

Japan and Barbados – *Partners in maintaining and strengthening free and open international order*

I AM DELIGHTED to be the first Foreign Minister of Japan to visit Barbados, a beautiful and distinguished country that shares a long-standing friendship with Japan.

Although located on the opposite sides of the globe, Japan and Barbados share commonalities; both are maritime nations, gifted with rich nature and educated people, and our two countries share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1967, we have consistently cooperated in various international fora.

Barbados, which became the world's youngest republic in 2021, has advocated boldly for both domestic and international reform. Its fair, reasoned and practical voice has gained wide support in the international community. In this context, I decided to visit Barbados today to further deepen our partnership as we confront shared challenges.

Today, our two countries and the world face critical challenges in international order under the severe international situation. It is a double jeopardy; on one hand, we all face an immediate need to cope with the economic difficulties arising from Russia's aggression against Ukraine. On the other hand, we are at a crossroads to protect our people and society from

global challenges such as intensifying natural disasters, land erosion, and rising sea levels. As we tackle such challenges, we also bear in mind that even though this year is the interim year for achieving SDGs, there is a significant delay in the progress.

Against this background, Barbados has proposed the "Bridgetown Initiative", which highlights the link between climate change and economic development. As we understand, the initiative aims to deliver necessary funds to necessary countries, particularly to states which are susceptible to external factors such as climate change and COVID-19. Japan praises the fact that a new initiative has been launched by Barbados and is widely echoed throughout the international community.

Japan supports Barbados' noble principle; "leave no one behind". Towards maintaining and strengthening the Free and Open International Order based on the rule of law, we would like to deepen our partnerships not only limited to climate change.

Japan's development cooperation is unique in focusing on human security, equal partnership, and building the capacity for empowerment. Japan recognises that the Caribbean region faces development challenges, difficulties, and vulnerabilities particular to small island states, even though they have a high per

capita income. Keeping this in mind, Japan continues to provide assistance specific to the circumstances of each Caribbean country.

In particular, as part of measures in the area of environment and climate change, Japan is providing grant assistance to Barbados to aid in the removal of Sargassum seaweed, which impacts the coastal and marine environment, imposing negative effects on tourism and fisheries. In addition, Japan shares its knowledge and experience with Barbados through the dispatch of a disaster prevention advisor.

To embody good friendship in a tangible manner, people-to-people exchanges are active between both countries. A scholarship programme to provide opportunities to study in Japan for graduate students is underway as cooperation between universities advances.

Moreover, Barbadian youth have been visiting Japan as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) through the annual Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme. The exchanges with the City of Nanyo, Yamagata Prefecture, the host town of the Barbadian 2020 Tokyo Olympic team, have also remained active.

By designating 2024 as the **Japan CARICOM Friendship Year**, we will



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expand our exchanges with the CARICOM countries. We are also looking forward to Barbados' participation in the **Osaka/Kansai Expo 2025**.

It is evident that Japan and Barbados are steadily becoming closer. I hope that the people of Barbados will feel even closer to Japan and that our two countries will continue to work in tandem, taking on broader responsibilities as members of the international community.