



## Asia and Oceania

### 1 Overview

#### (General Overview)

The Asia-Oceania region includes numerous emerging countries with remarkable growth. It is a dynamic region where diverse cultures and races intermingle and influence each other. This region, with an abundance of human resources, drives the world economy and has been increasing its presence. Of the world population of 8.0 billion, approximately 3.7 billion live in East Asia Summit (EAS) participating countries<sup>1</sup> excluding the U.S. and Russia. This represents about 47% of the world's population.<sup>2</sup> Their combined nominal gross domestic product (GDP) is 32.8 trillion U.S. dollars (2022), and accounts for more than 30% of the world total.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the region enjoys close economic relations and sees growing interdependence. Further economic growth is expected, and the strong growth within the region will also bring affluence and vitality to Japan.

Meanwhile, the security environment in the Asia-Oceania region is becoming increasingly severe as seen in the following developments: the nuclear and missile development by North Korea; the strengthening and modernization of military forces in a manner that lacks transparency and attempts to change the status quo in the region by force that goes against the rule of law and openness; and tension among the relevant countries and regions growing over the maritime issues. Other factors hindering the stable growth of the region include economic and financial systems still under development, environmental pollution, unstable demand and supply of food and resources, frequent natural disasters, terrorism, and aging populations.

Within this context, Japan has been actively engaging in diplomacy including at the leaders' and foreign ministers' levels, and is maintaining and developing good relations with neighboring countries. In 2023, Prime Minister Kishida visited India, the G20 Presidency, in March and held a Japan-India Summit Meeting, and in May he visited both Singapore and the Republic of Korea (ROK) and held Summit Meetings with each country. At the G7 Hiroshima Summit in May, Prime Minister Kishida held bilateral meetings with the leaders of India, Indonesia, the Cook Islands, the ROK, Australia, Viet Nam, as well as an exchange of views among Japan-U.S.-ROK Leaders and a Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders' Meeting. When Prime Minister Kishida visited Lithuania to attend the NATO Summit Meeting in July, he held a Japan-Australia-New Zealand-ROK Leaders' Meeting, and also held bilateral meetings with the leaders of the ROK, New Zealand, and other countries. In August, he visited the U.S. and held the first-ever stand-alone Japan-U.S.-ROK Summit Meeting.

In September, Prime Minister Kishida visited Indonesia and India to attend the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings and the G20 New Delhi Summit. In Indonesia, in addition to holding Summit Meetings with Southeast Asian countries and the Cook Islands, he also attended the ASEAN-Japan Summit, the ASEAN Plus Three (Japan-China-ROK) Summit, and the East Asia Summit (EAS), where he confirmed the further strengthening of Japan-ASEAN relations, which marked the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. Prime Minister Kishida also deepened discussions on urgent issues facing the region and the international community, including Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the situations in the East China Sea

<sup>1</sup> ASEAN (member states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam), Japan, China, the ROK, India, Australia, and New Zealand)

<sup>2</sup> Source: United Nations Population Fund

<sup>3</sup> Source: World Bank



and the South China Sea, and the situation in North Korea, and confirmed that Japan's will to strengthen cooperation with the relevant countries. In India, he held Summit Meetings with the leaders of India, Australia, the ROK, and other countries. In November, he visited the Philippines and Malaysia, held bilateral meetings with the leaders of both countries, and was the first Japanese Prime Minister to deliver a speech to a joint session of the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives. Furthermore, in November Prime Minister Kishida also visited the U.S. to attend the APEC Leaders' Meeting, held a Japan-China Summit Meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, held Summit Meetings with Thailand, the ROK, Australia, and other countries, and held an Informal Talk among Japan-U.S.-ROK leaders. In December, Prime Minister Kishida hosted the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation in Tokyo, and, after reviewing ASEAN-Japan relations over the past half-century, the Joint Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, which outlines a new vision for cooperation, and its concrete cooperation Implementation Plan were adopted.

When Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Germany in February, he attended a Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting, and in March, he visited India, where he held a Japan-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting and a Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers' Meeting. Furthermore, in March he also visited the Solomon Islands and the Cook Islands and held Foreign Ministers' Meetings with both countries. In April, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited China and paid a courtesy call to State Council Premier Li Qiang, had a meeting and dinner with Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee Wang Yi, and held a Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Working Lunch with State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs Qin Gang.

In July, Foreign Minister Hayashi attended the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings held in Indonesia and had meaningful discussions on a wide range of topics, from specific cooperation in the region centered around ASEAN, to the regional situation. He also held Foreign Ministers' Meetings with several Southeast Asian countries, the ROK, and Bangladesh, met with Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs

Commission of the CPC Central Committee Wang Yi, and attended a Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting and a Japan-U.S.-Philippines Foreign Ministers' Meeting. Furthermore, at the end of July, he visited India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, and held Foreign Ministers' Meetings with each country.

When Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited the U.S. in September to participate in the UN General Assembly High-level Week, she held bilateral Foreign Ministers' Meetings with Indonesia, Australia, the ROK, India, and other countries, and attended a Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers' Meeting, a Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers' Informal Talk, and a Japan-U.S.-Philippines Foreign Ministers' Meeting. In October, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Brunei, Viet Nam, Laos, and Thailand, and, when she visited the U.S. to attend the APEC Ministerial Meeting in November, she held bilateral Foreign Ministers' Meetings with the ROK, the Philippines, and other countries, as well as a Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting. She also visited the ROK in November to attend the Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting, it being the first face-to-face meeting in four years, and to hold ministerial meetings with Minister of Foreign Affairs Park Jin of the ROK and with Foreign Minister Wang Yi of China, respectively.

Japan is strengthening various cooperation in the Asia-Oceania region and will continue to make meaningful use of various cooperative frameworks.

#### (Japan-U.S. Alliance and Indo-Pacific region)

The Japan-U.S. Alliance, with the Japan-U.S. security arrangements as its core, is the foundation of peace, security, and prosperity, not only for Japan but also for the Indo-Pacific region. In the midst of an increasingly severe regional security environment, the importance of the Japan-U.S. Alliance has never been greater. Under the unprecedentedly strong cooperative relationship between Japan and the U.S., since the inauguration of President Biden in January 2021, Japan and the U.S. have held 19 Summit Meetings and 32 Foreign Ministers' Meetings, including telephone calls (as of December 2023). The two countries have been striving to maintain peace and stability in the region and the international community by constantly communicating



and collaborating at all levels, including at the summit level and at the foreign minister level. Both Japan and the U.S. are promoting cooperation toward realizing a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),” and are also deepening their cooperation to address regional issues, including the situations with China, North Korea, with Russia and Ukraine, and with Israel and Palestine.

In January, the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee (Japan-U.S. “2+2”) was held in Washington, D.C. in-person for the first time in two years, and both Japan and the U.S. firmly reiterated their commitment to champion a free and open Indo-Pacific region. In January, Prime Minister Kishida, who was visiting Washington, D.C., held a Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting with President Biden. Prime Minister Kishida stated that he will strengthen efforts to realize FOIP, and in response, President Biden reiterated the unwavering U.S. commitment to the region. Based on this, the two leaders concurred that Japan and the U.S. will continue to promote endeavors to realize FOIP. The Joint Statement of the United States and Japan, which was issued as a result of the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting, states that their cooperation today is unprecedented, rooted in a shared vision of FOIP and a peaceful and prosperous world, and guided by their shared values and principles, including the rule of law.

At the Japan-U.S. Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held in March, the two ministers confirmed that Japan and the U.S. will remain united and continue to drive efforts toward the realization of FOIP by leveraging cooperation of the G7 and Japan-U.S.-Australia-India (Quad), while building on the outcomes of the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting, the Japan-U.S. “2+2” in January, and other efforts.

At the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting held during the G7 Hiroshima Summit in May, Prime Minister Kishida stated that the Japan-U.S. Alliance is the cornerstone of the peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, and that the multilayered cooperation between Japan and the U.S. extends to all fields and is not limited to just security and the economy. In response, President Biden stated that Japan and the U.S. share fundamental values, and that the Alliance is stronger than ever. Furthermore, at the Japan-U.S. Foreign Ministers’ Meeting that was also held during the G7 Hiroshima Summit, the two ministers confirmed

that the Japan-U.S. relationship, with the Japan-U.S. Alliance at its core and which serves as the cornerstone of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, has never been stronger, and confirmed that they would continue to cooperate in a variety of fields.

In November, at the APEC Ministerial Meeting in San Francisco, a ministerial meeting of the Japan-U.S. Economic Policy Consultative Committee (the Economic “2+2”) was held, with the two sides discussing two topics: (1) strengthening the rules-based economic order in the Indo-Pacific region, and (2) strengthening economic resilience as well as promoting and protecting critical and emerging technologies. At the APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting that followed, Prime Minister Kishida and President Biden held a Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting, during which Prime Minister Kishida stated that the coordination between Japan and the U.S. is becoming more important than ever with the situation in the Middle East, Ukraine, and the challenges of the Indo-Pacific region including China and North Korea. In response, President Biden stated that the importance of the Japan-U.S. Alliance is higher than ever, and that he would like to further strengthen the coordination between Japan and the U.S.

### (Japan’s Efforts on the Issue of Comfort Women)

(See 3(2)B(C) regarding the comfort women issue between Japan and the ROK.)

The Government of Japan has sincerely dealt with the issues of reparations, property and claims pertaining to the World War II, including the comfort women issue, under the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which the Government of Japan concluded with 45 countries, including the U.S., the UK and France, and through other bilateral treaties, agreements and instruments. These issues including those of claims of individuals have already been legally settled with the parties to these treaties, agreements, and instruments.

On this basis, the Government of Japan has actively taken measures to recover the honor of former comfort women and to provide remedies for them. In 1995, the Asian Women’s Fund (AWF) was established with the cooperation of the people and the Government of Japan for the purpose of carrying out atonement and remedy projects for former comfort women. The Government of Japan provided a total of 4.8 billion Japanese yen.



Furthermore, approximately 600 million Japanese yen was donated to the AWF by the people of Japan. The Government of Japan extended maximum cooperation to the AWF, which implemented medical and welfare support projects and provided “atonement money,” to offer realistic relief to former comfort women. As part of the AWF’s projects, “atonement money” (2 million Japanese yen per person), which was funded by donations from Japanese people, was provided to 285 former comfort women (211 in the Philippines, 61 in the ROK, 13 in Taiwan). Moreover, the AWF provided funds in those countries/areas for medical and welfare support funded with contributions by the Government of Japan (3 million Japanese yen per person in the ROK and Taiwan, 1.2 million Japanese yen per person in the Philippines) (for a total of 5 million Japanese yen per person in the ROK and Taiwan, 3.2 million Japanese yen per person in the Philippines). Furthermore, using funds contributed by the Government of Japan, the AWF extended support for projects to promote social welfare services for elderly people in Indonesia as well as projects to help improve the living conditions of former comfort women in the Netherlands.

When the “atonement money” as well as the medical and welfare support were provided to individual former comfort women, then-Prime Ministers (namely, Prime Ministers HASHIMOTO Ryutaro, OBUCHI Keizo, MORI Yoshiro and KOIZUMI Junichiro) sent signed letters expressing their apology and remorse directly to each former comfort woman.

As stated in the Statement by the Prime Minister issued in 2015, Japan will engrave in its heart the past, when the dignity and honor of many women were severely injured during wars in the 20th century. Japan will lead the world in making the 21st century an era in which women’s human rights are not infringed upon.

Despite such sincere efforts by the Government of Japan, there are claims that can hardly be regarded to be based on historical facts, such as allegations of “forceful taking away” of comfort women and “sex slaves” as well as the figures such as “200,000 persons” or “several hundred thousands” for the total number of comfort women.

The Government of Japan’s position regarding these claims is as follows:

#### “Forceful taking away”

The “forceful taking away” of comfort women by the Japanese military and government authorities could not be confirmed in any of the documents that the Government of Japan was able to identify.

#### “Sex slaves”

The expression of “sex slaves” contradicts the facts and should not be used. This point was confirmed with the ROK on the occasion of the Japan-ROK Agreement in December 2015 and the expression “sex slaves” is not used in the agreement.

#### Figures such as “200,000 persons” for the total number of comfort women

The figure “200,000 persons” lacks concrete evidence. As stated in the report of the Government study’s result of August 4, 1993, it is virtually impossible to determine the total number of comfort women as no documents have been found which either indicate the total number or give sufficient ground to establish an estimate.

