

OPINION **PREMIUM**

SANAЕ TAKAICHI: Co-creating the future of Japan and Africa

Economic ties between Japan and South Africa are set to strengthen

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Sanae Takaichi



Japan's prime minister, Sanae Takaichi. (Supplied)

On the historic hosting of the G20 Summit in South Africa — the first to take place on the African continent — I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations. I look forward to my first visit to Africa as prime minister of Japan and to making it a truly meaningful one.

For many years Japan and Africa have built a close relationship as friendly partners. In 1993, immediately after the end of the Cold War, Japan was among the first in the world to recognise Africa's growing importance, and launched the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (Ticad) as a framework through which Japan and Africa jointly discuss and collaborate to realise Africa's development and future.

Since then, Ticad has developed as a central platform for Japan–Africa relations and, in August, successfully marked its ninth iteration. At Ticad9 in Yokohama we welcomed a large number of African leaders, including South Africa President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The core principles that have underpinned Ticad for more than 30 years are “ownership” by African countries and “partnership” by the international community, which symbolise the uniqueness of Ticad. In addition, we have also begun to see examples where technologies and ideas originating in Africa contribute to solving global challenges.

In this context, Ticad9 advanced these concepts further by adopting “co-create innovative solutions” as its central theme. During the conference extensive discussions unfolded to co-create solutions for African and global challenges, drawing on the experiences and wisdom of Japan and Africa as trusted partners, resulting in many innovative ideas, including in areas such as digital transformation.

It is essential to make sure the discussions and outcomes of Ticad9 are not treated as one-off achievements but are carried forward into sustained and more global efforts. At this G20 Johannesburg Summit, chaired by South Africa, Japan is committed to working closely with South Africa to address Africa's pressing challenges.



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The G20 Summit discussions by global leaders are expected not to be limited to the international economy but also to cover priority issues highlighted by South Africa. These are disaster risk reduction, debt sustainability, energy transition and critical minerals. Among these priorities, in the field of disaster risk reduction, as Japan faces frequent natural disasters and strives to become the world's leading disaster-resilient nation we have taken a central role in fostering international co-operation by sharing our knowledge and experience.

This includes the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. On the African continent Japan has long engaged in both “hard” and “soft” co-operation, such as drought countermeasures and support for disaster resilience. Building on our longstanding co-operation with SA and the outcomes of Tica d9, Japan will actively contribute to the G20 discussions and work towards even more concrete forms of co-operation.

Unprecedented challenges

Today, the international order as we know it is facing unprecedented challenges around the globe. In this context Japan is committed to preserving and strengthening a free and open international order based on the rule of law, guided by our vision of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. For Japan, South Africa continues to be a crucial partner in Africa. Together with Africa — which is playing an increasingly significant role within the international community — Japan hopes to work toward building responsible global governance.

Turning to our bilateral economic relationship, Japan is SA’s sixth-largest global trading partner. Today, about 250 Japanese companies have offices in South Africa. The country also serves as a gateway connecting the African continent with the rest of the world. Japanese companies maintain strong ties with SA in sectors such as manufacturing, energy, critical minerals, food and agriculture.

Through trade, investment and employment they contribute to SA’s technological innovation and economic development. The government of Japan, including through the activities of the Japan External Trade Organisation (Jetro), will continue working with the South African government to enhance the business environment. We will also continue to support energy sector reforms and energy transition efforts in SA. Furthermore, we intend to work closely with South Africa to realise the “Economic Region Initiative of Indian Ocean-Africa” announced at Tica d9.

Vibrant people-to-people exchanges across a wide range of fields have formed the foundation of our bilateral friendship. To date, many South Africans have participated in the Japan International Co-operation Agency (Jica) training programmes in areas such as education, energy and agriculture, as well as in the Japan Exchange & Teaching (JET) programme, and academic exchanges are also active.



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Exchanges in culture and sports are also flourishing. Today, more than 50 South African rugby players and coaches are active in Japan. I understand that on the occasion of the recent international rugby Test match between Japan and South Africa many government and sports officials took part in the live screening event hosted by the Embassy of Japan in South Africa, making it a wonderful and memorable occasion for cultural exchange.

Such mutual understanding between our peoples is indispensable to the sustainable development of our bilateral relationship. In Japan, the spirit of compassion and harmony has long been cherished. These values resonate strongly with the South Africa's philosophy of ubuntu, which emphasises mutual respect.

I am committed to working with the people of South Africa to ensure that compassion and harmony continue to spread across Africa and throughout the world.

• *Takaichi is prime minister of Japan.*

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