

Theme for the New Year's Poetry Reading (2026) :MEI (BRIGHT)

His Majesty the Emperor

Watching the morning star
Shining high in the sky
I pray sincerely for
Peace in the new year

(Background of the poem)

Every year before dawn on New Year's Day, His Majesty the Emperor attends Shinto ritual ceremonies such as Shiho-hai and Saitansai held at the Imperial Palace Sanctuaries. While proceeding for Saitansai, His Majesty watched the morning star (Venus) shining brightly in the clear winter sky from the corridor of the Imperial Palace Sanctuaries. While His Majesty was deeply moved by its beauty, he prayed for peace to the people of Japan and the world in the new year.

His Majesty composed this poem expressing his hope of that time on New Year's Day.

Shiho-hai: the first Shinto ritual of the year in which His Majesty the Emperor offers prayers of worship before dawn to the gods of Ise Shrine, the Imperial mausoleum and the four quarters.

Saitansai: the Shinto ceremony that takes place after Shiho-hai at the Imperial Palace Sanctuaries before dawn at the start of the new year.

Her Majesty the Empress

With medals around their necks
The athletes are beaming with joy
Using sign language
I convey to them
"Congratulations"

(Background of the poem)

Their Imperial Majesties the Emperor and the Empress, along with Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko watched the swimming events of the 25th Summer Deaflympics, held for the first time in Japan. Prior to attending their first sporting event of this kind, they learned greetings and other phrases in both Japanese and international sign language, hoping to communicate directly, even briefly, with the athletes, officials and staff with hearing impairments. During the competitions, they also learned the sign meaning "Congratulations". Her Majesty the Empress was deeply impressed by the dedication of the deaf athletes to giving their best performances during the events, and also by the bright and fulfilling smiles of the medalists they met after the competitions. Her Majesty was delighted to be able to convey messages like "Congratulations" and interact directly with the athletes using the sign language she had learned.

This experience has led Her Majesty the Empress to hope even more sincerely that social understanding towards and support for people with disabilities deepens and takes root extensively. Her Majesty composed this poem with the wish that a truly inclusive society would be formed where both the disabled and non-disabled people respect each other and live together happily.

His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino

With the voice
of the first fowl
as it crows just before dawn
the day begins
at Khao Ang Rue Nai.

(Background of the poem)

His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino visited the Khao Ang Rue Nai Wildlife Sanctuary in Thailand for his research on the red junglefowl, and had occasion to spend the night there. Thirty minutes before dawn he could hear the crowing of a junglefowl. He sensed anew that the bird indeed crows at its precise time. It was this experience that the Crown Prince wrote about in the poem.

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Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino

When it rains the handicraft workshop
and the paper story show are held indoors,
and the “Children’s Playing Square”
becomes a bright and cheerful plaza.

(Background of the poem)

Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino, together with her friends and other volunteers, has been involved in activities to support the mental health care of children in Fukushima affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Last autumn, as in previous years, activities were held in Soma City, Fukushima Prefecture. On the day of the activities it rained, so the children and their families gathered indoors, where they played with the toys and enjoyed handicrafts, picture books, and paper picture shows. The Crown Princess has written in her poem how the “Children’s Playing Square” became a bright and cheerful space, where participants experienced a comforting time of friendship through playing and talking together.

Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko

The bright and lively voices
Of the young Laotian students of Japanese
Fill the classroom cheerfully

(Background of the poem)

Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko made her first official overseas visit in November last year to Lao PDR, marking the 70th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Japan and Laos. Princess Aiko was warmly welcomed by Lao government officials and many Laotian people. In the capital Vientiane and the ancient city of Luang Prabang, Her Imperial Highness visited various locations including temples, museums, schools, hospitals, a visitor center for unexploded ordnance disposal, and famous waterfalls.

In one of these locations, the Vientiane Integrated Secondary School, a host school for the Japanese Language Partners program, she observed classes where local junior and senior high school students were learning Japanese language and culture. During the lessons, the students were pronouncing Japanese words with bright and cheerful voices, enjoying the traditional Japanese game of Fukuwarai, and seemed to enjoy learning Japanese with enthusiasm in the lively classroom.

Her Imperial Highness was delighted by this heartwarming scene, and composed this poem.