The Government of Japan has been making efforts to provide clear explanations regarding its sincere efforts and official position in international fora. Specifically, at the United Nations (UN), the Government of Japan has explained its position on a number of occasions such as during the consideration of the Seventh and Eighth Periodic Reports by the Government of Japan based on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in February 2016, the Ninth Periodic Report on the Implementation of the CEDAW submitted in September 2021, and the examination of the Seventh Report of Japan under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in October 2022.

Installations of comfort woman statues<sup>4</sup> have been observed not only in the ROK but also in some other countries and regions. Such moves are extremely regrettable and incompatible with the position of the

<sup>4</sup> For the sake of practical convenience, they are referred to as “comfort woman statues.” However, the use of this term is not a reflection of the recognition that these statues correctly embody the reality of those women at that time.



Government of Japan. The Government of Japan will continue reaching out to various people involved in this issue to explain its position.

The below Ministry of Foreign Affairs website details Japan's Efforts on the Issue of Comfort Women.

[https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/postwar/page22e\\_000883.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/postwar/page22e_000883.html)



## 2 China / Mongolia, etc.

### (1) China

#### A Situation in China

##### (A) Domestic Affairs

In March, the first session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) was held. Premier Li Keqiang delivered the Report on the Work of the Government, in which he enumerated the issues that China's economy is currently facing, and stated that China will continue "pursuing progress while ensuring stability." He also noted that China has achieved its First Centenary Goal (which was planned to be achieved by the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2021) by eradicating poverty and building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and that progress had already begun toward the Second Centenary Goal (build a great modern socialist country in all aspects by 2049 which is the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China). The leadership of state institutions for the next five years was also appointed, and General Secretary Xi Jinping was elected to his third term as President of the People's Republic of China.

State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang had been absent from public view since the end of June, and was dismissed from his position as Foreign Minister in late July. Wang Yi, former Foreign Minister and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, was appointed again. Additionally, State Councilor and Defense Minister Li Shangfu, who had been absent from public view since the end of August, was dismissed from his position as Defense Minister in late October.

In early October, "Xi Jinping Thought on Culture" was proposed for the first time at the National Conference on the Work of Public Communication and Culture. At the 19th CPC National Congress in 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," and later, his ideas on the military, economy, ecological civilization, diplomacy, and the rule of law were pointed out as important components of the thought.

In October, the Central Financial Work Conference was held for the first time in six years, and in December the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was held for the first time in five years. The Central Economic Work Conference was held in December as usual, but a plenary session of the Central Committee, which is typically held in autumn, was not held during 2023.

The international community continues to express high interest in China's human rights situation, including in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and the situation surrounding Hong Kong. Japan believes that it is important that universal values and principles of the international community, such as freedom, respect for fundamental human rights, and the rule of law, are guaranteed in China, and Japan has also taken summit meetings and foreign ministers' meetings as opportunities to directly communicate its position to the Government of China and express serious concern about these situations. The G7 Hiroshima Summit was hosted by Japan, holding the G7 Presidency, in May, and the G7 Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué and the G7 Japan 2023 Foreign Ministers' Communiqué both concurred on continuing to express concern about the human rights situation in China. Furthermore, at the UN, Japan has been the only member state from Asia to participate in a joint statement by like-minded countries expressing concerns about the human rights situation in China. At the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly in October, the UK, on behalf of 50 countries, delivered a joint statement concerning the serious human rights violations in the XUAR, and Japan participated in the statement. The Government of Japan will continue strongly urging China to take action while also closely cooperating with the international community.



## (B) Economy

At the NPC held in March, a firm growth rate target of around 5% was set for 2023, down 0.5% from the previous year's growth rate target. It was stated that China "should enhance the intensity and effectiveness of our proactive fiscal policy," the deficit-to-GDP ratio was relaxed to 3.0% (2.8% in the previous year), and the upper limit for new local government special bonds was relaxed to 3.80 trillion CNY (3.65 trillion CNY in the previous year). As a result, China's full-year real GDP growth rate for 2023 increased by 5.2% year on year, achieving the target, and by quarter, the first quarter (January to March) increased by 4.5% year on year, the second quarter (April to June) increased by 6.3% year on year, the third quarter (July to September) increased by 4.9% year on year, and the fourth quarter (October to December) increased by 5.2% year on year.

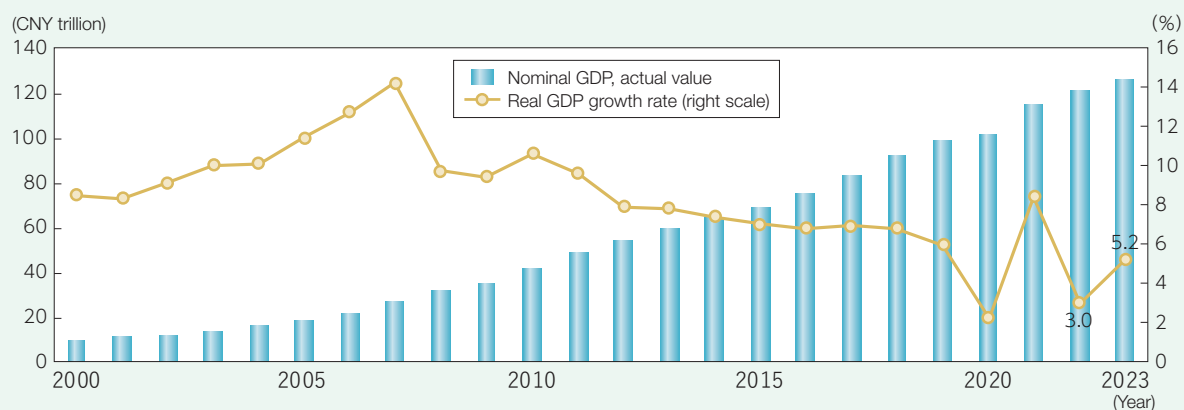
At the end of 2022, the Chinese economy temporarily experienced a strong recovery centered around service consumption as the "zero-COVID" policy, which placed restrictions on outings, was lifted. However, the recovery gradually slowed down due to factors such as the sluggish real estate market and weak external demand attributed to interest rate hikes in the U.S. and Europe. Furthermore, curbs on economic activity due to the "zero-COVID" policy resulted in poor performances of many companies, thereby suppressing employment, and the unemployment rate among young people aged 16 to 24 rose to over 20%.

At a meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC that was held in July, General Secretary Xi Jinping expressed his recognition that "the Chinese economy is facing new

difficulties and challenges, which mainly stem from insufficient domestic demand, difficulties in the operation of some enterprises, risks and hidden dangers in key areas, as well as a grim and complex external environment." On the other hand, he also noted that "The economy has tremendous resilience and potential for development, and its long-term sound fundamentals remain unchanged," and, in terms of economic policy for the second half of the year, indicated that China would continuously implement proactive fiscal policy and maintain a prudent monetary policy. Furthermore, in order to expand demand, policies were outlined to expand consumption by increasing residents' income; to promote the consumption of automobiles, electronic goods, furniture, sports, entertainment, tourism, and so on; and to accelerate the issuance and use of special bonds by local governments. Additionally, for the real estate market, it was pointed out that "to adapt to the great changes in the relationship between supply and demand in China's real estate market, it is imperative to adjust and improve the related policies in a timely manner," and policies such as reductions in down payments and mortgage interest rates were implemented to promote home replacement. Meanwhile, at the sixth session of the Standing Committee of the NPC that was held in October, the issuance of 1 trillion CNY in special government bonds for the purpose of disaster recovery and flood prevention was approved, and the deficit-to-GDP ratio was expected to rise from 3% to 3.8%.

The Central Economic Work Conference held in December positioned 2023 as a "year of economic

China's GDP



Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China



recovery and development” after measures that were taken against COVID-19. While pointing out challenges to economic recovery, it was evaluated that, “overall, favorable conditions outweigh unfavorable factors in China’s development, and the fundamental trend of the economic recovery and long-term positive outlook has not changed.”

### (C) Response to COVID-19

The nationwide surge of infected and seriously ill patients at the end of 2022 due to the complete elimination of the previous “zero-COVID” policy had already settled down nationwide as of January 2023, and in January China’s National Health Commission announced that “the country’s current wave is coming to an end.”

In May there was a temporary spike in the number of infected individuals, which was seen as a “second wave,” but when compared to the end of 2022 there were no major disruptions such as strains on the medical system or impacts on business activities.

The publication of data by the National Health Commission, such as the number of positive cases, was temporarily suspended after the holidays in May, and since June the data has been published once a month.

### (D) Foreign Policy

In 2023, China engaged in in-person diplomatic activities at all levels, including by President Xi Jinping and other high-level officials.

In March, at a press conference at the NPC, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang stated that, “We will follow the guidance of head-of-state diplomacy. In particular, we will ensure the success of the two major diplomatic events that we will host — the first China-Central Asia Summit and the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, and show the dignity of China’s diplomacy.”

In terms of head-of-state diplomacy, President Xi Jinping visited Russia in March as his ninth visit since taking office as President, and held a China-Russia Summit Meeting. In August, he also visited South Africa and attended the BRICS Summit, at which invitations were extended to Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to become new BRICS members. In September, Premier Li Qiang attended the ASEAN-related Summit

Meetings (Jakarta, Indonesia) and the G20 New Delhi Summit (New Delhi, India), and Secretary of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Li Xi attended the G77+China Summit held in Havana and stated that “China is consistently an inherent member of the Global South.”

As part of its major diplomatic events hosted by China, the first China-Central Asia Summit was held in May in Xi’an, Shanxi Province. President Xi Jinping and the leaders of five Central Asian nations attended the Summit and adopted the Xi’an Declaration of the China-Central Asia Summit. In October, the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was held face-to-face in Beijing for the first time in four years.

Mutual visits between the U.S. and China were temporarily halted after a Chinese high-altitude surveillance balloon violated U.S. airspace in February. High-level exchanges gradually resumed after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s visit to China in June, such as visits to China by U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kelly in July, as well as multiple meetings between National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee Wang Yi.

On the other hand, in the economic sphere, conflicts in the area of economic security continued to expand as in the previous year. In July, China announced export controls requiring the submission of end-use certificates and other documentation for items related to gallium and germanium. These are important minerals mainly supplied by China. The Biden administration in the U.S. has promoted a de-risking policy toward China to reduce excessive dependence in supply chains and is promoting efforts to strictly control limited advanced technologies. In August, the Biden administration announced an executive order banning investment in China in the areas of semiconductors and microelectronics, quantum information technology, and artificial intelligence if there are national security concerns. Furthermore, in October, revisions were made to the export control measures for advanced semiconductors that were implemented in October 2022, including expanding the items subject to restrictions.

In November, a U.S.-China Summit Meeting was held during the APEC Leader’s Meeting in San Francisco,



U.S., and the two leaders affirmed the resumption of high-level military-to-military communication and cooperation to combat the manufacturing and trafficking of illicit drugs such as fentanyl. Stable U.S.-China relations are important not only for Japan, but also for the entire international community. The future developments will remain to be a matter of interest.

As for the situation in the Middle East, a political dialogue between China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia was held in Beijing in March, and the normalization of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia was announced.

Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian situation since October, Wang Yi, Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee, and Zhai Jun, Special Envoy of the Chinese Government on the Middle East Issue, have been in frequent communication with both Israel and Palestine, as well as with neighboring countries.

China continues to strengthen cooperative frameworks such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), as well as with the emerging market and developing countries represented by the G77, and Japan will closely watch their future impact on China's diplomacy.

### (E) Military Affairs and Security

At the 19th CPC National Congress (2017), President Xi Jinping stated that China would transform its armed forces into a world-class military by the middle of this century. Additionally, the communique from the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee, published in October 2020, set the new goal of "securing the realization of the centennial goal by 2027, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA)." Furthermore, at the 20th CPC National Congress in 2022, he reiterated this point, stating that "Achieving the goals for the centenary of the People's Liberation Army in 2027 and more quickly elevating our people's armed forces to world-class standards are strategic tasks for building a modern socialist country in all respects." Although China's publicly reported defense expenditures have increased about 37-fold over the past 30 years, the breakdown of the budget and the intention behind the increases have not been sufficiently disclosed, and it is

believed that this is only a portion of the amount that China actually spends on military purposes. Amidst such circumstances, China, under its "development strategy of civil-military fusion," has been extensively and rapidly enhancing the quality and quantity of its military power centered on its nuclear and missile capabilities and naval and air forces. In addition, China is placing importance on ensuring its superiority in new domains of outer space, cyberspace, the electromagnetic spectrum, AI, and unmanned systems, and promoting the modernization of its military through "integrated development of mechanization, informatization and the application of smart technologies."

