

Japanese PM brings

Asian leader says music, sports bringing Japan, Jamaica closer

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JAPANESE Prime Minister Shinzo Abe arrives in Jamaica for a one-day official visit today, bringing good news on technical cooperation to promote greater energy efficiency and development of Jamaica's capacity to respond to natural disasters.

Describing Jamaica as a "beautiful land of wood and

water". Prime Minister Abe has also signalled his admiration for Jamaica's prowess in athletics, in an interview requested by the Jamaica Observer and facilitated by the Japanese Foreign Ministry ahead of his arrival here.

"We were very impressed and excited with the performances of Jamaican athletes who participated in the 15th IAAF World Championships in China this year, having had pre-Championship training in Japan," Abe said of Jamaica's

12-medal haul highlighted by Usain Bolt's three-gold strike and Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce's two-gold take.

The Japanese leader is coming to Jamaica at the invitation of Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller, who visited the Asian country in November 2013. Simpson Miller renewed the invitation when the two leaders met again in July 2014 in Trinidad and Tobago at the first Japan-Caribbean Community (Caricom) summit.

"I had always hoped to visit



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Jamaica, so it was with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation from Prime Minister Simpson Miler," said Abe. "I could say that if they are asked about

Jamaica, any Japanese would answer that it is a country of athletics, Blue Mountain Coffee, Reggae and beaches. There are some persons who would add rum and 'Cool



Olympic and World Champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce



Usain Bolt, the world's fastest man



Junko, Japanese dance hall queen

gift of energy



Members of the Mighty Crown, winner of the International Sound System competition

Runnings," he said lightheartedly. "Although Jamaica is far from Japan geographically, Japanese people feel very close to Jamaica through various areas such as music and sports."

Japan has become a must-stop for major reggae acts on tour of the Asian country which stages the biggest reggae festival outside of Jamaica. Japanese have also shocked Jamaicans by snatching the Sound System as well as the Dance Hall Queen crowns in international competitions.

Prime Minister Abe's visit comes in the 51st year of bilateral relations between Kingston and Tokyo, which Abe hailed as "amicable". He recalled that on the 50th anniversary last year several events were held in both countries, "bringing not only extreme enthusiasm but also greater mutual

understanding among the people of our two countries", and disclosed that his one-day visit to Jamaica was intended to further deepen the strong bonds of friendship and cooperative relationship.

"I also wish to expand the dialogue and cooperation with Jamaica as partners in the international fora which share fundamental values such as democracy, respect for basic human rights and the rule of law. When the first-ever Japan-Caricom Summit was held in July last year, I had fruitful meetings with Caricom leaders, including Prime Minister Simpson Miller. That first year of Japan-Caricom friendship has been very memorable for me," he told the **Observer**.

"On that occasion, I announced Japan's Caricom policy which consists of three pillars: 1) Cooperation

towards sustainable development, including overcoming the vulnerabilities particular to small island states; 2) Deepening and expanding bonds founded on exchanges and friendship, and 3) Cooperation in addressing challenges of the international community. We will continue to build on these three pillars without undermining one pillar for another," the Japanese leader said.

He noted that Japan, as an island country, and the small island states of Caricom shared common challenges such as hurricanes and rising sea levels caused by climate change. For this reason, Japan regarded environment and disaster risk management as a priority area for its assistance to Caricom aimed at overcoming the vulnerabilities particular to small island states, including the use of technology and expertise developed by Japan based on its own experiences as an island.

"Jamaica has had a major challenge in securing affordable energy. Last July, I received a request from Prime Minister Simpson Miller for cooperation in this area. Just like Jamaica, Japan imports much of its energy resources and is vulnerable to fluctuations in energy prices on the international market. Having experienced the oil shock twice, Japan has developed technologies to help us achieve energy efficiency and promote renewable energy. I believe

that Jamaica can benefit significantly by taking advantage of these technologies and expertise.

"In addition, Japan will assist Jamaica in its development of capacity-building in the area of natural disaster response through the provision of Japanese experts, training and equipment.

"At the Japan-Caricom Summit, I expressed the importance of providing support from perspectives other than those based on per-capita income, taking into account the 'vulnerabilities particular to small island states' that Caricom member states face. The new cooperation with Jamaica will bring this policy into shape. Japan will continue to provide cooperation for Jamaica and other Caricom states, based on their needs," Prime Minister Abe pledged.