

Speech of Ambassador ARAI Yusuke

at the Emperor's Birthday Reception

on February 3rd, 2026

Good evening.

On Monday last week, the remains of the last hostage, Staff Sergeant Major Ran Gvili, were returned. All hostages have now returned from Gaza, and we share a profound sense of relief.

Sof-sof, kulam babait.

This year, I sincerely hope that, through the continuation of the ceasefire and the expansion of the Abraham Accords, the entire region, including Gaza, will move towards greater stability. I also look forward to seeing the relations between Israel and its neighboring countries become even stronger. Japan expects Israel to further deepen its cooperation with the Indo-Pacific region, and as Ambassador of Japan, I am determined to make every possible effort to realize this goal.

Since last year, high-level exchanges between our two countries have been revitalized. In May, Foreign Minister Sa'ar visited Japan on the occasion of the Israel's Expo National Day at Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai. Minister Sa'ar's visit was the first visit by an Israeli Foreign Minister in 15 years.

One of the most important visits was that of the Honorable Amir Ohana, who is with us here tonight, to Japan in August. It was the first visit to Japan by the Speaker of the Knesset since 1999 and contributed to further enhancing inter-parliamentary cooperation between our two countries. And Economic Minister Barkat's visit followed shortly thereafter. These visits demonstrate that our bilateral relations extend across a wide range of areas.

Just last month, Japanese parliamentary delegations visited Israel, followed by a visit by Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi as his first visit to this region in his current tenure. I am pleased that high-level exchanges between our two countries are becoming increasingly active. As Ambassador of Japan, I remain committed to further fostering the relationship between Japan and Israel.

Exchanges between our two countries are not limited to high-level visits. Interest in Japanese culture continues to grow steadily in Israel. Japanese artists who came to Israel from Japan including pianists, violinists, sculptors and dancers have also heightened interest in Japanese culture.

The number of Israeli tourists visiting Japan reached a record high of approximately 90,000 last year. In terms of business relations, I feel that expectations from Israeli companies for building business ties with Japan are growing stronger than ever. I also see the business travels from Japan to Israel, including executive level of major large enterprises, have been gradually recovering. Embassy of Japan is going to hold business event next week, where we are expecting Japanese companies' attendance including their executives. In this connection, Japan hosted the Expo 2025, with 158 countries and regions participating, including Israel, which presented its own pavilion. The total attendance reached 29 million, making it a great success.

Tonight, to celebrate the 66th birthday of His Majesty the Emperor, we have prepared Japanese cuisine, sake, beer, and wine. I hope you will all enjoy this small journey to Japan.

Thank you very much.