In 2023, continuing on from the previous year, Japan has confirmed movements such as navigation by Chinese naval survey vessels in Japan's territorial sea around Yakushima, joint navigations by Chinese and Russian naval vessels around Japan, and joint flights by Chinese and Russian strategic bombers around Japan. In April, China conducted large-scale military exercises in the waters and airspace around Taiwan, with the exercises involving the participation of numerous naval vessels and aircraft, following similar exercises in August 2022. In the South China Sea, China has continued and strengthened its unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and to render them faits accomplis which goes against the rule of law and openness, as well as its actions to increase regional tensions, such as further militarization of disputed features and coercive actions against coastal States.

In recent years, China has grown to have a great influence on the international community, not only politically and economically, but also militarily. China's current external stance, military activities, and other activities have become a matter of serious concern for Japan and the international community, and present an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge in ensuring the peace and security of Japan and the peace and stability of the international community, as well as in strengthening the international order based on the rule of law, to which Japan should respond with its comprehensive national power and in cooperation with its ally, like-minded countries and others. With regard to China's rapid strengthening of its military capabilities and expansion of military activities, Japan will strongly encourage China to improve transparency and



to cooperate constructively with international efforts for arms control, disarmament and other such efforts, in cooperation with its allies, like minded countries and others. Furthermore, in order to nurture a relationship of trust between China and Japan, Japan will enhance communication with China in the security field, including through dialogues and exchanges such as the Japan-China Security Dialogue. Additionally, Japan will promote efforts between Japan and China, including the establishment of frameworks to avoid and prevent unforeseen situations with China, such as the Maritime and Aerial Communication Mechanism between the Japanese and Chinese defense authorities. In this way, Japan, in cooperation with related countries, is strongly urging China to improve its transparency to dispel the concerns of the international community, including Japan, while further promoting mutual trust in Japan-China relations.

### **B** Japan-China Relations

#### (A) Bilateral Relations: General

Relations with neighboring China are one of Japan's most important bilateral relations, and the two countries have close economic ties and people-to-people and cultural exchanges. While there are various possibilities between Japan and China, there are a number of challenges and concerns, including unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force in the East China Sea and South China Sea as well as the situation surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and intensified military activities around Japan by China, including those conducted in coordination with Russia. Peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is also important. Furthermore, Japan is seriously concerned about the situation in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in the XUAR. At the same time, both Japan and China have a great responsibility for the peace and prosperity of the region and international community. Japan will comprehensively promote a "Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests." At the same time, it is important that both China and Japan promote efforts to build constructive and stable relations, in which Japan maintains and asserts its position, and strongly

calls for responsible actions by China, while continuing dialogue including on issues of concern and cooperating on matters of common interest.

Continuing on from the previous year, in 2023, high level communication, including between leaders, was continuously conducted. Japan and China exchanged opinions on a wide range of topics, from bilateral relations to regional and international affairs, including on a variety of issues between the two countries.

On February 2, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a Japan-China Foreign Ministers' telephone call with Foreign Minister Qin Gang, and stated that he would like to cooperate with Minister Qin in order to realize the broad direction of building a "constructive and stable relationship," which was an important shared recognition between the two leaders, and Minister Qin expressed the same view. On February 18 at the Munich Security Conference, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a meeting with Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee Wang Yi.

From April 1 to 2, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited China for the first time by a Japanese Foreign Minister in approximately three years and three months. In addition to meeting with Foreign Minister Qin Gang and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee Wang Yi, Foreign Minister Hayashi also paid a courtesy call on Premier Li Qiang. During the meeting with Foreign Minister Qin Gang, Foreign Minister Hayashi stated that he hoped that both sides would continue making efforts to put into practice the common understanding shared by the two leaders of building a "constructive and stable Japan-China relationship," and Foreign Minister Qin Gang indicated that he was of the same view. Foreign Minister Hayashi also made a protest against the detention of a Japanese national; expressed Japan's serious concerns about the situation in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, the intensification of Chinese military activities near Japan, and the human rights situation in China; and clearly communicated Japan's position regarding the discharge of ALPS treated water<sup>5</sup> from TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station into the sea.

<sup>5</sup> ALPS treated water is water which is processed by devices such as ALPS (Advanced Liquid Processing System) for its radioactive materials other than tritium to surely become below the regulatory standards for safety. ALPS treated water is then sufficiently diluted so that the concentrations of the radioactive materials including tritium is far below the regulatory standards for safety, and then finally discharged into the sea.



On July 14, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a meeting with Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee Wang Yi during the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings in Indonesia. During the meeting he clearly reiterated Japan's position regarding the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea and once again called upon China to act based on a scientific standpoint, and also expressed Japan's resolute position on the case of the detention of a Japanese national in China, Japan's grave concerns about issues such as the situation in the East China Sea, and China's increasingly active military activities near Japan.

On September 6, Prime Minister Kishida, who was visiting Jakarta, Indonesia, had a brief conversation with Premier Li Qiang prior to attending the ASEAN Plus Three Summit Meeting. In the conversation, Prime Minister Kishida, referring to the importance of building a "constructive and stable Japan-China relationship," clearly reiterated Japan's position on ALPS treated water.

On November 16, Prime Minister Kishida, who was visiting San Francisco, U.S., to attend the APEC Leaders' Meeting, held a Japan-China Summit Meeting with President Xi Jinping. Prime Minister Kishida stated that 2023 marks the 45th anniversary of the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China, and that this has provided the people of both countries an opportunity to remember the efforts made by many of their predecessors for the development of friendly relations in a wide range of areas and to look ahead to the future of Japan-China relations. Prime Minister Kishida added that it is important that as major powers that lead the region and the international community, both Japan and China fulfill their responsibilities to contribute to global peace and stability. The two leaders reaffirmed to firmly uphold the principles and common understanding of the four basic documents between Japan and China, and to comprehensively promote a "Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests," and went on to confirm a broad direction of building "constructive and stable Japan-China relations" in order to carve out a new era in Japan-China relations. From that perspective, the two leaders welcomed the successful ministerial dialogue

held in 2023 in the areas of foreign affairs; economy, trade and industry; defense; and environment, and concurred to continue having close communication at all levels, including the summit level. Additionally, Prime Minister Kishida expressed his desire to promote mutually beneficial cooperation in specific areas of economy and people-to-people exchanges. Prime Minister Kishida also expressed his desire to help revitalize Japan-China economic exchanges after ensuring a business environment that guarantees legitimate business activities. The two leaders agreed to hold the Japan-China High-Level Economic Dialogue at an appropriate time in order to achieve concrete results in areas of cooperation, such as green economy, including environment and energy conservation as well as medical care, nursing care, and healthcare; welcomed the launch of the Japan-China Export Control Dialogue; and concurred to strengthen dialogue on macro-economy and confirmed that the geographical scope of Japan-China cooperation is expanding across the world. The two leaders shared the intention to work together as responsible major powers on global challenges such as climate change, to further expand people-to-people exchanges in various areas, and to hold the Japan-China High-Level People-to-People and Cultural Exchange Dialogue at an appropriate time. In addition, Prime Minister Kishida welcomed the launch of the operation in May of a hotline between the Japanese and Chinese defense authorities under the Maritime and Aerial Communication Mechanism, and stated the importance of communication on security matters. Prime Minister Kishida also reiterated his serious concerns regarding the situation in the East China Sea, including the situation surrounding the Senkaku Islands, called for the immediate removal of the buoy installed in Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and reiterated his serious concerns regarding the intensification of China's military activities in areas surrounding Japan, including those coordinated between China and Russia, and other matters. Prime Minister Kishida again stressed that peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is extremely important for Japan and the international community, and, in response to China's assertions on its position regarding Taiwan, stated that Japan's position on Taiwan is based on the Joint Communique of the Government of Japan and the



Government of the People's Republic of China issued on September 29, 1972, and that there is no change in this position. Furthermore, Prime Minister Kishida also reiterated his call for the early release of Japanese nationals detained in China. Prime Minister Kishida once again strongly called for a calm response based on scientific evidence in response to the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea, and reiterated his call for the immediate lifting of import restrictions on Japanese food products. Recognizing that there are differences in their respective positions, both sides shared the view that they will seek to find ways to resolve issues through consultations and dialogue in a constructive manner. The two leaders also discussed international affairs, such as North Korea, including the abductions issue, the Middle East and Ukraine, and confirmed that they will maintain close communication on those issues.

On November 25, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the occasion of the Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Busan, the ROK. The Foreign Ministers shared the intention to work together closely to develop Japan-China relations in line with the broad direction confirmed at the Japan-China Summit Meeting on November 16, and both sides confirmed that they will maintain close communication at all levels. Foreign Minister Kamikawa also strongly called for the immediate lifting of restrictions on imports of Japanese food products, expressed Japan's serious concerns about various outstanding issues such as the situation in the East China Sea, and called for the immediate removal of the buoy installed in Japan's EEZ. The two Ministers also exchanged views on global issues and the situation in North Korea.

In addition, in February the Japan-China Security Dialogue and Japan-China Diplomatic Consultations were held; in April and October various face-to-face meetings were held working level, including the Japan-China High-Level Consultation on Maritime Affairs; and close communication between Japan and China continued at working levels, including frank exchanges of views on various outstanding issues such as the situation in the East China Sea and increased military activity by China.

Furthermore, on the occasion of the IISS Shangri-la Dialogue held in Singapore, a Japan-China Defense

Ministerial Meeting was held between Minister of Defense HAMADA Yasukazu and Chinese State Councilor and Defense Minister Li Shangfu on June 3.

### (B) Japan-China Economic Relations

Economic relations between Japan and China, including trade and investment, are very close. In 2023, the total trade between Japan and China (excluding Hong Kong) amounted to about 300.7 billion U.S. dollars (10.4% decrease year on year), and China has been the largest trading partner for Japan for 17 consecutive years.

Moreover, according to Chinese statistics, Japan's direct investment in China was about 4.61 billion U.S. dollars (17.7% increase year on year, as estimated from officially published information on investment) in 2022. Japan ranks third in terms of the amount of direct investment to China (Singapore ranks first and the ROK ranks second). According to balance of payment statistics, China is Japan's third largest investment destination after the U.S. and Australia, and is a source of direct investment income that amounts to about 3.2 trillion yen.

Economic dialogue between Japan and China continued as restrictions on travel due to the spread of COVID-19 were eased. A Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in April and a meeting with Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee Wang Yi was held in July, during which it was confirmed that Japan and China would continue close communication at all levels, including at the leader and foreign ministerial levels. At the Japan-China Summit Meeting on November 16, the two leaders agreed to hold the Japan-China High-Level Economic Dialogue at an appropriate time in order to achieve concrete results in areas of cooperation, such as green economy, including environment and energy conservation as well as medical care, nursing care, and healthcare. Additionally, at the Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting on November 25, the two Foreign Ministers concurred on coordinating toward utilizing the Japan-China High-Level Economic Dialogue and the Japan-China High-Level People-to-People and Cultural Exchange Dialogue to be held at an appropriate time, in order to promote bilateral cooperation in areas such as green economy (including environment and energy conservation), as

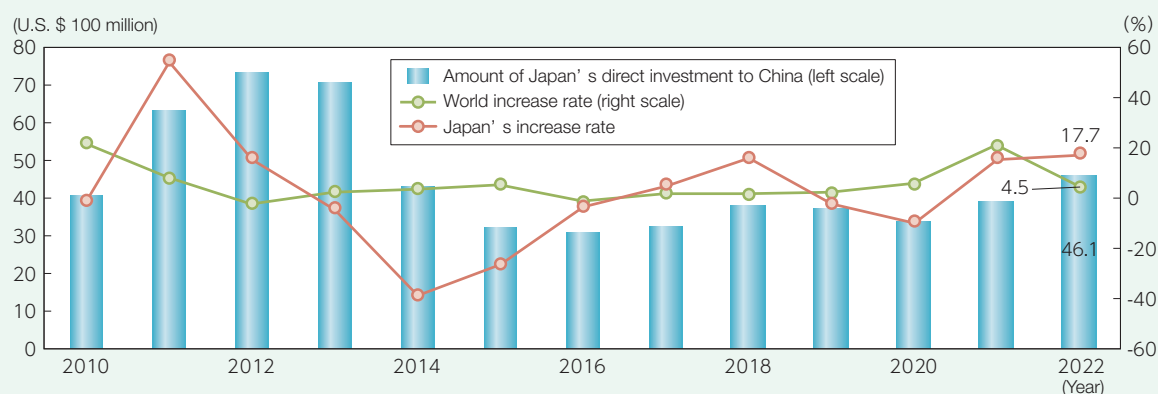


### Japan's Value of Trade with China



Source: Ministry of Finance and Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO)

### Japan's direct investment to China



Source: Ministry of Commerce of China

Note: Increase rate is estimated based on published amounts of investment.

well as medical care, nursing care, and healthcare and to expand people-to-people exchanges in various areas as agreed by the two leaders during the Japan-China Summit Meeting on November 16. The Japan-China Economic Partnership Consultation was also held online in February. As for public-private economic exchanges, the 9th Japan-China Business Leader and Former High-Level Government Official Dialogue (Japan-China CEO Summit) was held face-to-face in November, with State Minister for Foreign Affairs HORII Iwao from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attending the welcome reception.

