

# **Japan – Bahrain Relations and Their Prospects for This Year**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for inviting me to join you today. I am very pleased to talk to you about my thoughts on Japan – Bahrain relations and their prospects for this year. I would like to thank the Capital Club for giving me this occasion.

Before going into the substance, please let me talk a little bit about myself. I have been working as Japanese Ambassador to Bahrain since March of 2018. But this is not my first time to work in Bahrain. I had worked at the Japanese Embassy as Deputy Chief of Mission between 2007 and 2009. Before coming to Bahrain as Ambassador, I was Japanese Ambassador to Sudan. One day, I received a call in Khartoum from my

headquarters in Tokyo and was told that my next assignment would be in Bahrain. I was pleasantly surprised, because it does not happen often that one works in the same country twice. Bahrain is a rather small community. And my old friends welcomed me when I came back to the Kingdom as Ambassador. I was very happy to see them again, although, naturally, everybody was ten years older. Surrounded by many good friends, I feel very at home in the Kingdom and enjoy my stay here.

## **1- History of the relations between Japan and Bahrain**

Now I would like to turn to our subject. Whenever I meet Bahraini dignitaries, I start with saying that Japan is not a new comer to Bahrain and that our relations go back to 1934 when the first oil export from Bahrain went to Japan.

The tanker El Segundo left Bahrain and arrived in Yokohama, Japan on July 9, 1934. Bahraini oil export to Japan in 1934 was the first instance of Japan's importing of oil from Arab Gulf

countries and it was the first export of oil abroad by any Arab Gulf country. As such, it was the beginning of the relations through oil not only between Japan and Bahrain but also between Japan and GCC countries.

In addition, when I visited Banagas, I learned that the first shipment of Bahraini LPG, that was 5,000 tons of butane, also went to Japan on the Japanese tanker YUYO MARU in March 1980. Furthermore, during my recent visit to GPIC, I was told that its first shipment of methanol, once again, went to Japan in 1985.

In this way, the relations between Japan and Bahrain in oil related industries are long-standing and historic.

These traditional relations between the two countries were translated into the world of diplomacy. After the independence of Bahrain in 1971. Japan established diplomatic relations with Bahrain in 1972. At first, the Japanese Embassy in Kuwait was covering Bahrain as well. But in 1983, Charge d' affaires opened an office in Bahrain, and in 1988, the Japanese Embassy

was established and the first resident Ambassador of Japan to Bahrain, Mr. Ogushi, arrived in Manama in March that year.

Since then, I am the eleventh Japanese Ambassador to Bahrain.

Regarding the Bahrain side, it opened its Embassy in 2005. And now we have the second Ambassador, His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Al- Dosary following the long Ambassadorship of HE Dr. Khalil Hassan.

## **2- Current Bilateral Relations**

Now I would like to turn to the current bilateral relations between Japan and Bahrain.

At the government level, there were exchange of visits at the highest level.

In April 2012, His Majesty King Hamad made a historic visit to Japan. In the following year 2013, in March, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Salman visited Japan, and in August,

Prime Minister Abe made the first visit of Japanese Prime Minister to Bahrain.

The year 2019 was a fruitful year for the bilateral relations between Japan and Bahrain in terms of exchanges of visits. The highlight was the participation of HRH Crown Prince Salman in the Enthronement Ceremony of the New Japanese Emperor in October. Apart from that, in March, HH Shaikh Khalifa, Southern Governor visited Japan officially. In June, HE Ms. Fawzia Zainal, Speaker of the Council of Representatives, together with delegations both from the Council of Representatives and the Shura Council, visited Japan to attend Women Political Leader Summit held in Tokyo. In November, Defense Minister HE Taro Kono came to Bahrain to participate in the Manama Dialogue following his consecutive attendances to the Dialogue as Minister for Foreign Affairs in the previous two years. This time, HE Keisuke Suzuki, State Minister for Foreign Affairs also took part in the Manama Dialogue.

If I may add, the new Japanese Emperor and Empress together visited Bahrain in 1994 as Crown Prince and Crown Princess

after they got married. Definitely, they have fond memories of Bahrain.

