

Tokyo to Enhance Security Coordination, Strengthen Strategic Saudi-Japanese Dialogue



Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi (Reuters)

Riyadh: [Fatehelrahman Yousif](#)

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Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, who is currently visiting the region, emphasized the strategic nature of the relationship between Riyadh and Tokyo, citing significant potential to deepen bilateral ties.

Hayashi disclosed that his discussions with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, aim to enhance the longstanding friendly relations between Japan and the Kingdom, explore new areas of cooperation, and increase coordination regarding regional and global security challenges within the framework of bilateral strategic dialogue.

The meeting between the Japanese top diplomat and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states' foreign ministers presents a significant opportunity for the exchange of strategic perspectives on regional and global affairs.

According to Hayashi, the meeting sheds light on the expanding economic relations between Japan and the region, where trade volumes exceeded \$100 billion in 2022.

"I am confident that this meeting will be an important opportunity to exchange strategic perspectives on regional and global affairs, as well as to highlight the growing economic relations between Japan and the GCC countries, with trade volumes exceeding \$100 billion last year," Hayashi told Asharq Al-Awsat.

Moreover, the Japanese foreign minister said he looks forward to exchanging viewpoints on matters of mutual interest.

Hayashi pointed out that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and GCC Secretary-General Jassim Mohammed Al-Budaiwi reached an agreement in July to resume negotiations on a free trade agreement.

The foreign minister anticipates that the agreement will serve as a legal framework for enhancing trade and investment between Japan and the GCC countries, with hopes of concluding the negotiations within a short timeframe.

"It is worth noting that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Jassim Mohammed Al-Budaiwi, the GCC Secretary-General, agreed during their meeting in July to resume negotiations on a free trade agreement between Japan and the GCC countries in 2024, with preliminary discussions set to begin," highlighted Hayashi.

"It is expected that this agreement will serve as a legal framework to enhance trade and investment between Japan and the GCC countries," he added.

In his capacity as Japanese Foreign Minister, Hayashi hoped that he could work together with GCC top diplomats to conclude negotiations in a brief amount of time.

"I will closely follow the outcomes of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit to the Middle East in July last year, during which he held a meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, where they agreed to establish a strategic dialogue between the two foreign ministers to enhance political and economic cooperation and coordinate efforts on the international stage," said Hayashi.

He pointed out that Saudi Arabia is a vital partner for Japan in the energy sector and that bilateral cooperation has rapidly expanded beyond this sector, encompassing new areas such as finance, tourism, human resource development, sports, culture, and entertainment.

"One of the most important areas of new bilateral cooperation is promoting the shift towards a green economy and carbon emissions reduction," revealed the top diplomat in an interview with Asharq Al-Awsat.

"This is under a new initiative aimed at transforming the Middle East into a global hub for clean energy and vital minerals," he added.

“Through the Saudi-Japanese ‘Manar’ initiative launched during Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit, Japan seeks to develop joint projects related to the safe use of hydrogen and ammonia technologies and efficient energy transportation and distribution,” explained Hayashi.

When asked to assess Japan’s relationship with Saudi Arabia, Hayashi said: “Japan attaches great importance to its strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia, considering the leading role that the Kingdom plays in the Arab and Islamic world.”

“Based on the friendly relationship that has evolved over many years between the two countries, the partnership has expanded significantly, particularly in recent years within the framework of the Saudi-Japan Vision 2030,” he added.

“Through discussions I have had with Prince Faisal bin Farhan, the Kingdom’s Foreign Minister, in several meetings or via telephone conversations, I can confirm that Japan and Saudi Arabia have substantial potential to deepen and broaden their bilateral relations,” affirmed Hayashi.

Regarding the nature of Saudi-Japanese ties, Hayashi said: “First and foremost, Saudi Arabia has been and continues to be a significant partner for Japan in the energy sector, especially given its longstanding role in ensuring energy security by providing stable oil supplies to Japan over many years.”

“However, this is not the sole aspect of the partnership between the two nations,” he added.

“At present, the Kingdom is actively pursuing industrial diversification and carbon emissions reduction under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who serves as both the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister, within the framework of Saudi Vision 2030,” elaborated Hayashi.

It is worth noting that Japan has fully supported social and economic reforms adopted by Saudi Arabia since 2017.

“I am pleased to note that cooperation between the two countries has rapidly expanded beyond the energy sector in recent years, encompassing new areas such as finance, tourism, human resource development, sports, culture, and entertainment,” said Hayashi.

Japan is actively supporting the vision of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” and both Tokyo and Riyadh share a common perspective on the rule of law, stressed Hayashi, adding that he looks forward to working more closely with Saudi Arabia on the international stage to achieve this goal.

“Undoubtedly, the cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Japan contributes to the preservation of peace and stability in the region and the world,” noted Hayashi.

“Despite the improved relations among Middle Eastern nations and enhanced cooperation among them, the open and rules-based international system remains threatened worldwide.”

“To safeguard and empower this international system, and to achieve peace, stability, and prosperity both regionally and globally, Japan vigorously supports the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.”

“Given that Saudi Arabia and Japan share a common perspective on the importance of the rule of law, I look forward to working more closely with the Kingdom on the international stage to achieve this objective,” said Hayashi.

As for developments on the international level, Hayashi underlined Saudi Arabia’s efforts to address the Ukrainian crisis through a recent Jeddah meeting, which involved advisors from more than 42 countries worldwide, providing an important opportunity to discuss how to achieve a just and lasting peace in Ukraine.

“Russia’s aggression against Ukraine not only poses a threat to the security of the European continent but also represents a shameful act that violates the principles of the United Nations Charter, including sovereignty and territorial integrity,” said Hayashi.

“It has had a negative impact on the international community as a whole, including in weaker countries, due to the rising prices of food, fertilizers, and energy resulting from this aggression,” he added.

“I take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the leadership of Saudi Arabia and its efforts in holding the Jeddah meeting on Ukraine, which included more than 40 countries, including nations from the Global South such as India, Brazil, and South Africa, as well as China, participating for the first time.”

As per Hayashi, the meeting provided a significant opportunity to discuss how to stop Russian aggression as soon as possible and achieve a just and lasting peace in Ukraine.

“Adherence to international law and the preservation of the international system based on the rule of law are the responsibility of all nations and serve the interests of everyone,” stressed Hayashi.

Following the fruitful outcomes of the Jeddah meeting, Japan continues to support the free and open international system based on the rule of law in cooperation with its partners in the international community, including Saudi Arabia.