#### (C) Promotion of Mutual Understanding Between Japanese and Chinese People

(Current situation of people-to-people exchanges between Japan and China)

On January 8, 2023, China relaxed its border measures, including by eliminating post-entry PCR tests

and quarantine measures, but it announced on January 10 that the issuance of general visas to Japanese citizens would be temporarily suspended in response to border measures announced by Japan at the end of 2022 to address the spread of COVID-19 infections in mainland China. On January 29 China once again resumed issuing general visas, but did not resume issuing some visas (such as tourist visas, which had previously been suspended) and visa exception measures for short-term stays (up to 15 days) in China. On March 15, China resumed issuing various types of visit visas, including tourist visas, but visa exemption measures for short-term stays in China for Japanese nationals remain suspended (as of December 2023).

The number of visitors to Japan from China was approximately 2.425 million in 2023 (provisional value from the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO)). Although this value is a significant increase when compared to the approximately 189,000 visitors



in 2022 (finalized value from JNTO), when compared to the 9.594 million visitors in 2019, the flow of people between Japan and China has not yet fully recovered to pre-COVID-19 levels.

A wide range of cultural, economic, educational, and regional exchanges have been built up between Japan and China. 2023 marks the 45th anniversary of the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China, and many events and activities were held to commemorate this event.

On October 23, the effective date of the treaty, the “Reception for the 45th anniversary of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China” was held in Tokyo, hosted by the Executive Committee for Promotion of Japan-China Exchange (Chair: TOKURA Masakazu, Chairman of the KEIDANREN (Japan Business Federation)), and featured messages exchanged between Prime Minister Kishida and Premier Li Qiang and between Foreign Minister Kamikawa and Foreign Minister Wang Yi to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the conclusion of the treaty. On the same day, a commemorative reception was also held in Beijing by the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and the China-Japan Friendship Association.

As for youth exchange programs for the next generation, with COVID-19 continuing to subside, for the first time in about three years cross-border travel is being resumed and face-to-face exchange programs are being held. It is hoped that exchange programs such as Japan’s Friendship Ties Program “JENESYS” will promote mutual understanding and understanding of Japan between students and researchers from both countries.

### (D) Specific Pending Issues

#### (Situation Surrounding the East China Sea)

In the East China Sea, China Coast Guard vessels continue to intrude into the Japanese territorial sea around the Senkaku Islands. The Chinese military has also been rapidly expanding and increasing its activities in quality and quantity in the sea and in the airspace over the East China Sea.

The Senkaku Islands are indisputably an inherent territory of Japan in light of historical facts and based upon international law. Indeed, the Senkaku Islands are under the valid control of Japan. Thus, there exists no issue of territorial sovereignty to be resolved concerning the Senkaku Islands. From 1895, when the Senkaku Islands were incorporated into Japanese territory by lawful means under international law, until the 1970s, when the islands became the focus of attention after it was suggested that there might be oil reserves in the East China Sea, China had not raised any objections to Japan’s sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands. Moreover, China has never explained why it had not expressed objections until then. Subsequently, in 2008, vessels belonging to China’s State Oceanic Administration intruded into Japanese territorial sea surrounding the Senkaku Islands for the first time.<sup>6</sup>

During 2023, 34 incidents were recorded in which China Coast Guard vessels intruded into the Japanese territorial sea surrounding the Senkaku Islands (there were 28 incidents in 2022 and 34 incidents in 2021), and the number of confirmed days in 2023 in which China Coast Guard vessels navigated the contiguous zone around the Senkaku Islands reached a record high of 352 days. Furthermore, since May 2020, Chinese Coast Guard vessels have intruded into the Japanese territorial sea of the Senkaku Islands and there have been incidents in which China Coast Guard vessels frequently attempt to approach Japanese fishing boats in those waters, and the situation remains severe, as evidenced by an incident associated with China’s such attempts that occurred in April 2023, in which an intrusion into Japan’s territorial sea lasted more than 80 hours, the longest ever recorded. The activities of the China Coast Guard vessels, which make their own assertions in Japan’s territorial sea around the Senkaku Islands, are in violation of international law, and, in response to China’s such unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force, through diplomatic routes the Government of Japan has repeatedly lodged strong protests, has called for the prompt withdrawal of Chinese vessels from Japan’s territorial sea, and has demanded

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs website detailing the position of the Government of Japan on the Senkaku Islands: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/index.html>





that such incidents be prevented from reoccurring. With the determination to defend Japan's territory as well as territorial sea and airspace, Japan will continue to take a calm and resolute approach to the situation.

Chinese naval vessels and aircrafts have also been accelerating their activities in the sea and airspace around Japan, including in the East China Sea. In 2023, continuing on from the previous year, Japan confirmed multiple instances in which Chinese naval survey ships navigated Japanese territorial sea around Yakushima. Joint flights by Chinese and Russian strategic bombers were confirmed in June and December, and continuing on from the previous year, joint navigation by Chinese and Russian vessels was confirmed from July to August. On multiple occasions Chinese naval vessels were also confirmed to be navigating waters surrounding Japan including in those around the Senkaku Islands. Based on past movements of Chinese naval vessels in the waters surrounding Japan, the Government of Japan has strong concerns about the navigation of Chinese naval vessels in Japanese territorial sea. Furthermore, because the joint actions of Chinese and Russian militaries in the vicinity of Japan are a serious concern for Japan's security, Japan has appropriately raised objections with the Chinese side regarding each incident.

Chinese aircraft activity, including by unmanned aerial vehicles, continues to occur, and the number of times the Air Self-Defense Force has had to scramble jets in response to Chinese military aircrafts since autumn 2012 has remained high. In response to these recent activities by the Chinese military, Japan has been raising the issues through diplomatic routes.

China has been continuing its unilateral activities to develop natural resources while the EEZ and the continental shelf between Japan and China in the East China Sea remain pending delimitation. In addition to the four structures built by the Chinese side prior to the "2008 Agreement" on resource development in the East China Sea, the Government of Japan has confirmed 12 new structures built between June 2013 and May 2016 that are west of the geographical equidistance line and two new structures that have been built since May 2022, for a total of 18 structures have been installed in 16 locations so far (at two of the 16 locations, two structures have been integrated into a single structure). Such unilateral development activities are

extremely regrettable, and every time such moves by China are detected, Japan has strongly requested China to cease its unilateral development and to immediately resume negotiations for the conclusion of international agreements based on the implementation of the "2008 Agreement" regarding the development of natural resources in the East China Sea. At the summit meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President Xi Jinping in June 2019, the two leaders shared the view of promoting and implementing the "2008 Agreement" regarding resource development in order to achieve the goal of making the East China Sea a "Sea of Peace, Cooperation and Friendship," and at the Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in April 2023, the two Foreign Ministers also shared the view on promoting and implementing the "2008 Agreement" regarding resource development in the East China Sea.

In recent years numerous activities by China to carry out maritime surveys in and around Japan's EEZ, including in the East China Sea, without obtaining Japan's approval, have also continued, and each time this happens Japan raises objections with the Chinese side through diplomatic routes.

Additionally, in July 2023, the existence of a buoy considered to have been installed by China was confirmed to be in Japan's EEZ in the East China Sea. The Government of Japan has utilized various opportunities at all levels, including at the Japan-China Summit Meeting and Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in November, to lodge protests against China, and has repeatedly and strongly called for the immediate removal of the buoy.

In order to appropriately deal with these maritime and security concerns, both Japan and China have been promoting dialogue and exchanges between the authorities concerned. For example, in June 2018 the defense authorities of Japan and China began operation of the Maritime and Aerial Communication Mechanism between the Japanese and Chinese defense authorities, which is highly significant for promoting mutual understanding between both countries and avoiding and preventing accidental collisions, and under the Mechanism the operation of the Hotline between Japanese and Chinese Defense Authorities began in May 2023.





Chinese maritime structures confirmed to have been built near the geographical equidistant line between Japan and China (Photo: Ministry of Defense)  
For details, see [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/page3e\\_000356.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/page3e_000356.html)



As Japan has stated on repeated occasions, including at Japan-China Summit Meetings, true improvement in Japan-China relations cannot be achieved without stability in the East China Sea. It is highly meaningful from the perspective of building trust and bolstering cooperation for diplomats from both countries to directly and frankly exchange opinions, such as at the Japan-China High-Level Consultation on Maritime Affairs or other discussions between related authorities of both countries. The Government of Japan will continue asserting Japan's position on individual issues through steady dialogue and bolstering of communication.

### (Yamato Bank)

In the waters around the Yamato Bank in the Sea of Japan, illegal fishing by Chinese fishing vessels was still confirmed in 2023. Utilizing opportunities such as Japan-China High-Level Consultation on Maritime Affairs, Japan has, at various levels, repeatedly conveyed its concerns and has strongly urged China to take effective steps, including strengthening measures such as providing guidance to those engaged in fishing.

### (Japanese Food Import Restrictions Issue)

Regarding the import restrictions that China placed on food products from Japan, Japan has been strongly and repeatedly urging China to immediately remove these restrictions at various levels, including at the leader and foreign ministerial levels.

On August 24, in response to the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea, the Government of China announced a temporary suspension of all imports of Japanese marine products. China's introduction of new measures in addition to existing import restrictions is a response that is not based on scientific evidence, and Japan has seized various opportunities at all levels, including at the leader and foreign ministerial levels, to call for the immediate removal of these measures. Furthermore, in response to China's notification at the World Trade Organization (WTO) based on the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) the Government of Japan has submitted its counterargument in writing to the WTO that refutes China's claims, and has also explained Japan's position at related committees, including at the SPS Committee. Furthermore, the Government of Japan has requested that the Government of China hold discussions based on the provisions of the SPS Agreement and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, and is urging China to respond to these discussions in accordance with its obligations under the agreements.

Japan is strongly urging China to engage in discussions based on scientific evidence, and will continue utilizing every opportunity to urge China to immediately remove import restrictions on Japanese food products.



### (Cases of Detainment of Japanese Nationals)

In regard to successive cases of detainment of Japanese nationals, the Government of Japan has urged early release of Japanese detainees on various occasions between Japan and China, including summit and foreign ministers' meetings, and, so far, five Japanese nationals have been released before being arrested and six Japanese nationals have returned to Japan after serving their sentences. In March 2023, another Japanese national was detained in Beijing. The Government of Japan has been strongly requesting, at all levels and on every occasion, including at the leader and foreign ministerial levels and at the Japan-China Summit Meeting and Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting, that the Government of China provide early releases; transparency in law enforcement and judicial processes, including with respect to China's revised Counter-Espionage Law; and proper safeguards for the rights of Japanese nationals, as well as ensuring impartial justice and humane treatment, and will continue to tenaciously persevere in such efforts. Additionally, from the perspective of protecting Japanese nationals, the Government of Japan is providing as much support as possible, including consular visits and contact with family members.

In response to these successive cases of Japanese nationals being detained, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Embassy of Japan in China have issued warnings on their websites urging Japanese residents to be aware that acts deemed to "endanger national security" are subject to investigation, and that they may not only be forced to spend long periods of time in detention, but may also face penalties such as imprisonment if convicted. Additionally, in response to the revised Counter-Espionage Law taking effect in July 2023, the content of the warning on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Overseas Safety website has been updated to provide more detailed and specific warnings.

### (Abandoned Chemical Weapons Issue)

The Government of Japan, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), has been steadily working on the destruction of chemical weapons abandoned by the former Japanese military forces in China. In 2023, Japan carried out the excavation, and recovery, and destruction operations of

abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) in Haerbaling District, Dunhua City, Jilin Province, and also carried out the destruction operation of ACW in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province. Additionally, Japan also carried out field surveys and the excavation and recovery operations of ACW in various other parts of China (as of December 2023, approximately 88,000 ACW have been destroyed).

