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Central Asia and Caucasus

The Central Asian and Caucasus region, located in a geopolitically important place linking East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Russia, is also an important region from the strategic perspective of energy security, situated along an important route for energy transportation which produces abundant natural resources, such as oil, natural gas, uranium, and rare earths. In particular, since Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, it has been attracting attention as an important point of connectivity between Europe and East Asia without passing through Russia.

Central Asian and Caucasus countries have been working toward transitioning to a market economy and economic development since their independence in 1991. However, they still face challenges such as the aging economic infrastructure dating back to the former Soviet Union era, the development of business human resources for further transition to a market economy, and the establishment of social service delivery systems including health and medical care. Additionally, this landlocked region, which is geopolitically vulnerable to the influence of major countries in its vicinity and the security situations in neighboring countries, faces concerns about social unrest associated with the reintegration of returnees from conflict areas such as Afghanistan. Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen border control and customs procedures against cross-border trafficking of illegal drugs and other items.

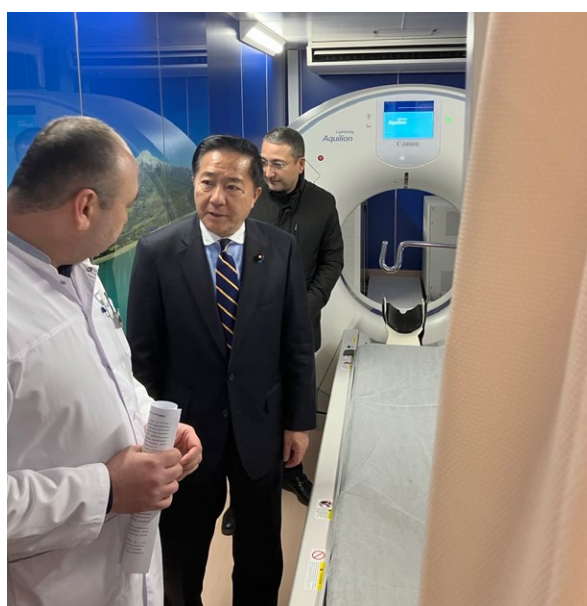
Cooperation with the Central Asian and Caucasus region, which continues to experience high economic growth and population increase, is becoming increasingly important in terms of maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order based on the rule of law amid rapidly changing global circumstances.

Japan's Efforts

Japan launched the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue in 2004, recognizing that regional cooperation is essential for the development of Central Asia. With the aim of contributing to peace and stability in Central Asia, which is a partner in maintaining and strengthening the free and open international order, Japan serves as a catalyst to promote regional cooperation led by the Central Asian countries. Within the framework of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue, 10 Foreign Ministers' Meetings have been held to date, including online meetings. In addition, Japan promotes cooperation in various fields including politics, economy, and people-to-people exchanges. This is done by organizing Senior Officials Meetings (SOM) and business dialogues, expert meetings on themes such as anti-drug measures, border management, and tourism, as well as Tokyo Dialogues

(open symposiums by experts) on themes such as Connectivity with Central Asia and the Caucasus.

From late January to early February 2025, then Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Nagashima visited five Central Asian countries (the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan) as Special Envoy of then Prime Minister Ishiba. He exchanged views with officials of each country on cooperation through the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue and on relations between Japan and the Central Asian countries in a wide range of fields including politics, economy, and culture.



Then Special Advisor to the Prime Minister (Special Envoy) Nagashima inspecting a CT scanner provided to Uzbekistan

In August, then Foreign Minister Iwama visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and held discussions with each of these strategic partner countries on strengthening cooperation in a wide range of fields, including the economy and development cooperation, and on cooperation towards holding the Summit of "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue.

In September, then Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Muto held the Second Ministerial Economic and Energy Dialogue of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue with the five Central Asian countries, sharing with the Ministers of each country the "Roadmap to Carbon Neutrality for Central Asia," which Japan had prepared for the five Central Asian countries, as well as the importance of a realistic energy transition.

On December 20, the first Summit of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue (CA+JAD) was held in Tokyo, with the participation of Prime Minister Takaichi, President Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan, President

Zhaparov of the Kyrgyz Republic, President Rahmon of the Republic of Tajikistan, President Berdimuhamedov of Turkmenistan, and President Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Prime Minister Takaichi declared the launch of the “CA+JAD Tokyo Initiative” to support the industrial advancement and diversification of the five Central Asian countries and to strengthen the mutually beneficial relationship between Japan and Central Asia. The leaders of the Central Asian countries expressed gratitude for the cooperation and support provided by Japan in the three priority cooperation areas: “green and resilience,” “connectivity,” and “human resource development.” They also expressed their willingness to form mutually beneficial projects with Japan, and showed strong interest in further cooperation and strengthening of collaboration with Japan in the three priority cooperation areas, including resource and energy development, particularly critical minerals, climate change mitigation, energy transition, disaster risk reduction, connectivity in logistics and transportation, human resources development, and the health and medical fields.



The Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue (Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

Along with these initiatives, Japan provides cooperation toward the free, open, and sustainable development of the Central Asian and Caucasus region, including supporting democracy and market economy development, developing economic and social infrastructure, strengthening connectivity, managing borders, and implementing anti-drug measures.

Regarding strengthening connectivity and border control, Japan is working on the development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. For example, in the Central Asian and Caucasus region, customs systems differ from country to country, and crossing borders requires considerable time for complicated procedures and inspections. To reduce such costs, Japan cooperates with the World Customs Organization (WCO), which is involved in international cooperation in the customs sector, to implement a project for customs officials in the region to improve customs clearance efficiency.

Japan also collaborates with the WCO on assistance to prevent the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons. In addition, under the framework of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), the G7, including Japan, is cooperating on the development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route.

With regard to human resources development, since 1993, Japan has accepted approximately 13,764 trainees from Central Asian and Caucasus countries in fields such as health, agriculture, and education, while dispatching approximately 9,260 experts and survey team members to those countries. Moreover, since the transition period to market economies, Japan has been providing cooperation to develop the human resources necessary for nation-building by supporting young government officials from these countries to study in Japan through the Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship (JDS), by launching the JICA Development Studies Program, and providing business human resource training through the Japan Center for Human Resources Development.

Regarding the provision of social services, Japan has implemented projects to strengthen health and medical care systems and to improve sanitary conditions in these countries. As a recent example, in Uzbekistan, Japan decided to provide a loan to construct a Neurology and Stroke Center and provide it with medical equipment in Tashkent, as well as to equip medical facilities in Samarkand and Bukhara, with the aim of enabling the provision of advanced medical services to patients with neurological diseases and others in the country. In addition, for the Kyrgyz Republic, where medical equipment is markedly aged and in short supply, Japan decided to provide two medical containers capable of conducting mobile medical services in rural areas. For Kazakhstan, many residents continue to suffer from the effects of exposure to the nuclear weapons tests conducted during the former Soviet Union era, including cancers such as leukemia. At the same time, the aging of medical equipment is making it difficult for them to receive appropriate medical care. Taking this into account, Japan decided to provide medical equipment such as MRI and CT scanners. In Tajikistan, Japan is constructing wells, elevated water tanks, and transmission and distribution pipe networks to establish safe and reliable water supply services.

In response to Azerbaijan’s military activities in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, more than 100,000 persons were displaced to Armenia. Given the broader impact of conflict on the Caucasus region, Japan is providing support, through the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), for the provision of psychosocial care to alleviate the mental stress experienced by children among these displaced persons and in host communities and to enable their return to peaceful daily life.



Powered by Japanese Technology! Making Central Asia's Vital Artery "Safe and Swift"

Grant (September 2019 – June 2023)

The Project for the Rehabilitation of Kizilkala-Bokhtar Section of Dushanbe-Bokhtar Road



Tajikistan

Tajikistan depends on road transport for more than 90% of its freight movement. The trunk road connecting the capital Dushanbe with the Afghan border plays an important role in the stability and prosperity of the entire Central Asian region. However, the road had deteriorated significantly, and its two-lane structure was unable to cope with the increasing traffic volume. As a result, particularly around the urban area of the major southern city of Bokhtar, cargo trucks, agricultural vehicles, and pedestrians shared the road, creating chronic congestion and serious risks of traffic accidents.

In response, Japan launched a cooperation project to widen the 9.2 km Kizilkala-Bokhtar section of the road in Khatlon State, part of the route connecting Dushanbe and Bokhtar, from the existing two lanes to four lanes, and to reinforce the pavement using highly durable Japanese technology designed to withstand future increases in traffic volume. The project also introduced sidewalks, street lights, and speed reduction road markings of the

type used on national roads in Japan, ensuring safe transportation for local residents.

As a result of the road improvements, travel time between Dushanbe and Bokhtar was reduced by approximately 20 to 30% compared to before, significantly improving the efficiency of both daily commuting and freight transport for local residents. Local residents have expressed their satisfaction, stating, "access to markets and schools has become easier and safer," "the installation of sidewalks and street lights has made it possible to travel safely even at night," "fences installed along the sidewalks have prevented livestock from entering the road, reducing accidents," and "the improved road surface has reduced vehicle breakdowns and repair needs." Japan will continue to support Tajikistan's sustainable economic growth and the stability of people's livelihoods through the development of resilient and safe infrastructure.



The road during construction. The road was unpaved and had no sidewalks. (Photo: JICA)



The road after completion. Sidewalks, fences, central medians, and street lights have been installed, ensuring traffic safety. (Photo: JICA)