Regarding trade relations between Japan and Bahrain, Japan has been a long – standing major trade partner of Bahrain. Its trade volume with Bahrain has been at around one billion US dollars. However, the latest statistics shows that there was a huge increase of export from Bahrain to Japan in 2018 and that the total trade volume reached around two billion dollars. Japan's main export items are vehicles and machinery, while Japan's main import items from Bahrain are oil, petrochemical products and aluminum. Japan is the sixth largest exporter to Bahrain. There are many Bahraini business people who have long history of dealing with Japanese companies.

Also Japanese companies have contributed to the nation building efforts of Bahrain through their participation in various development projects. Japanese companies contributed to infrastructure construction in such important fields as gas, oil and aluminum. Japanese companies are also a part of IWPP

projects, and taking part in supplying stable water and electricity.

In the cultural field, the Embassy of Japan worked hard in recent years to offer people in Bahrain as many chances as possible to appreciate Japanese culture. In December 2018, we invited a Japanese traditional folk song singer and a Shamisen player. In February 2019, on the occasion of Bahrain International Garden Show, we invited a professor of Japanese flower arrangement, IKEBANA. Also in the framework of Spring of Culture in March, a Japanese drum group visited the Kingdom and made performances. In June, we invited a Japanese candy artist to take part in Bahrain Summer Festival. And from October to November, we held an exhibition entitled The Dolls of Japan at the National Museum introducing Japanese traditional dolls.

In the academic field, every year, Japan has been offering two scholarship seats to Bahraini students for their post – graduate studies in Japanese universities. In this way, more than thirty Bahrainis have studied in Japan.

Also we have been offering Ship for World Youth program. I am very pleased that a new batch of Bahraini youths consisting of twelve participants were invited to take part in this year's program after the interruption for three years. Their participation brings the total number of Bahraini members to 150, which is among the highest all over the world. I hope the participants are now enjoying the program.

Fortunately, in Bahrain, we have a very strong alumni association for the participants of the Program. This group is very active in organizing various events related to Japan.

Those scholarship students as well as Ship for World Youth program alumni are Japanese ambassadors in their respective work places or towns.

When we talk about bilateral relations between Japan and Bahrain, there is another special field of cooperation that is security. Japan has been sending its Maritime Self – Defense Force vessels and aircrafts to contribute to counter – piracy



operations since 2009. And from 2013 on, Japan has been working in the framework of Combined Task Force 151 with other like - minded countries. Japanese Rear Admirals commanded the Task Force three times in 2015, 2017 and 2018. Japan will command the Task Force for the fourth time from February. As the headquarters of those activities are located in Bahrain, we have very close cooperation with Bahrain Defense Force as well as US Navy. In addition, last month Japan decided to dispatch an additional destroyer and also utilize the patrol aircrafts currently engaging in counter-piracy operations, for information gathering activities. That is to ensure the safety of navigation in this region on which Japan depends 90% of its oil import. This decision is also accompanied by Japan's determination to undertake further diplomatic efforts towards easing tensions and stabilizing the situation in the Middle East.

### **3- Prospects for this year**

Now we would like to talk about the prospects for this year.

Fortunately, as I described above, our bilateral relations are excellent. I would say we don't have any serious problems. But we should always try to move forward.

As the representative of the Japanese government, I hope that more exchange of visits will be made among Japanese dignitaries and Bahraini dignitaries. From the Japanese side, Manama Dialogue will continue to be an occasion for such visits. I hope from Bahraini side as well, more Ministers will visit Japan.

This year, in 2020, Tokyo will host Olympic and Paralympic games in July and August. In recent period, many Bahraini athletes are putting in excellent performances in various international competitions. I look forward to seeing many Bahraini athletes competing in Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. Also I hope that many Bahraini people, in addition to the official delegation will visit Japan on that occasion and enjoy Japanese hospitality.

Here, I would like to touch upon our relations between Japan and Bahrain in the field of tourism. This field is an important

one both for Japan and Bahrain. Unfortunately, we don't have appropriate statistics in this field. Therefore, it is difficult to grasp the picture clearly. However, for example, the number of visa we issued in our Embassy doubled between 2009 and 2018. I know many Bahrainis visited Japan as their honeymoon destination, particularly during cherry blossom season. Also I know a couple of Japanese travel agencies are handling tours to Bahrain. I hope more and more Bahraini people will visit Japan and more and more Japanese people will visit Bahrain.

