

Speech by CE at Japan Autumn Festival in Hong Kong – Rediscovering Nippon opening ceremony (English only) (with photos/video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the opening ceremony of Japan Autumn Festival in Hong Kong – Rediscovering Nippon this evening (October 12):

Ambassador Matsuda (Ambassador and Consul-General of Japan in Hong Kong, Mr Kuninori Matsuda), Mr Sakurai (Chairman of Japan Autumn Festival Executive Committee, Mr Chiharu Sakurai), ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. I am delighted to join you today for the opening of the Japan Autumn Festival in Hong Kong.

This is the third annual Japan Autumn Festival in Hong Kong, and I've been here each year for the opening. The people of Hong Kong, myself included, have long enjoyed close and rewarding relations with Japan in business and trade, in culture, travel, entertainment and many other aspects. Since Japan launched its first Autumn Festival here in Hong Kong two years ago, the Festival has become a marvellous treat for us, making October and November two eventful months filled with all things Japanese. The festival's popularity is reflected in the numbers. Last year, more than 430 000 people attended its 140 events. This absolutely fantastic response has given me extra joy because the idea of a Japan Festival was put to Ambassador Matsuda by me when he arrived to take up this position some three years ago. But its success owes entirely to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Ambassador and his consular colleagues as well as the local Japanese community.

This year, another 140 Japanese cultural, entertainment and consumer happenings are on show through this month and November. They cover just about everything we love when it comes to Japan: art, film, performance, food, fashion, design, together with such special events as a Halloween Festival featuring popular Japanese cartoon characters including Hello Kitty at Ocean Park and a Japanese carnival in Lan Kwai Fong.

Alongside our deep cultural ties, the people of Hong Kong and Japan love to do business together. Last year, Japan was our fourth-largest trading partner, while we were Japan's eighth-largest partner in trade and fifth-largest market for exports. For more than a decade now, Hong Kong has been the number-one export market for Japanese food and agricultural products, ahead of much larger markets such as the United States. At last count, Japan was Hong Kong's ninth-largest source of inward direct investment, with a value totalling US\$28.5 billion. That significant investment in Hong Kong is

backed up by the more than 1 300 Japanese companies that maintain an office here.

Beyond business, the continuing flow of people between us has been remarkable. Last year, more than 2.2 million Hong Kong people took in the many delights of Japan, up more than 21 per cent over the previous year. More than 1.2 million Japanese visited Hong Kong over the same period, up nearly 13 per cent, year-on-year. The positive trend continues this year. In the first eight months of 2018, the corresponding numbers are 1.5 million and 820 000, representing year-on-year increases of 1.4 per cent and 4.3 per cent respectively. I would like to thank Ambassador Matsuda for his efforts in this regard, and with our mutual, visa-free arrangements and frequent flight connections, I am confident those numbers will continue to rise in the coming years.

As you all know, I delivered my second Policy Address on Wednesday, elaborating on the vision and the priorities of the current-term Government. One of the priorities lies in enhancing Hong Kong's external affairs through more Government-to-Government and Government-to-Business interactions. Such work priority has taken me to some 10 overseas countries since I took office in July last year. With that objective in mind, I am very glad that I will be visiting Japan from October 29 to November 2 for the first time in my capacity as Chief Executive. This will be the first Chief Executive visit to Japan since 2010. As a result of meticulous planning and full assistance rendered by the Japanese Government, I will have a full five-day schedule in Japan meeting senior government officials and people from various sectors, as well as attending the "Think Global, Think Hong Kong" business promotion event organised by our Trade Development Council, which will form part of Hong Kong Week in Japan.

Ladies and gentlemen, I understand that Ambassador Matsuda will finish his term with us in the middle of next month. I have always been grateful for the Ambassador's remarkable efforts in promoting the bilateral ties between Hong Kong and Japan in the past three years, and for his kindness to accompany me on this visit to Japan as one of his last assignments on Hong Kong. Ambassador, you have been a valuable addition to our Consular Corps, and you will be sorely missed. I've enjoyed working with you on a number of issues and projects, of course including the Japan Autumn Festival, and I wish you and Mrs Matsuda all the best in your new posting.

My best wishes, as well, to this year's Japan Autumn Festival in Hong Kong, and have fun! Thank you very much.

