

Opening Remarks by Ambassador Satoshi Suzuki
at the Opening Ceremony of the Japan Week
(October 9, 2021)

His Excellency Dr. Tandi Dorji, Honorable Minister of Foreign
Affairs,

Mr. Kozo Watanabe, Chief Representative, JICA Bhutan Office,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

སྐུ་གཟུགས་བཟང་པོ་ལགས། (Kuzu Zangpo La).

It is my pleasure to join you this morning in the Opening Ceremony of the Japan Week in Bhutan 2021, although it is virtual participation due to COVID-19 protocol. We celebrated the Japan Week in Thimphu face to face until 2019. However, last year, due to the pandemic, we were not able to gather in Thimphu. So, this year, we decided to hold the event online so that many Bhutanese people across the country can enjoy interactive cultural events after a gap of one year. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the officials of the Royal Government of Bhutan who have helped this idea to take shape. I hope these online programs will offer opportunities to each Bhutanese citizen to feel a more affinity with the Japanese culture.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it challenging for both Bhutanese and Japanese dignitaries to pay mutual visits. However, in the meantime, Japan was not absent in Bhutan: the Government of Japan has steadily continued its support to Bhutan in the area of social and economic development. We have signed several projects, such as “the Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship,” which contributes to the empowerment of young Bhutanese public service officers, and “the Economic and Social Development Program”, which provides health and medical equipment to several hospitals in Bhutan. In addition, we also extended the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Project to support women’s shelter home in Thimphu. In December last year, the inaugural ceremony of “the Project for Reconstruction of Bridges on Primary National Highway No. 4” was witnessed by the Honorable Minister for Works and Human Settlement of Bhutan in Trongsa.

In this regard, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to JICA Bhutan Office for the great cooperation with us. Under the leadership of Mr. Watanabe, I am sure that JICA Office will continue to work closely with the Royal Government of Bhutan to ensure the successful operation of every project.

Human resources development is also an important subject. In the field of people-to-people exchanges, Japan invariably continues to

accept Bhutanese students and trainees through various schemes such as the Government Scholarship Program for foreign students and the Asia Kakehashi Project. Although the situation is not favorable yet for us to make full-fledged exchanges between the two nationals, Japan supports the young Bhutanese people in achieving high-level human resources development and contributes to the national development of Bhutan through those who have gained skills and experiences in Japan.

On this occasion, I would like to inform you that two Bhutanese high-school students will visit Japan under the Asia Kakehashi Project next week, followed by five university students under the Government Scholarship Program within this year.

I would also like to pay my sincere respect to the seven Bhutanese athletes who recently participated in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games despite various challenges caused by COVID-19 pandemic. This afternoon, we will celebrate the inauguration of the Judo Dojo in Thimphu. I look forward to meeting those who have engaged in the development of Judo in Bhutan.

During the Japan Week in Bhutan 2021, we will hold online events such as “Expressing Japanese Poetry” supported by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan, “Origami Workshop,” “Ikebana Demonstration” and “Bon Dance Workshop” organized by Japan

Foundation. The BBS will broadcast the TV programs entitled “Explore Japan” produced by NHK and Japan Foundation. I would like to invite as many Bhutanese people as possible to watch the live streaming of these events and experience some flavor of Japan’s culture.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to see the Government of Bhutan’s efforts in containing the COVID-19 pandemic and bringing forward vaccination throughout the country. I hope the situation will be further improved in the near future and more people can interact with each other like before. I myself would like to visit Bhutan again soon.

The next year 2022 has special meanings for both countries. It is the 30th anniversary of the demise of Dasho Keiji Nishioka, who served for the nation-building of Bhutan, and the 35th anniversary of the agreement to dispatch JOCV (Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers) to Bhutan. Hence, the Governments of Japan and Bhutan will celebrate the year 2022 as the Japan-Bhutan Friendship Year.

In closing, I hope that the relations between our two nations, which started with our cooperation in the Bhutan’s nation-building and have now expanded into many fields, will further flourish

throughout the Japan-Bhutan Friendship Year 2022 and beyond.

Thank you. བཀྲིས་བདེ་ལེགས། (Tashi Delek)