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**Minister Taro Kono: It is an honor for me to
contribute to further development of
Azerbaijan-Japan relations**

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On the eve of his official visit to Azerbaijan, Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Kono commented on the current state and prospects of relations between the two countries. AZERTAC presents the minister's comments as quoted by Japan's Embassy in Azerbaijan.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan I will pay an official visit to Azerbaijan on the dates of 5-6th September after 19 years of interval. Last year Japan and countries of Caucasus region celebrated the 25th anniversary of their diplomatic relations. In this regard, it is an honor for me personally to step on this region, to contribute to the further development of the relations between Azerbaijan and Japan and I am very glad for that. Especially, it is very important for Japan to strengthen relations with Azerbaijan, which is rich in significant minerals and playing one of the key roles in the international energy security.

There are several points that connect two countries Japan and Azerbaijan. For example, "Shimal Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project 1", funded by the Government of Japan provides approximately 10% of Azerbaijan's domestic energy consumption and

supports the living condition of Azerbaijani people and economic development of the country. Moreover, beautiful Japanese gardens have been constructed in Baku and Ismayilli regions, which have become the resting places for the residents. Besides that, starting from 2005, Japan's Fuji Megane Company within the framework of its cooperation with UNHCR has been visiting Azerbaijan and with the aim to help refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country, provides an active assistance through distributing glasses as the gift to those people. In July of this year, the company examined more than 2800 people's eyesight and presented (donated) over 2000 glasses. The company was awarded with confer in Japan in 2017 for these achievements as well. Through this visit I am glad to get the chance to convey the information to the both countries and to the whole world about these relations between two countries.

The Caucasus Region is at the core of the junction connecting the world in all cardinal directions. The stability of this region is not only a matter of concern at the regional level, but is also directly linked to the peace and security of the international community. The Caucasus sees Europe in the West, while the Caspian Sea is located in the East of the region, overlooking Central Asia on the opposite shore. Further to the east, there is a big economic zone of the East Asia, including Japan. I would like to promote cooperation towards the self-sustained development of the Caucasus Region, which plays a critical role as a gateway connecting Asia and Europe.

Main point regarding its approach to Caucasus region so far and after is to support the state-building for the self-sustained development of the Region. I hope our country's experiences and lessons from its own pursuit of self-sustained development after the opening of the country in the mid-19th century will be shared with the Region. As Japan, we think to support the "Independent Development" of Caucasus region over the following two pillars.

The first pillar is human resources development. State-building begins with human development. Both infrastructure and institutions work effectively only when people can make full use of them. When Japan set off to rebuild itself as a new nation 150 years ago, its first focus was placed on developing human resources who can acquire leading-edge know-how and skills from the world, and bring them back to Japan. Human resources are very essential in the transmission of the information to the Caucasus and sharing the experience of Japan for the Caucasus region.

What Japan has always taken into account in state-building process is the rule of law. Laws and excellent legal professionals secure fairness and predictability in

state-building. The development of legal professionals who execute the rule of law forms the cornerstone of state-building. Japan would like to contribute to the development of young legal professional in the Caucasus Region, taking advantage of opportunities such as invitation programs to Japan and human resource exchange.

At the same time, we attach a great importance on bringing up the Japan- lovers who will play the role of the bridge connecting the region with Japan in the Caucasus region. From this point of view we will continue to support the initiatives on presenting the media materials of Japan on broadcasting of animation films such as “Inuyasha” desired do be demonstrated on Azerbaijan TV channels.

Moreover, there are conducted exchange programmes in Japan in the fields of health, protection of natural disasters and water resources, social security, transport and shipping, energy resources, economic policy, development of private sector, development of the agriculture and farms for Azerbaijan. We support the development of human resources jointly by Japanese companies such as INPEX or JCG Corporation as a public and private sector through the organization of internship (exchange) programs for young employees of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR).

The main goal of these human resources should be to facilitate the establishment of “more attractive Caucasus” with the investment flow from other countries, throughout creating infrastructure and favorable business environment. This is the second pillar.

To date, Japan has cooperated with Caucasus, a region with full of importance and potential for the stabilization, democratization, socioeconomic development, and development of a market economy of the region. Beside the “Shimal Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project 1”, which I mentioned earlier, Japan has supported the improvement of the living condition of the Azerbaijani people through the implementation of such projects as school construction, construction of hospitals, improvement of water supply equipment or wastewater treatment equipment, and irrigation systems equipment. Additionally, Japanese companies participated in the "Contract of the Century" dealing with the exploitation of the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli oil fields under the leadership of former President Heydar Aliyev, and together with the Government of Azerbaijan contributed to the development of the energy sector which is one of the essential industrial fields of Azerbaijan. This is one of the evidences indicating that Japan is constantly supporting the development of Azerbaijan.

In addition to basic infrastructure assistance and other supports, Japan is making efforts to conclude bilateral investment treaties with Azerbaijan and countries of the Caucasian

Region. I hope that within the frame of this visit, important negotiations will be conducted on Azerbaijan's investment agreement. The investment treaties will create fair and predictable legal framework for Japanese companies investing in the countries, and will establish the conditions for attracting Japanese investment. Japan also would like to share knowledge of utilization of these framework with experts from the countries of the Region by training activities for government personnel of the Caucasus countries in investment treaties and arbitration.

The growth of the business will cause the frequent flow of the visits of the business related people. We will also accelerate the simplification procedures on visiting Japan in order to make it easier for people of the Caucasus countries.

In addition, the construction of the second block of the “Shimal Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project” is underway and is expected to be completed this year. With the launch of this 400 megawatts power plant, the demand for energy can be a bit stabilized and strengthen the base for the growing economic diversity in Azerbaijan. We will continue to work together in order to maintain a wide range of hygienic and sustainable living conditions in Azerbaijan through helping to strengthen the management and maintenance of water supply and sewerage systems in the main cities of the regions. In addition, we will continue our cooperation in the energy sector on the Project "Contract of the Century" which is duration had been extended last year.

Based on these two pillars, Japan will support the self-sustained development of the Caucasus Region. Japan’s collaboration with Azerbaijan and the other countries in the Region is not anything closed. It will create organic links to that with other countries as well as international community and generate synergetic effect. I am confident that my visit will serve as a milestone for stronger relations between Japan and Azerbaijan, as well as Japan and other Caucasian countries, and will be the first step to our promising future.

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