## (2) Taiwan

### A Domestic Affairs and Economy

Taiwan has presidential and legislative elections every four years, and they were held on January 13, 2024. The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) suffered a significant defeat in the local elections held in November 2022, but in the 2024 presidential election, Vice President Lai Ching-te, the DPP's official candidate, was elected with 40.05% of the vote. The difference between Lai Ching-te and the second-place candidate from the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party was 6.56 points. In the legislative elections that were held at the same time, the DPP lost 11 seats and fell to 51 seats, down from the 62 seats it held before the election, and making it the second largest party in the Legislative Yuan (113 seats in total). The KMT was the leading party in the legislative elections, increasing by 15 seats to 52 seats, and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) a new party that was formed in 2019, increased by 3 seats to 8 seats, but no party gained a majority of the seats. As such, the TPP has become the deciding vote in the Legislative Yuan (when two major parties are competing and neither can control a majority, the minority party effectively holds the decision-making power).

Since the second half of 2022, Taiwan's economic growth rate has declined due to inflationary pressures and sluggish external demand caused by the U.S.-China conflict and by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and Taiwan's annual real GDP growth rate for 2023 is forecast to be only +1.61%.

### B Cross-strait Relations and External Relations

From March 29 to April 7, 2023, President Tsai Ing-wen visited Guatemala and Belize in Central America, which have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, stopping in New York, the U.S. on the way there and in Los



Angeles on the way back. In Los Angeles, she held a meeting at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library with bipartisan members of the U.S. Congress, which was hosted by Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy. In response, China announced sanctions, including a ban on visits to China, against Representative of Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the U.S. Bi-khim Hsiao representatives of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, and others, and also conducted military exercises near Taiwan from April 8 to 10. On April 5, a naval fleet including the aircraft carrier *Shandong* made its way from the South China Sea to the Western Pacific Ocean.

On March 26, just before President Tsai Ing-wen's overseas trip, the Central American country of Honduras severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan and established diplomatic relations with China.

From August 12 to 18, Vice President Lai Ching-te visited Paraguay, a South American country that has diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and President Santiago Peña Palacios said that "During my five-year term, Paraguay will stand with Taiwan." Vice President Lai Ching-te did not hold any meetings with dignitaries during his stops in New York on the way out or in San Francisco on the way back. In response, China conducted military exercises around Taiwan on August 19. Furthermore, China announced anti-dumping duties on Taiwanese polycarbonates on August 15, and a suspension of imports of Taiwanese mangoes on August 21.

In September, Taiwan held a ceremony to launch its first domestically manufactured submarine. In addition, Taiwan's defense budget for FY2024 was a record high of 606.8 billion NTD, and Taiwan has been making efforts to strengthen deterrence, including reverting the compulsory military service period from four months to one year, starting from 2024.

On December 21, China announced that Taiwan's trade restrictions with China violate the Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), and that from January 1, 2024, China was suspending the application of the tax rates stipulated in the ECFA for 12 Taiwanese products, including paraxylene.

In December, just before Taiwan's presidential election, China also rescinded preferential tariffs on certain chemical imports from Taiwan under the ECFA.

In response to the DPP candidate Lai Ching-te's election in the January 2024 presidential election, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi commented that, "The outcome of the recent leadership election in the Taiwan region also won't change the prevailing consensus of the international community on adhering to the 'one-China principle'" and that "China will eventually achieve complete reunification." The State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, which is in charge of Taiwan, released a statement saying, "the results reveal that the DPP cannot represent the mainstream public opinion on the island." Immediately after the election, on January 15, the Pacific Island country of Nauru severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan, bringing the total number of countries that recognize Taiwan to 12.

Peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait are important not only for the security of Japan, but also for the stability of the entire international community. This was reaffirmed at the G7 Hiroshima Summit, and the G7 leaders concurred to call for a peaceful resolution of cross-strait issues.

In 2023, active visits to Taiwan by legislative members and others from various countries continued, particularly from Europe and the U.S., with 61 groups making visits, which is 31 more than in 2022.

Taiwan was an observer at the World Health Organization (WHO) General Assembly from 2009 to 2016, but has not been able to participate since 2017. Japan has consistently asserted that there should be no geographical gap in responding to international health issues. From this perspective, Japan has consistently supported Taiwan's participation as an observer to the WHO General Assembly.

### **C** Japan-Taiwan Relations

For Japan, Taiwan is an extremely important partner and a valuable friend, with which it shares fundamental values and principles such as freedom, democracy, basic human rights and the rule of law, and enjoys close economic relations and people-to-people exchanges. The relations between Japan and Taiwan are maintained on the basis of working relations at the non-governmental level in accordance with the 1972 Joint Communiqué between Japan and China. Citizen sentiment in both Japan and Taiwan is generally positive, and, 42 members from the Japan-ROC Diet Members'



Consultative Council delegation attended the National Day Celebration events held in Taipei on October 10, and for the second consecutive year, a marching band from a Japanese high school was invited as a guest performer. There have also been active visits by dignitaries, such as when the Vice Premier of the Executive Yuan visited Japan in June for the first time in 29 years for an economic conference and when Vice-President of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan ASO Taro visited Taiwan in August to attend a symposium. In 2023, a total of 4.2 million people traveled from Taiwan to Japan.

Taiwan has been responding to Japan's discharge of ALPS treated water based on scientific evidence. On the other hand, import restriction measures such as import suspensions and the requirement to submit certificates of some Japanese foods still remain in place. Japan continues to persistently urge Taiwan to lift these restrictions as soon as possible based on scientific evidence.

In March, the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association and the Taiwan-Japan Relations Association signed a "Memorandum of Understanding on Exchange and Cooperation in the Legal and Justice Fields," bringing the total number of agreements between the two associations to 64.

### (3) Mongolia

#### **A** Domestic Affairs

In order to strengthen overall coordination functions related to long-term development plans, the Oyun-Erdene Administration worked on strengthening the system for promoting the "New Recovery Policy," a policy package aimed at achieving post-COVID-19 economic independence; including by positioning the Minister of Economy and Development at the Deputy Prime Minister level, and creating a ministerial post in charge of "Border Port Recovery" (issues on development of infrastructure to serve as bases for imports and exports, etc.), which is one of the pillars of that Policy. Additionally, in response to frequent demonstrations in 2022 including those over the mismanagement scandal by the Development Bank of Mongolia and the allegations of illegal exports at the Tavan Tolgoi coal mine, the administration designated 2023 as the "Year of Fighting against Corruption." However, it resulted

in the resignation of some ministers and multiple incumbent legislators due to coal corruption allegations. In addition, the allegations of corruption in the procurement of buses for the capital city Ulaanbaatar was raised, which led to the resignation of the mayor of Ulaanbaatar and the Minister in Charge of Capital Affairs.

In May a constitutional amendment bill was passed to change the number of seats in the State Great Hural (Parliament) and the electoral system (to take effect in January 2024); a proportional representation system was introduced in addition to the electoral district system for the next general election in 2024; and the number of seats of the State Great Hural, which had been maintained at 76 seats since its establishment in 1992, was significantly expanded to 126 seats in total, including 78 constituency seats and 48 proportional representation seats.

#### **B** Foreign Policy

Mongolia, which is situated between China and Russia and increasingly dependent on both countries in terms of economy and energy, has long pursued a foreign policy of maintaining good relations with both countries as a top priority while at the same time maintaining a balance by strengthening relations with other countries, including Japan and Western countries, which it positions as its "Third Neighbors."

In 2023, numerous dignitaries visited Mongolia, including French President Emmanuel Macron (May) and His Holiness Pope Francis (September), while President U. Khurelsukh, Prime Minister L. Oyun-Erdene, and Foreign Minister B. Battsetseg, each actively visited foreign countries and engaged in active dignitary diplomacy. Furthermore, in June, Foreign Minister Battsetseg hosted a Female Foreign Ministers' Meeting in the capital Ulaanbaatar, which the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, Indonesia, and other countries attended.

As for Mongolia's relations with China, Foreign Minister Battsetseg (May, November), Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene (June), and President Khurelsukh (October for the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, accompanied by Foreign Minister Battsetseg) visited China. As for Mongolia's relations with Russia, Chairman of the State Great



Hural G. Zandanshatar visited Russia (June), and from Russia Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Gordeyev Alexey Vasilievich (January), Chairman of the State Duma Volodin Vyacheslav Victorovich (September), and Deputy Prime Minister Viktoria Abramchenko (October) visited Mongolia. Furthermore, Mongolia continued efforts to maintain relations with both neighboring countries, including by holding multiple summit meetings with both China and Russia during international conferences.

### **C** Economy

In 2023, Mongolia's economy continued on a recovery trend due to expansion of external demand from China and accompanying expansion of domestic demand. Export growth was especially driven by Chinese demand for mineral resources including coal. On the other hand, industries other than mining recovered in a slow pace. In particular, the production of livestock and agricultural products experienced negative growth due to poor weather from winter to spring. Mongolia's inflation rate, being slightly better than in 2022, also continued to rise at 10.4%, which has slowed the economic recovery. Mongolia's economic growth rate from July to September was 6.9% year on year. In addition, Mongolia's trade value for 2023 increased by 12.1% in terms of exports and increased by 6.3% in terms of imports when compared to the previous year.

### **D** Japan-Mongolia Relations

In regard to relations with Japan, high-level exchanges and dialogue continued in 2023.

Chairman of the State Great Hural Zandanshatar visited Japan at the invitation of the House of Councilors in March; a meeting between Foreign Minister Hayashi and Foreign Minister Battsetseg was held at the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings in July; and a Summit Meeting was held between Prime Minister Kishida and President Khurelsukh at the UN General Assembly High-level Week in September. The two countries confirmed steady progress being made in cooperation projects in various sectors based on the "Japan-Mongolia Action Plan (2022-2031)," which was issued on occasion of President Khurelsukh's visit to Japan in 2022.

Specifically, as part of cooperation with Mongolia's "One Billion Trees" initiative, which President Khurelsukh proposed and has been implementing as part of measures to combat climate change and desertification, Japan has launched the first project under its plan of afforestation up to around 50,000 trees over five years in Mongolia. In addition, the second "Japan-Mongolia Student Forum" (a three-day online study session and a two-night, three-day exchange camp), which was launched on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Mongolia, was held in the period from July to October, and students who will be responsible for the next generation of bilateral relations deepened mutual understanding and exchanges.

## **3** Korean Peninsula

### **(1) North Korea (including the abductions issue)**

The Government of Japan has been taking various initiatives based on its basic policy of seeking to normalize its relations with North Korea through comprehensively resolving outstanding issues of concern, such as the abductions, nuclear and missile issues, as well as settlement of the unfortunate past in accordance with the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration of September 2002. In 2023, North Korea repeatedly conducted launches of ballistic missiles and others, including five intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM)-class ballistic missiles and a launch using ballistic missile technology for the purpose of satellite launch. This series of actions by North Korea constitutes a grave and imminent threat to Japan's national security and poses a clear and serious challenge to the region and the international community, and are totally unacceptable. Japan will continue to ensure the full implementation of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions by the international community and seek the complete dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs while also cooperating with the international community, including the U.S. and the Republic of Korea (ROK). The abductions issue is a humanitarian and time sensitive-issue with no time to spare. Japan continues to call



on North Korea to implement the May 2014 Japan-North Korea agreement (the agreement in Stockholm)<sup>7</sup> and will continue to make the utmost efforts to realize the return of all abductees at the earliest possible date, while working closely with the international community, including the U.S. and the ROK.

## **A North Korea Nuclear and Missile Issues**

### **(A) Recent Trends in North Korea Nuclear and Missile Issues**

North Korea has not carried out the dismantlement of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner, in accordance with the series of relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

The Sixth Enlarged Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers Party of Korea (WPK) was held at the end of December 2022, and it was reported that North Korean President of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong-un announced a work plan for 2023 and mentioned “the mass-producing of tactical nuclear weapons” and “an exponential increase of the country’s nuclear arsenal.” In February 2023, a military parade celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Korean People’s Army was held and it was reported that a “tactical missile column,” a “long-range cruise missile column,” a “tactical nuclear-armed unit” and an “intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) column” were presented. The Ninth Session of the 14th Supreme People’s Assembly that was held in September where a constitutional amendment was adopted clearly stating that North Korea “develops highly nuclear weapons,” and President Kim was reported to have stated that, given “the present situation, in which the structure of the ‘new Cold War’ is being materialized on a global scale” “by the reactionary imperialist forces,” “we must neither change nor concede the present position of our country as a nuclear weapon state, but, on the contrary, continue to further strengthen the nuclear force.”

