



TIMES OF OMAN 'ENVOY SPEAK'
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PART ONE: BILATERAL RELATIONS

As this is my first '*Envoy Speak*' contribution, I would like to take the opportunity to extend my sincere greetings to readers of the *Times of Oman*. I am delighted to be involved with the column.

The Japan-Oman diplomatic relationship was established in 1972, a year after Oman joined the United Nations. I am the eleventh ambassador since Japan established its Embassy in Muscat, in 1983. The bond between the two countries is strong and our bilateral relationship has developed over recent decades. Oman is a key country for Japan's security, since it holds the Strait of Hormuz through which over three quarters of our oil imports pass, and is a beacon of peace and stability in the Middle East.

Historical ties between Japan and Oman can be traced back more than 400 years. As early as 1619, a Japanese Christian passed through Oman on his way to Jerusalem. In 1924, a Japanese geographer, who also made a stopover in Muscat, was granted an audience with Sultan Taimur. This exchange prompted the Sultan to visit Japan in 1935, after he abdicated the throne. Sultan Taimur then married a Japanese woman named Kiyoko Oyama and the couple lived in Kobe with their daughter, Princess Buthaina. After Kiyoko Oyama passed away in 1938, Princess Buthaina moved to Oman with Sultan Taimur and still lives in Muscat.

The Imperial House of Japan has an enduring, close relationship with the Al Busaidi Dynasty in Oman, one of the oldest dynasties in the Arab world. In November 1994, Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Japan visited Oman, turning a new page in bilateral relations. In return, H.H. Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister, visited Japan in 1997 and H.H. Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq al Said, Minister of Heritage

and Culture and cousin of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, in 2008. Both Highnesses had an audience with His Majesty the Emperor and His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince.

Japan and Oman enjoy a robust economic relationship, built upon a solid foundation of a trusted trade partnership nurtured by the two countries. This relationship has been advanced in recent years with the diversification of Oman's economy, presenting opportunities for Japanese companies to participate in a wider range of economic activities in the Sultanate. Japan is one of the first and largest importers of crude oil and natural gas from Oman. Japan also imports a large quantity of vegetables and fish products. Oman imports a large array of consumer products from Japan, notably automobiles and auto parts, machinery and electronic appliances. When I drive along the coastline, deserts, mountains and other beautiful parts of the Sultanate, I see so many off-road, four wheel drive vehicles, such as Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Isuzu and Subaru, which makes me immensely pleased and proud.

Good relations between countries are backed by mutual understanding, and cultural exchange is central to this. My favourite role as ambassador of Japan is bringing cultural exhibitions and events to the friendly Omani people. Bringing traditional Japan to Oman is one way, but I passionately believe it is of equal importance to introduce contemporary Japanese culture, such as state-of-the-art technologies, including robots and high-tech public transport, industrial design as well as popular culture such as music, anime and manga. The Embassy of Japan did just that in 2012 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Oman, which saw a plethora of well-received traditional and contemporary cultural events.

Finally, diplomacy is not limited to diplomats. Far from it. People-to-people exchange has a pivotal role to play. Organizations which constitute the backbone of good relations have been established over the past 41 years. In Oman, the Oman-Japan Friendship Association, Japan Fan Club and Japan's International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Alumni are some such organizations. In Japan, we have the Japan-Oman Society, the Japan-Oman Parliamentary Friendship Leagues and the Hiroshima-Oman Friendship Association. I would like to thank everyone who has enhanced the friendship and mutual understanding between our two countries, and I look forward to ever stronger ties.