were very exciting. At the event, Japanese “Ping Pong Lovers” handed over 100 uniforms, 20 rackets with 115 rubbers and 230 balls to the Bhutan Table Tennis association. I sincerely hope the friendship among people will further expand and develop through this sort of exchanges.

This morning, I attended the hand-over ceremony of the patrol cars for the community police centres in Paro, Wangduephodrang and Traishigang. I hope this will contribute to strengthening the capability of the Royal Bhutan Police for community patrolling and emergency response.

The Government of Japan has also agreed to extend Grant Aid for “the Project for the Improvement of Farm Machinery for Hiring Services of Tillage”. This project will provide funds for the procurement of 353 power tillers. In addition the two Governments have signed the Exchange of Notes for “the Project for Reconstruction of Bridges on Primary National Highway No.4” last week.

Japan will continue to assist Bhutan’s economic development. This time the representatives of two Japanese companies, namely Sojitz India and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation, came to Bhutan with me. We hope to strengthen the economic relations including trade and investment along with the assistance through ODA.

I wish to express my deep gratitude for everyone who has made utmost efforts to strengthen the cooperative relations between our two countries. I sincerely hope that further active interactions and exchanges will take place between our countries in coming years.

Throughout this year in which we celebrated the 30th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Relations, I strongly felt a deep affinity between the people of Japan and Bhutan.