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パース・エクスプレス読者の皆様、新年明けましておめでとうございます。早いもので、豪州に着任以来、三度目のお正月を迎えています。

昨年を振り返ってみますと、日本とオーストラリアの関係が飛躍的に強化された年でした。4月にアボット首相が日本を公式訪問し、7月には安倍総理が豪州を公式訪問しました。特に、豪州連邦議会での安倍総理の感動的な演説は今なおキャンベラでの語り種となっています。又、11月のG20首脳会議に出席するために安倍総理が再びブリスベンを訪問しました。これらの相互訪問や国際会議の際の会談を合わせると、日豪両国の首脳は昨年1年間で5回も会談を行いました。

これらの訪問や会談を通じて様々な成果もたらされました。例えば日豪EPAの署名です。同協定の発効により、両国間の貿易と投資が一層促進されることになり、両国のビジネス関係の更なる発展が期待されます。また防衛品装備品・技術移転協定も署名されました。このような防衛分野での両国間の協力は、二国間の安全保障のみならず、アジア太平洋地域全体の平和と安定にも大きく貢献することになります。そして、両首脳は今後、毎年交互に相手国を訪問することにもなりました。

これらの成果によりこれまでビジネス関係と人的な交流が中心であった日豪関係において、政治面や防衛面での協力がもう一つの柱とな

り、また、両国関係が双方向でよりバランスのとれたものになりつつあります。まさに日豪関係が「新しい時代」に入ったということです。そして、強調しておきたいことは、このような両国関係を牽引しているのは、アボット首相と安倍総理の日豪関係強化のための強固な意思と個人的な信頼関係であるということです。

今年は、アボット首相が再び訪日する番です。また、外務・防衛大臣協議は豪州で開催される番です。これらを通じて政治・防衛面での協力は更に進展すると思います。ビジネス面では、日豪EPAの発効、福岡での日豪経済合同委員会会議の開催等が予定されています。現在の日豪関係には、発展のための大きな「流れ」や「追い風」が間違いなくあります。これを最大限活用しつつ両国関係を一層盤石な、強固なものとしていくことが重要です。私も微力ながら日豪関係の発展のために全力を傾注していきたいと思えます。

最後になりましたが、本年が日豪関係にとり更なる大きな発展の年となること、また、読者の皆様のご多幸を心からお祈り申し上げます。

I would like to wish the readers of *The Perth Express* a very happy New Year. It amazes me to think that this is already the third time my wife and I have welcomed the New Year in Canberra.

Looking back, 2014 saw a tremendous strengthening of the relationship of Japan and Australia. Prime Minister Abbott made an official visit to Japan in April and Prime Minister Abe made an official visit to Australia in July. In particular, Prime Minister Abe's moving address to the Australian Parliament is still talked about here in Canberra. Moreover, Prime Minister Abe visited Australia again in November to attend the G20 Leaders Summit held in Brisbane. Taking into account the reciprocal visits and international meetings, the two leaders engaged in direct talks a remarkable five times last year.

Significant outcomes were achieved as a result of the official visits and talks held between the two leaders. A prime example was the signing of the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). When the EPA comes into effect, the Agreement will provide a substantial

boost to two-way trade and investment, while also enhancing the overall business relations of our two countries. Another key outcome was the signing of the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology Agreement. Cooperation in the area of defence will not only support the security of Japan and Australia, but also enable the two countries to make a fuller contribution to ensuring the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, Prime Ministers Abe and Abbott also made the important step of committing to undertake alternating annual official visits to each other's country.

Through these achievements, political and defence cooperation will serve as a further pillar to the relationship of Japan and Australia, which until now has focused chiefly on promoting business ties and people-to-people exchange. In addition, the recent developments will bring a greater sense of balance and interactivity to our bilateral relations. Undoubtedly, the Japan-Australia relationship has entered a "new era". I would also like to emphasise that it has been Prime Minister Abbott and Prime Minister Abe's strong determination and personal relationship of trust that has driven the advancement of our relationship in such profound ways.

Based on the agreement of the two leaders, this year it is Prime Minister Abbott's turn to visit Japan again. In addition, it is Australia's turn to host the Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations. I have every confidence that these meetings will contribute to further deepening the political and defence cooperation of our two countries. In the area of business cooperation, the Japan-Australia EPA will soon come into effect and the Japan-Australia Business Cooperation Committee will meet in Fukuoka later in the year. As such, we can see that the progression of our bilateral relations is now being supported by a powerful "wave" or "tailwind". It is critical that we make our relationship rock-solid by continuing to utilise these favourable circumstances to the greatest possible extent. For my part, I will also make every effort to further strengthen the invaluable relations of our countries in the year ahead.

Finally, I sincerely hope for a most prosperous year for Japan-Australia relations and I wish the readers of *The Perth Express* the all the very best for 2015.