In 2023, North Korea launched ballistic missiles 18 times (at least 25 launches). A ballistic missile was launched on January 1st, and on February 18 an ICBM-class ballistic missile is estimated to have

fallen within Japan’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ), approximately 200 kilometers west of Oshima-Oshima Island, Hokkaido. North Korea subsequently launched a ballistic missile on February 20, an ICBM-class ballistic missile which it announced as the “Hwasong-17” on March 16, and ballistic missiles on March 19 and March 27. On April 13, it launched an ICBM-class ballistic missile that appears to use a new type of solid-fuel propulsion system and which was reported to have been the “first test launch” of the “Hwasong-18.”

On May 29, North Korea notified that it would launch a satellite between May 31 and June 11, and on May 31 North Korea conducted a launch using ballistic missile technology. On the same day, it was announced that the “Malligyong-1 military reconnaissance satellite” had been launched and that it “lost propulsion and crashed.”

On June 15, two ballistic missiles were launched, and both were estimated to have fallen within Japan’s EEZ, approximately 250 kilometers north-northwest of Hegura Island, Ishikawa Prefecture. On July 12, it launched an ICBM-class ballistic missile once again which it announced as “Hwasong-18,” and ballistic missiles were also launched on July 19 and July 24.

On August 22, North Korea notified that it would launch a satellite between August 24 and August 31. On August 24 it conducted a “launch of the “Malligyong-1” military reconnaissance satellite” using ballistic missile technology, flying over the Japanese archipelago, but on the same day it was announced that the launch “failed due to an error in the emergency blasting system during the third-stage flight.” Ballistic missiles were also launched on August 30 and September 13.

On November 21, North Korea notified that it would launch a satellite between November 22 and December 1, but carried out the launch on November 21 using ballistic missile technology, and on November 22, the following day, announced that they had “accurately placed reconnaissance satellite ‘Malligyong-1’ into orbit.”

North Korea also launched a ballistic missile on December 17, and the following day, on December

<sup>7</sup> In May 2014, Japan-North Korea Intergovernmental Consultations were held in Stockholm, Sweden. North Korea promised to conduct a comprehensive and full-scale investigation on all Japanese nationals, including abductees.



18, it launched an ICBM-class ballistic missile which it announced as the “Hwasong-18.”

Faced with these series of violations of Security Council resolutions, Japan, as a member of the Security Council, has been diligently working to take a resolute action at the Security Council in cooperation with the U.S. and other countries, but the Security Council has not been able to take a unified action due to the reluctance of some countries.

Under these circumstances, Japan has been working together with like-minded countries in encouraging relevant countries to enhance the effective implementation of sanctions based on existing Security Council resolutions.

On March 17, September 1, and December 1, the Government of Japan took further measures against North Korea, additionally designating a total of 7 entities and 12 individuals involved in North Korea’s nuclear and missile development as being subject to asset freezes and other measures (as a result, a total of 144 entities and 133 individuals were designated as of the end of December 2023).

With regard to North Korea’s nuclear activities, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General’s report in August stated that further activity had been observed at the Adit 3 tunnel in the nuclear test site near Punggye-ri, and pointed out that several buildings had been constructed, including in the test site support area. On December 21, the IAEA Director General also pointed out that North Korea’s light water reactor at Yongbyon had been shown to have reached criticality.

#### **(B) Initiatives by Japan and Cooperation with the International Community**

The repeated launches of ballistic missiles and others by North Korea are serious challenges not only to Japan, but also to the international community, and are totally unacceptable. It is crucial that the international community makes concerted efforts to fully implement the UN Security Council resolutions for the dismantlement of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner by North Korea. Japan has confirmed these points at meetings with the leaders and foreign ministers of various countries. On March 19, July 13,

and December 19, G7 Foreign Ministers’ Statements on the launch of an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile by North Korea were released, and on August 24 and November 22, G7 Foreign Ministers’ Statements on the launch using ballistic missile technology by North Korea were released.

In addition, recognizing that the collaboration among Japan, the U.S., and the ROK is essential for regional peace and stability beyond issues related to North Korea, Japan, the U.S., and the ROK have been enhancing collaboration at multiple levels, through holding meetings among leaders, Foreign Ministers, Vice-Ministers, and Special Representatives to the Six-Party Talks. At the leaders’ level, an exchange of views among Japan-U.S.-ROK leaders was held on May 21 on the occasion of the G7 Hiroshima Summit, and subsequently on August 18, the first-ever stand-alone Japan-U.S.-ROK Summit Meeting was held at Camp David in the U.S. (See the Special Feature on page 37). Furthermore, an informal talk among Japan-U.S.-ROK leaders was held on November on the occasion of the APEC Leaders’ Meeting in San Francisco, U.S. At the foreign ministerial level, Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers’ Meetings were held on February 18 in Munich, Germany on the occasion of the Munich Security Conference, and on July 14 in Jakarta, Indonesia on the occasion of the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers’ Meetings. In both meetings, North Korea’s launches of an ICBM-class ballistic missile were strongly condemned and a Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers’ Joint Statement was released after the July meeting. On September 22, a Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers’ informal talk was held in New York, U.S. on the occasion of the UN General Assembly, and on November 14, a Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers’ Meeting was held in San Francisco, U.S. on the occasion of the APEC Ministerial Meeting. At the vice-ministerial level as well, a Japan-U.S.-ROK vice foreign ministerial meeting was held on February 13 in Washington, D.C., U.S., and after the meeting a joint statement was released. In addition, at the level of the Special Representatives to the Six-Party Talks, trilateral meetings among Japan, the U.S., and the ROK were held in Seoul, ROK on April 7, in Karuizawa, Japan on July 20, and in Jakarta, Indonesia on October 17, and a Japan-U.S.-ROK joint statement was released after the talks in April.



As part of the Japan Coast Guard's patrolling activities and the Self-Defense Forces' surveillance operations, Japan has been conducting information gathering on the activities of vessels suspected to be violating the UN Security Council resolutions. When the Government of Japan finds activities strongly suspected to be violating the UN Security Council resolutions, including ship-to-ship transfers<sup>8</sup> with North Korean vessels, measures have been taken, such as notification to the UN Security Council 1718 Sanctions Committee and other bodies, sharing of information with related countries, and releasing of information to the public. Aircraft of Australia, Canada, and France, in addition to U.S. aircraft, have, based on the UN Status of Forces Agreement, used U.S. military facilities and areas in Japan to engage in surveillance operations against illicit maritime activities, including ship-to-ship transfers. Furthermore, monitoring and surveillance activities were conducted in the waters surrounding Japan, including the East China Sea, by naval vessels such as multiple vessels of the U.S. Navy, the UK Royal Navy offshore patrol vessel HMS *Spey*, the French Navy frigate *Prairial*, the Royal Canadian Navy frigates HMCS *Montréal* and HMCS *Vancouver*, and the Royal Australian Navy frigates HMAS *Anzac* and HMAS *Toowoomba*. From the perspective of further deepening the multinational cooperation, Japan considers it significant that concerned countries are sharing information and coordinating efforts to ensure that UN Security Council resolutions are implemented fully and effectively.

## **B The Abductions Issue and Japan-North Korea Relations**

### **(A) Basic Position on the Abductions Issue**

To date, the Government of Japan has identified 12 separate incidents, involving a total of 17 Japanese abductees, 12 of whom have not yet returned home. North Korea claims that 8 of these 12 abductees have died and that it is unable to confirm that the other 4 ever entered its territory, but as no convincing explanation of this claim has been provided, Japan continues to work toward the resolution of this issue on the

assumption that all of the abductees whose whereabouts are unknown are still alive. As well as being a critical issue concerning the sovereignty of Japan and the lives and safety of Japanese citizens, abductions by North Korea constitute a universal issue among the international community as a violation of basic human rights. In addition, the abductions issue is a humanitarian issue with a time constraint. With not just the abductees themselves, but also their families having reached an advanced age, Japan continues to work toward the resolution of this issue with a determination to “never give up.” Based on the basic recognition that the normalization of its relations with North Korea is impossible without resolving the abductions issue, Japan has positioned its resolution as the most important issue. Accordingly, Japan has strongly urged North Korea to provide a full account of all the abduction cases, to hand over the perpetrators to Japan, and to ensure the safety of all abductees and their immediate return to Japan, irrespective of whether the abductees are officially identified. In January 2024, Prime Minister Kishida gave a policy speech where he stated: “With the aging of the families of abductees, the abductions issue, which is a top priority for my administration, is a humanitarian and time sensitive issue with no time to spare. North Korea's nuclear and missile development is totally unacceptable. I would like to pursue high-level talks under my direct supervision toward holding a summit meeting with President Kim Jong-un, in order to realize the return of all abductees at the earliest possible date and thereby bring the relations between Japan and North Korea to new heights, as well as to resolve the outstanding issues of concern in accordance with the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration.”

### **(B) Initiatives by Japan**

Following the nuclear test by North Korea in January 2016 and the launch of the ballistic missile in the following month, which North Korea purported to be a “satellite,” Japan announced its autonomous measures against North Korea in February 2016. In response, North Korea unilaterally announced that it would completely stop the investigations on all Japanese

<sup>8</sup> In this context, “ship-to-ship transfers” refers to the transfers to or from North Korea-flagged vessels of any goods or items at sea, which UN Security Council resolution 2375 (adopted in September 2017) prohibits the UN member states from facilitating or engaging in.



abductees and dissolve the Special Investigation Committee. Japan lodged a serious protest against North Korea, conveyed its intention of not abandoning the agreement in Stockholm, and strongly demanded that North Korea implement the agreement and return all the abductees home at the earliest possible date.

### (C) Japan-North Korea Relations

During the reception of the PyeongChang Olympic Winter Games Opening Ceremony in February 2018, Prime Minister Abe brought up the abductions, nuclear and missile issues and conveyed Japan's basic position to Kim Yong Nam, President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of North Korea. Prime Minister Abe strongly urged North Korea to resolve the abductions issue, especially the return of all abductees to Japan. In September, Foreign Minister Kono held a meeting with the North Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Ri Yong Ho at the UN headquarters. In September 2023, Prime Minister Kishida addressed the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, declaring: "I would like to hold high-level talks under my direct supervision to realize a summit meeting at an early time" with President Kim.

### (D) Cooperation with the International Community

In order to resolve the abductions issue, it is essential for Japan not only to proactively urge North Korea, but also to gain understanding and support from other countries regarding the importance of resolving the abductions issue. Japan has taken all possible diplomatic opportunities to raise the abductions issue, including at summit meetings, foreign ministers' meetings and international conferences such as the G7 Summit. At the G7 Hiroshima Summit in May, Japan confirmed with G7 leaders that they would continue to closely work together in dealing with North Korea, including on the abductions issue. Additionally, at the Japan-U.S.-ROK Summit Meeting on August 18, President Joseph Biden and President Yoon Suk Yeol reaffirmed their support for the immediate resolution of the abductions issue, and the Japan-U.S.-ROK Joint Leaders' Statement released after the meeting also reaffirmed their commitment to the immediate resolution of the abductees issue.

With regard to the U.S., President Donald Trump raised the abductions issue with President Kim at the U.S.-North Korea Summit in June 2018, at the request of Prime Minister Abe. At the second U.S.-North Korea Summit in February 2019, President Trump raised the abductions issue with President Kim at the tête-à-tête meeting, which was held first on the first day, and clearly stated Prime Minister Abe's views regarding the abductions issue. Furthermore, at the small group dinner that followed, President Trump again raised the abductions issue, and a serious discussion was held between the leaders. During his visit to Japan in May 2022, President Biden met with the family members of the abductees, listened carefully and earnestly to the families' sentiments and their requests for U.S. support in resolving the abductions issue as soon as possible, and encouraged them. At the Japan-U.S. Summit Meetings on January 13 and May 18, 2023, Prime Minister Kishida asked for continued understanding and cooperation toward the resolution of the abductions issue, to which President Biden offered his full support. At the joint press conference following the Japan-U.S.-ROK Summit Meeting in August 2023, President Biden mentioned his meeting with the family members of the abductees and expressed the commitment to work together to see the return of all who have been abducted.

With regard to China, at the Japan-China Summit Meeting in June 2019, President Xi Jinping stated that he had conveyed Japan's position on Japan-North Korea relations and Prime Minister Abe's views to President Kim during the China-North Korea Summit held in the same month. Prime Minister Abe also gained the strong support of President Xi for the improvement of Japan-North Korea relations, including the abductions issue. At the Japan-China Summit Meeting on November 16, 2023, Prime Minister Kishida and President Xi discussed international affairs, such as North Korea, including the abductions issue, and confirmed that they would maintain close communication on those issues.

