

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL SASAYAMA TAKUYA

April 2023

April this year turned out to be exceptionally warm. The Sakura at my official residence fully blossomed on April 15 – as they have in High Park and elsewhere – a month earlier than they had last year. Although the subsequent cool weather brought the flowers past their peak bloom, the season has given rise to various local cherry-blossom-themed events. Many are listed on our website [here](#) so please be sure to have a look.



Sakura at the official residence

An [opinion piece](#) I wrote was published in the Toronto Star on April 23, following [another article](#) I wrote for the Globe and Mail in March. Japan's presence seems to be of growing importance to Canadians, and I would like to do my part in further strengthening relations between Japan and Canada and between Japan and Ontario.

1. IIHF (International Ice Hockey Federation) Women's World Championship in Brampton

This year's IIHF Women's World Championship was held in Brampton, and among the competitors was the Japanese women's national team, known affectionately as Smile Japan. The team consistently ranks high internationally, placing sixth at the Beijing Olympics and fifth and sixth in recent world championships.

I was invited to attend their opening game against the United States. Things started well for Japan with an immediate goal scored by forward TOKO Haruka, although, regretfully, the Americans subsequently caught up and took the match. However, Ms. Toko was named a Player of the Game, and I had the privilege of handing her a commemorative hockey stick, beautifully adorned with a work by an indigenous artist.

Later, as the championship was going into its final games, I went again and was able to meet the members of Smile Japan in person to express my support. Although our visit took place during the tense time before a game, true to their namesake, they all greeted me with big smiles on their faces.

Ice hockey is one of Canada's national sports, and practice is constantly taking place at schools, community centres, and even people's homes. The Japanese national team has apparently noticed this favourable environment that is so conducive to good hockey, and are now actively deepening exchange with Canada. In figure skating, the famous HANYU Yuzuru was known to be based in Toronto while training. More recently, pair champions MIURA Riku and KIHARA Ryuichi also utilized the Toronto suburbs as their training grounds. Members of Smile Japan currently range in age from a 17-year-old youth to a 31-year-old veteran. I look forward to hearing of their successes in the future.

The championship game was between Canada and the US. In the end, the American team came out on top, much to the delight of the US Consul-General who was in attendance. However, she told me that she left quickly after the game, because the auditorium was full of Canadian fans who had been there to support their team.





Memories of Smile Japan

2. Prof. NAGASAKI Shinya on Nuclear Energy

I try regularly to introduce notable Japanese individuals who are active in various fields here in Ontario. This month, I had the opportunity to speak with Prof. Nagasaki of McMaster University who is an authority on nuclear energy.

Prof. Nagasaki was conducting research on nuclear power at Tokyo University before moving in 2012 to Canada where he continues his work at McMaster. Canada has a long history of studies on nuclear energy and is a leader in this field internationally. For example, small modular reactors (SMR) are currently attracting a lot of attention, and Canada is in the process of developing and incorporating it ahead of the rest of the world.

Prof. Nagasaki specializes in the area of nuclear waste disposal and have spent many years studying this challenging issue, which cannot be avoided if we are to continue using nuclear energy in a sustainable manner. Canada is in the stage of actually implementing nuclear waste disposal, and Prof. Nagasaki's move to McMaster was influenced by his consideration of such factors.

Japan and Canada share various common challenges, and energy is a prime example. There is still much room for increased cooperation between the two countries. It seems each is not aware of the other's capabilities, which is why Prof. Nagasaki is also involved in exchanges between universities and students. I would like to wish him continued success in the future.



With Professor Nagasaki

3. Visit to Toronto by Former Sumo Ozeki Baruto

Many readers of this report may remember Baruto Kaito, who was born in Estonia but was active in the Japanese sumo world. He even advanced to the rank of ozeki in 2010. The Estonian community is quite large in multicultural Canada, and, due to their kind invitation, I was given an opportunity to meet Baruto when he came to Toronto. There actually is a Canadian connection to Baruto's career. During the time after he retired from sumo and was working as an actor, he appeared in a NHK drama playing a Canadian character (2018's *My Brother's Husband*).

Since April 20, the Japan Foundation, Toronto, has been holding an exhibition entitled *A Sense of Movement: Japanese Sports Posters*, and a public discussion with Baruto was held on April 30 in conjunction with this exhibition. The venue was filled to capacity by people who wanted to get a glimpse of Baruto. He spoke about his memories of Japan, notable characteristics of Japanese culture, and traditional customs within the world of sumo, receiving a tremendous round of applause from the audience.



At the Japan Foundation, Toronto's Baruto event

4. The Expansion of Mitsui High-tec (Canada)

There have been a number of announcements recently on new large-scale investment projects in Ontario related to automobiles, particularly EV batteries. The outlook is generally optimistic in the province's manufacturing sector, despite the impacts of COVID, supply chain disruptions, and issues related to inflation. This is reflected in how expansions of investment by Japanese manufacturers continue to make the news. This month, I attended the ground-breaking ceremony of auto parts manufacturer Mitsui High-tec's PHASE 2 expansion of its industrial site in Brantford.

Brantford is one of Canada's major manufacturing hubs. There is even a large billboard in the city stating it is the birthplace of the telephone. According to the City of Brantford Website, Graham Bell successfully developed the telephone there in July 1874. Ontario has set the goal of producing 400,000 vehicles a year, including EVs and hybrids, by 2030. Due to such factors as the shifts to EVs, the automotive industry is said to be in a period of unprecedented change. Mitsui High-tec's latest investment is in anticipation of this development and is certain to contribute towards meeting the Ontario Government's goals. It will also strengthen the supply chain of Japanese carmakers, as well as the Ontario economy.

The ground-breaking ceremony was attended by His Worship Kevin Davis, Mayor of Brantford, and many other stakeholders. I fully experienced the warm welcome extended by the local economy which prides itself on traditional manufacturing.



At Mitsui High-tec (Canada)