In the end, exchange of visits both at government level and people's level is the basis of mutual understanding.

In the business and economic field, I sincerely hope that Japanese companies will have new chances to contribute to the nation – building efforts of the Kingdom of Bahrain in various fields for the benefit of both Japan and Bahrain.

One particular area in which the Japanese Embassy is working hard in the business field is the promotion of Japanese foods.

After the great earthquake in Japan in March 2011, because of the FUKUSHIMA nuclear power plants accident, many countries in the world, including Bahrain, restricted the import

of Japanese foods out of concern for radioactive contamination. But in March last year, these restrictions were lifted by the Bahraini government, as the safety of Japanese foods has been accepted by the international community. The Embassy held events to promote Japanese foods in Bahrain. We will continue to do so, so that the Bahraini people can enjoy good quality Japanese foods, as Japanese foods are gaining more and more popularity in Bahrain and all over the world.

This year, too, I intend to continue to focus on increasing cultural exchanges between our two countries.

I am very pleased that everybody I talk to in Bahrain has good image of Japan. Indeed, everywhere, I can see many Toyota, Nissan and other Japanese cars. Also there are a lot of Panasonic products. Bahraini people talk about Japan as a technologically advanced country. For some other Bahrainis, Japan is a country of animation, “Manga” or games. All those are not wrong, but those are only a part of Japan.

It is really important to cultivate deeper understanding on each other. I am determined to increase occasions to present Japanese

culture in Bahrain as much as possible so that the Bahraini people understand the thoughts and everyday lives of the Japanese people who are behind various Japanese products.

After spending some time in Bahrain previously and this time, it seems to me that there are many similarities between the Japanese society and the Bahraini society. As Japan is in East Asia, Bahrain is in West Asia and both as Asians, and also both as island countries, we share common values. For example, both the Japanese people and the Bahraini people respect the elders. Also Japan and Bahrain both attach importance to harmony of its society. Bahrain is famous for being a tolerant society. That may be a heritage from the ancient times as an island country located in the crossroad of civilizations. On the other hand, Japan was an agricultural country based on the cultivation of rice. Growing rice requires cooperation of all villagers. When Prince Shotoku promulgated the first Japanese constitution consisting of 17 articles more than one thousand and four hundred years ago, the first article went that harmony is precious. Furthermore, because Japan and Bahrain lack natural

resources, we regard human resource development and education as important. Last year, Bahrain celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first public school. In Japan, too, literacy of the Japanese people was high even before we opened up our country to the world in the nineteenth century. That was the reason why Japan was able to develop its economy quickly to compete with European countries. In this way, in fact, there is a solid basis to have mutual understanding between the Japanese people and the Bahraini people.

Fortunately, there are many generous Bahrainis who understand the importance of people to people relations and are prepared to sponsor cultural events. In this endeavor, we also have a strong support from the Bahrain – Japan Business & Friendship Society.

Now I am planning three occasions inviting Japanese performers this spring. The first one is during the period of International Garden Show. We intend to invite a representative of Urasenke School, which is one of the largest schools of Japanese tea

ceremony. Also during the Spring of Culture festival, we will present a player of Japanese traditional musical instrument, so to speak, Japanese Kanoon, called Koto. She is expected to play with a Bahraini musician. Furthermore, we will present Japanese vaudeville theatre performers, also as one of the events of the Spring of Culture. Two performers will visit Bahrain. One is a Japanese traditional comic storyteller and the other is a performer of Daikagura, traditional auspicious performance. People in Bahrain will get to know a different aspect of Japanese culture from more rigid, formal culture of Japan, like tea ceremony and flower arrangement IKEBANA.

As Japanese Ambassador to Bahrain, I would like to do my best to further strengthen our bilateral relations not only at a governmental level but also at a people to people level in cooperation with all Bahraini friends.

Thank you very much for your listening.