The ROK has also raised the abductions issue with North Korea at multiple opportunities, including the Inter-Korean Summit in April 2018. At the Japan-ROK Summit Meeting in December 2019, President Moon Jae-in of the ROK expressed his understanding



for Japan's position regarding the importance of the abductions issue and stated that the ROK had repeatedly raised the abductions issue with North Korea. At the Japan-ROK Summit Meetings held on March 16 and May 7, 2023, President Yoon reiterated his support for Japan regarding the abductions issue, and at the Japan-ROK Summit Meetings held on July 12 and November 16, the two leaders confirmed that they would work closely with each other in dealing with North Korea including the abductions issue.

At the UN Human Rights Council in April 2023 and the UN General Assembly in December, a resolution on the human rights situation in North Korea that was submitted by the EU and co-sponsored by Japan was adopted without a vote. Additionally, on August 17, 2023, a public meeting of the Security Council was held to discuss the human rights situation in North Korea, including the abductions issue, for the first time in about six years since December 2017, and after the meeting, the EU and 52 like-minded countries referred to the abductions issue in the joint stakeout. Japan will continue to closely coordinate and cooperate with relevant countries, including the U.S., toward the early resolution of the abductions issue.

## **C North Korea's External Relations, etc.**

### **(A) U.S.-North Korea Relations**

From 2018 to 2019, the U.S. and North Korea held two summit meetings as well as a meeting between President Trump and President Kim in Panmunjom, and in October 2019, U.S.-North Korea working-level talks were convened in Stockholm, Sweden. However, after this, no concrete progress was made in dialogues between the U.S. and North Korea.

Through President Biden's North Korea policy review in April 2021, the U.S. has made it clear that its goal remains the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and that it is stepping up its efforts to ensure the security of its allies, including Japan. In October 2022, the U.S. released a new National Security Strategy (NSS), indicating that it would seek sustained diplomacy toward the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and that it would strengthen extended deterrence in the face of North Korean weapons of mass destruction and missile threats. At the same

time, the U.S. has also stated on various occasions that the U.S. has no hostile intentions toward North Korea and that it is prepared to resume dialogue with North Korea without any preconditions.

On the other hand, it was reported that President Kim said in his speech at the 9th Session of the 14th Supreme People's Assembly in September: "the accelerated establishment of the triangular military alliance with Japan and the 'Republic of Korea' finally resulted in the emergence of the 'Asian-version NATO,' the root cause of war and aggression. This is just the worst actual threat, not threatening rhetoric or an imaginary entity" and that North Korea would "further promote solidarity with the nations standing against the U.S. and the West's strategy for hegemony."

In July, a U.S. Forces Korea soldier crossed the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) and was detained by North Korea. He was released in September. In response to a series of provocative acts by North Korea, including ballistic missile launches, the U.S. decided to additionally designate individuals and entities as subject of its own sanctions in March, April, May, June, August, and November of 2023, respectively.

### **(B) Inter-Korean Relations**

In May 2022, the President Yoon administration was inaugurated in the ROK with the goal of "normalizing inter-Korean relations." In August, President Yoon proposed the "audacious initiative" that would provide various types of economic assistance on the condition of genuine and substantial denuclearization, but North Korea has not shown any willingness to respond to this proposal. In January 2023, President Kim was reported to have said that, "Now that the South Korean puppet forces [...] openly trumpet about 'preparations for war' have assumed our undoubted enemy," and in February, the ROK's defense white paper stated that North Korea's regime and military were "an enemy of the Republic of Korea."

In April, the inter-Korean communication line, which had been restored since October 2021, was disrupted again. In response, the Government of the ROK issued a statement from the Unification Minister expressing strong regret. In September, the Constitutional Court of the ROK ruled that a provision in a law enacted during the Moon administration



which banned the dissemination of leaflets to North Korea was unconstitutional. In November, the ROK announced the partial suspension of the “Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain” that was signed in 2018, citing North Korea’s repeated violations of the agreement and the launch of a “military reconnaissance satellite.” In response, North Korea reportedly issued a statement saying that it would no longer be bound by the agreement. Furthermore, at the Ninth Enlarged Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the WPK, there was reportedly a pivot in policy toward the ROK, with it being said that “The North-South relations have been completely fixed into the relations between two states hostile to each other and the relations between two belligerent states.”

In response to a series of provocative acts by North Korea, including ballistic missile launches, the ROK decided to additionally designate individuals and entities as subject to its own sanctions in February, March, April, May, June, July, September, and December, respectively.

#### **(C) China-North Korea and Russia-North Korea Relations**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, since 2020 there have been no visits by dignitaries, but it was reported that in July 2023, a delegation headed by Li Hongzhong, Vice Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the 14th National People’s Congress of China, and Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu visited North Korea to commemorate North Korea’s “70th anniversary of the victory in the Fatherland Liberation War,” and that letters from President Xi and President Vladimir Putin were delivered to President Kim. In relation with Russia, with the year 2023 being the 75th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations, President Kim visited Russia in September for the first time in four years and held a summit meeting with President Putin in Amur Oblast, where it was reported that the two sides agreed to strategic and tactical cooperation. In October, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited North Korea to hold a Russia-North Korea Foreign Ministers’ Meeting and paid a courtesy call to President Kim. On October 26, Japan, the U.S., and the ROK released the U.S.-Japan-ROK

Joint Statement on North Korea-Russia arms transfers, in which they strongly condemned the provision of military equipment and munitions by North Korea to Russia, and announced that Japan, the U.S., and the ROK were closely monitoring the situation regarding the possibility of military assistance from Russia to North Korea.

Trade between China and North Korea, which accounts for approximately 90% of North Korea’s entire external trade, was significantly reduced when compared to pre-COVID-19 levels due to traffic restrictions following the global spread of COVID-19, but has continued to be on a recovery trend since September 2022 when it was announced that cross-border rail freight between Dandong, China, and Sinuiju, North Korea, would be resumed. As a result, the China-North Korea trade volume in 2023 greatly exceeded that of the previous year and has recovered to pre-COVID-19 levels.

#### **(D) Other Issues**

In 2023, a total of 22 drifting or wrecked wooden vessels presumed to be from North Korea were discovered (49 in 2022) on Japan’s coast with the Sea of Japan. The Government of Japan continues its effort to gather and analyze information, with great interest on relevant developments. In September 2020, a vessel that appeared to be an official North Korean vessel in Japan’s EEZ in the west of the Yamatotai bank in the Sea of Japan was confirmed, and when this incident occurred the Ministry of Foreign Affairs conveyed Japan’s position to North Korea. Japan will continue to deal appropriately with these issues in close coordination among relevant ministries and agencies.

### **D Domestic Political Affairs and Economy**

#### **(A) Political Affairs**

In January 2021, for the first time in approximately five years, North Korea held the Eighth Congress of the WPK, which is the highest decision-making institution in the WPK, and President Kim, while emphasizing “people-first politics,” is reported to have given an activity summary of achievements/reflections on the past five years and on future issues, including the continued nuclear and missile activities as well as the external relations. It was also reported that the “Five-Year Plan



for the Development of National Defence Science and the Weapons System” and the “Major Five-Point Goals for Developing the National Defence Capabilities” were presented at the Congress of the WPK. At the Sixth Enlarged Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the WPK that was held in December 2022, President Kim reportedly mentioned the launch of the first “military satellite” and emphasized strengthening defense capabilities.

At the 8th Session of the 14th Supreme People’s Assembly held in January 2023, the year 2022 was reportedly evaluated as “full of unprecedented challenges and threats” while also reporting that “the Korean people achieved remarkable successes in the struggle for economic construction and improvement of the people’s standard of living.” It was also reported that the “Law on the Protection of the Cultured Pyongyang Dialect” was adopted to “exterminate non-normative language elements.” In February, the 7th Enlarged Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the WPK was held, and President Kim was reported to have said that “the WPK has attached importance to the rural question as a strategic one which should be settled without fail.” In June the 8th Enlarged Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the WPK was held with President Kim in attendance, and it was reported that the development of a military reconnaissance satellite was mentioned as one of “the Five-Point Major Goals for Developing the Defense Capabilities” and that the need to “push ahead with the expansion and development of the space industry as a national affair” was pointed out. At the 9th Session of the 14th Supreme People’s Assembly held in September, it was reported that decisions were made regarding constitutional amendments and changing the “National Aerospace Development Administration of the DPRK” to the “National Aerospace Technology Administration of the DPRK.”

At the 9th Enlarged Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the WPK that was held at the end of December, President Kim is reported to have praised 2023 as a “year full of eye-opening victories and events” and announced to lay a “foundation for steadily increasing the production of nuclear weapons” in 2024, as well as vowing to launch in addition three reconnaissance satellites.

Additionally, during the launch of an ICBM-class ballistic missile in November 2022, President Kim is reported to have “guided on the spot” that launched together with his “beloved child,” allegedly his daughter, who publicly appeared for the first time. Subsequently, President Kim is reported to have been accompanied by this child on various occasions, including a February 2023 event related to the “75th Founding Anniversary of the Korean People’s Army (KPA),” the April inspection of the National Aerospace Development Administration, and the visit to the KPA Navy Command.

### (B) Economy

It was reported that at the 8th Congress of the WPK in January 2021, President Kim presented the new “five-year plan for the national economic development” (2021 to 2025) centered around self-reliance and self-prosperity while referring to difficulties due to sanctions, natural disasters and the global health crisis. In January 2023, President Kim is reported to have defined the year 2023, the third year of the five-year plan for the national economic development, as “a year of making a big stride in the development of the national economy, a year of attaining key goals in increasing production—carrying out the strategy of readjustment and reinforcement and improving the people’s living standards,” and to set “as the main targets the economic indices and 12 major goals to be attained by all sectors of the national economy.”

### E Other Issues

Defectors who have fled North Korea have to be kept in hiding to avoid being cracked down on by the authorities in the countries where they are staying or to avoid being forcibly repatriated to North Korea. The Government of Japan is addressing the protection of and support for these North Korean defectors, in line with the purpose of the North Korean Human Rights Violation Act, taking into account a comprehensive range of factors, including humanitarian considerations, the safety of those concerned, and relations with the countries in which these defectors reside. Relevant ministries and agencies in Japan are closely working together to promote measures aimed at helping the settlement of defectors accepted by Japan.



## (2) Republic of Korea (ROK)

### **A** Situation in the ROK

#### (A) Domestic Affairs

The Yoon Suk Yeol administration has sought to promote a variety of policies amidst rising international prices, including stabilizing prices and people's lives, expanding exports and investment, and promoting a market-centered economy and sound public finances. However, the National Assembly continued to be divided, with the ruling People Power Party holding a minority of seats and the largest opposition party, the Democratic Party of Korea, holding the sole majority. The ruling and opposition parties were bitterly divided over various issues including the role of individual policies and the appointment of ministers. Although an opposition-led motion was passed to impeach the Minister of the Interior and Safety over the 2022 Itaewon crowd accident, the claim was dismissed in a hearing at the Constitutional Court. In September, a proposal to dismiss the Prime Minister was passed for the first time in the history of the ROK's constitutional government. In addition, the appointment of the government's nominee for Supreme Court Chief Justice was rejected, and for about two and a half months the position of Supreme Court Chief Justice remained vacant for the first time in about 35 years.

The term of office for the current National Assembly concluded at the end of May 2024, with a general election for National Assembly members being held in April. Both the ruling and opposition parties have been moving towards the elections in earnest since the end of 2023.

#### (B) Foreign Policy

President Yoon has promoted active summit diplomacy, including visiting foreign countries with the goal of becoming a "Global Pivotal State (GPS) that contributes to freedom, peace, and prosperity." Since his inauguration and until the end of October 2023, President Yoon held 142 summit meetings with 93 countries.

As for relations with the U.S., President Yoon visited the U.S. for a State Visit from April 24 to 30 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the U.S.-ROK Alliance. This was the first State Visit to the U.S. by an ROK President in about 12 years since President Lee Myung-bak. President Yoon held a Summit Meeting

with President Joseph Biden, and after the meeting, in addition to releasing a Leaders' Joint Statement, the Washington Declaration was also released to strengthen extended deterrence for the ROK. As a result, the U.S.-ROK Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) was established in July. In addition to the above, the following statements were also released on the occasion of President Yoon's visit to the U.S.: "Joint Statement of the U.S. and the ROK on Cooperation in Quantum Information Science and Technologies," "ROK-U.S. Joint Statement on Launching the Next Generation Critical and Emerging Technologies Dialogue," "Strategic Cybersecurity Cooperation Framework between the ROK and the U.S.," "Joint Statement from the Presidents of the U.S. and the ROK on the Identification of Medal of Honor Recipient from Korean War," and "Joint Statement of Intent for Cooperation on Space Exploration and Science." During his visit, President Yoon also visited the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Goddard Space Flight Center, gave an address to the U.S. Congress, and delivered a speech at Harvard University. President Yoon also held an ROK-U.S. Summit Meeting with President Biden on the occasion of the Japan-U.S.-ROK Summit Meeting held at Camp David in August.

