

2017 New Year Greeting from the Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications



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Happy New Year!

In the two years and four months since I took office as the Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications, I have been working as hard as I can in various fields that are closely related to the everyday lives of Japanese people.

Thanks to the “Abenomics” policies promoted by the current government, an economic “virtuous circle” of expanding employment and increasing salaries has been set in motion. 2017 is going to be an important year with the acceleration of efforts to prepare Japan for the future by making this flow more secure.

There will be a general mobilization of the policy resources of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) so that Japanese people will really start to feel that their lives are becoming easier, and that their local communities are becoming more invigorated.

The new era of IoT, big data and AI

We are developing an integrated and comprehensive IoT promotion strategy for the forthcoming era of IoT, big data and artificial intelligence (AI), and we are taking steps to cultivate IoT skills in the workforce. We are also promoting social implementations and R&D of AI.

For social implementations, AI-related research results and data obtained by the National Institute of Information and Communications Technology (NICT) are being made available to other organizations, and we are introducing infrastructure technology to promote innovative new initiatives that make use of AI in a wide range of fields.

This research and development also incorporates the latest findings in brain science, and is accelerating the research and development of next-generation AI technology that is capable of learning at a level comparable to big data analysis, even from small amounts of data.

At G7 ICT Ministers’ Meeting in Takamatsu, Kagawa last April, we proposed a set of principles for AI development that were accepted following international discussions among each of the participating countries. In March this year, we will hold an international symposium in Tokyo, at which we intend to discuss AI development guidelines embodying the content of our development principles. By working together with organizations such as G7 and OECD, we will play a central role in the embodiment and acceleration of international discussions.

We are also discussing measures to protect networks from new

threats of the IoT era. To deal with the increasing damage caused by the complication and sophistication of cyber-attacks, we are making every effort to ensure that cyber security is maintained. At NICT, we have started to set up a National Cyber Training Center to provide more robust cyber-attack defense exercises and to train young security personnel.

Programming education

To cultivate logical thinking, problem-solving and creative skills that are needed in the IoT era, we are promoting model development and expansion of programming education targeted at younger age groups.

Since programming is due to become a compulsory subject in Japanese primary schools from 2020, it is essential that efforts are made to ensure the availability of sufficient teaching materials and trained instructors. At MIC, we have started hands-on training at 24 schools with the aim of building a practical model that taps into cloud-based teaching materials and local human resources.

This year, we will expand the education model across the whole of Japan, and we will develop a variety of models to cover different situations including the education needs of children with disabilities.

Toward the further spread of smartphones

Today, the smartphone is part of the everyday infrastructure of ordinary people, and reducing the communication charges incurred by smartphone users has become an important issue.

Based on previous efforts, the leading mobile phone operators have introduced new billing plans to suit light users, long-term users and heavy users.

Ministerial ordinance amendments are being made to introduce revised guidelines for shortening the SIM unlocking period and for giving assistance in purchasing terminals by early January, and for normalizing the mobile phone connection charges paid by mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) to the major mobile phone operators by the spring of this year.

This will lead to greater competition, providing users with environments that support a greater choice of communication services and terminals, and will lead to the implementation of billing systems and services that are easier to understand and more reasonable.

I hope 2017 brings good health and happiness to all of you.

1st January, 2017