In terms of relations with China, President Yoon had his first meeting with State Council Premier Li Qiang on the occasion of the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings in September. Later that month, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo visited China, the first visit by a Prime Minister in four and a half years, to attend the opening ceremony of the Asian Games Hangzhou, and took this opportunity to meet with President Xi Jinping. In November, the ROK hosted a Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Busan for the first time in about four years, with Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi visiting the ROK to attend this meeting and then holding a China-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

#### (C) Economy

In 2023, the GDP growth rate in the ROK fell from 2.6% to 1.4% in comparison to the previous year. The total amount of exports decreased by 7.4% year-on-year to approximately 632.7 billion U.S. dollars, and the total amount of imports decreased by 12.1%



year-on-year to approximately 642.7 billion U.S. dollars. Although this was a trade deficit for a second consecutive year, the deficit amounted to approximately 10 billion U.S. dollars, which was smaller than the record high deficit of approximately 47.8 billion U.S. dollars in 2022 (figures published by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy).

At the time of its inauguration in May 2022, the Yoon administration announced economic policies based on four pillars: “A dynamic economy that puts the private sector at its core,” “An economy that pushes toward economic leaps by addressing structural issues,” “A leading economy that prepares for the future,” and “An inclusive economy that moves forward together.” In 2022, the “new Regime’s Energy Policy” and the “Semiconductor Superpower Strategy” were released, and the ROK is proceeding with economic policies based on these documents. In the private sector, in September 2023, the Federation of Korean Industries (FKI) announced that, in order to eliminate influence from the issue in 2016 when FKI companies donated large amounts of money to a foundation associated with a friend of former President Park Geun-hye, (at the time, numerous member companies, including the four major groups (Samsung, Hyundai Motor, SK, and LG) withdrew from the FKI), it changed itself and its Korean name to “correct an organizational culture that allowed political and economic collusion in the past,” and at this time the main companies of the four major groups that had previously withdrawn from the FKI once again became member companies.

In recent years, the ROK has had a rapidly declining birthrate and aging population. In 2023, the total fertility rate was a record low of 0.72 children per woman, making the declining birthrate issue all the more serious.

## **B Japan-ROK Relations**

### **(A) Bilateral Relations**

2023 was a year of major developments in Japan-ROK relations.

The ROK is an important neighboring country with which Japan should cooperate as partners in dealing with various issues of the international community. In particular, under the current severe international environment, Japan and the ROK need to deepen coordination and expand the scope of cooperation across a variety of areas in order to secure their mutual interest in regional peace and stability.

The two countries have built a close, friendly and cooperative relationship based on the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, the Agreement on the Settlement of Problem concerning Property and Claims and on the Economic Co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea, and other relevant agreements that the two countries concluded when they normalized their relationship in 1965, but bilateral relations had been severely strained over the past several years, particularly due to the issue of former civilian workers from the Korean Peninsula (CWKs). However, since the change in administration in the ROK, and the inauguration of the Yoon Suk Yeol administration in 2022, close communication between the two countries’ Foreign Ministries has taken place, including between the foreign ministers. Subsequently, on March 6, 2023, the Government of the ROK announced its position on the issue of CWKs. In response, on the same day, the Government of Japan released a comment by Foreign Minister Hayashi<sup>9</sup>, stating that it values the measures announced by the Government of the ROK, as a move toward restoring Japan-ROK relations, which had been severely strained due to the ROK Supreme Court ruling in 2018, to a sound footing, and Japan-ROK relations have turned around.

On March 16, just 10 days after the measures were announced, President Yoon visited Japan<sup>10,11</sup> in the first bilateral visit by the ROK President in about 12 years. At the Japan-ROK Summit Meeting, the leaders concurred to resume “shuttle diplomacy,” in which both leaders frequently visit each other without being bound by formality, and also agreed on the early resumption

<sup>9</sup> See References on the Issue of Former Civilian Workers from the Korean Peninsula (CWKs)

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs website explaining President Yoon’s visit to Japan on March 16 and 17: [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/na/kr/page1e\\_000593.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page1e_000593.html)

<sup>11</sup> Prime Minister’s Office website on the March 16 Japan-ROK joint press conference: [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101\\_kishida/statement/202303/\\_00010.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202303/_00010.html)

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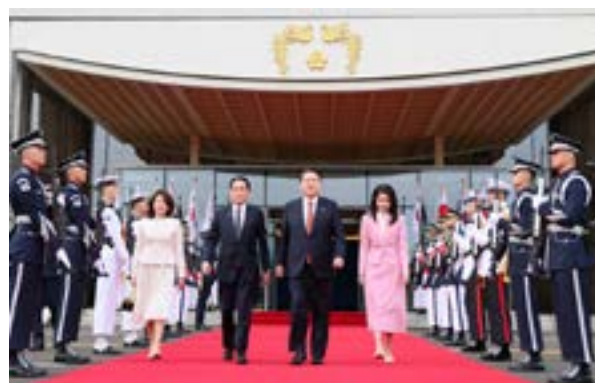


of the Japan-ROK Security Dialogue and the Japan-ROK Vice-Ministerial Strategic Dialogue as well as the launch of a bilateral consultation on economic security. Furthermore, the two leaders welcomed the progress made in the area of export control.

Following this, Prime Minister Kishida visited the ROK on May 7, the first bilateral visit by a Prime Minister of Japan in approximately 12 years.<sup>12</sup> At the Summit Meeting with President Yoon, the two leaders confirmed that dialogue and cooperation between the two governments were moving forward in a wide range of areas, as well as the robust resurgence of bilateral exchanges in the business sector and the robustness seen in private sector exchanges and parliamentary exchanges, and welcomed the fact that the improvement of the Japan-ROK relations is on track. Regarding the ALPS treated water, Prime Minister Kishida stated that Japan will continue to provide the ROK with explanations based on scientific evidence in a highly transparent and sincere manner, and the two leaders concurred on the dispatch of a delegation of ROK experts to TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

Subsequently, on the occasion of the G7 Hiroshima Summit in May, President Yoon visited Japan again, and the two leaders continued to deepen their trust. They visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and offered prayers together at the Cenotaph for the Victims of the ROK atomic bombing victims.

Throughout 2023, a total of seven Japan-ROK Summit Meetings took place taking the opportunities of the NATO Summit Meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania in July, the Japan-U.S.-ROK Summit Meeting at Camp David in the U.S. in August, the G20 New Delhi Summit in New Delhi, India in September, and the APEC Leaders' Meeting in San Francisco, U.S. in November. Through these frequent exchanges, Prime Minister Kishida and President Yoon have been driving the development of Japan-ROK cooperation in a variety of fields and have been promoting efforts for their mutual interest which is ensuring regional peace and stability. Furthermore, in San Francisco, the two



Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the ROK (official welcome ceremony) (May 8, Seoul, ROK; Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

leaders appeared together at a Summit discussion held at Stanford University and discussed cooperation in the field of advanced science and technology. During the same period, communication between the Foreign Ministers also took place extremely frequently, with six face-to-face meetings and three telephone calls. In particular, regarding the protection of Japanese nationals living overseas, close cooperation was made possible based on exchanges between the Foreign Ministers in support of evacuations and departures from Sudan and Israel. Intergovernmental dialogue has become significantly more active, including ministerial-level contacts across a wide range of areas including finance, aviation, ICT, tourism, trade, energy, culture, and the environment. Moreover, there has been progress on a wide range of cooperation between Japan and the ROK, including active economic and business exchanges, a recovery in the number of flights, and expanded cooperation in the fields of finance and energy.

Given the severe security environment in the Indo-Pacific, close cooperation between the two countries is necessary now more than ever. As Japan-ROK relations get back on track and continue to improve, a variety of issues in the international arena were discussed at summit meetings and foreign ministers' meetings, including the Indo-Pacific, North Korea, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the Israel-Palestine situation, where they confirmed that they will further enhance coordination on global issues.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs website explaining Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the ROK on May 7 and 8: [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/na/kr/page1e\\_000658.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page1e_000658.html)





### (B) The Issue of Former Civilian Workers from the Korean Peninsula (CWKs)

The Government of Japan is of the view that it is necessary to advance Japan-ROK relations based on the platform on which the friendly and cooperative bilateral relations have been built since the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1965, and that the issue of CWKs, which was ruled on by the ROK Supreme Court in 2018, needs to be resolved to that end. Based on this recognition, the Foreign Ministry engaged in close communication with their ROK counterpart including at the Ministerial level since the inauguration of the Yoon Suk Yeol administration in May 2022.

On March 6, 2023, the Government of the ROK announced its position on the issue of CWKs, and a ROK foundation will pay court-awarded fees and late charges to the plaintiffs in the three 2018 final judgements by the ROK Supreme Court.

In response, on the same day, Foreign Minister Hayashi made public the view of the Government of Japan, stating that it values the measures announced by the ROK government as a move toward restoring Japan-ROK relations, which had been severely strained due to the ROK Supreme Court ruling in 2018, to a sound footing; that the Government of Japan will enhance Japan-ROK and Japan-ROK-U.S. coordination; that the Government of Japan confirms that it upholds in its entirety the positions of the previous Cabinets on history, including the “Japan-ROK Joint Statement” issued in October 1998; and that the Government of Japan hopes to see a robust expansion of political, economic and cultural exchanges between the two countries, together with the implementation of the announced measures.<sup>13</sup> The U.S., Australia, the UK, the European Union (EU), Germany, Canada, the UN, and others publicly welcomed the announcements made by the Government of the ROK and the Government of Japan.

In April, the Government of the ROK announced that it had made payments to 10 plaintiffs. Later, at the Japan-ROK Summit joint press conference during Prime Minister Kishida’s visit to the ROK in May, he said, “As efforts by the Government of the ROK have progressed, I was moved by the fact that many people

opened their hearts for the future, even though they have not forgotten the painful memories of the past. My own heart aches for the fact that many people experienced tremendous pain and suffering under harsh conditions at the time.”

Subsequently, another payment was made to one plaintiff in July. The Government of the ROK has expressed its intention to continue to make the utmost efforts to gain the understanding of the plaintiffs, and the Government of Japan will continue to maintain close communication with the ROK side.

Meanwhile, in December 2023 and January 2024, the ROK Supreme Court rendered final judgments in multiple similar lawsuits and followed the 2018 judgement in ordering Japanese companies to pay compensation. On these judgements, as well as on a case in February 2024 where a deposit previously paid by a Japanese company to the ROK court was handed over to the plaintiffs, the Government of Japan has lodged protests to the ROK government that these are extremely regrettable and totally unacceptable. In its announcement of the measures on March 6, 2023, the Government of the ROK has stated that a ROK foundation will pay the judgement court-awarded fees and late charges in the event that other currently pending CWK-related lawsuits (at the time of the announcement) end in favor of the plaintiffs.

The below Ministry of Foreign Affairs website details the issue of CWKs.

[https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/na/kr/page4e\\_000947.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000947.html)



### (C) The Issue of Comfort Women

Japan has sincerely dealt with the issue of comfort women as it has been a major diplomatic issue between Japan and the ROK since the 1990s. The issue concerning property and claims between Japan and the ROK was settled “completely and finally” in 1965 through the Agreement on the Settlement of Problem concerning Property and Claims and on the Economic Co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea. However, from the perspective of facilitating

<sup>13</sup> See References on the Issue of Former Civilian Workers from the Korean Peninsula (CWKs)



feasible remedies for the former comfort women, in 1995, the people and the Government of Japan cooperated to establish the Asian Women's Fund in 1995, through which they carried out medical and welfare projects and provided "atonement money" to each former comfort woman in Asian and other countries, including the ROK. Furthermore, successive Prime Ministers have sent letters expressing their "apology and remorse" to former comfort women.

Furthermore, as a result of great diplomatic efforts, the Governments of Japan and the ROK confirmed that the issue of comfort women was "resolved finally and irreversibly" with the agreement reached at the Japan-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting in December 2015. Directly after this Japan-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the Japanese and ROK leaders also confirmed that they would take responsibility as leaders to implement this agreement and that they would deal with various issues based on the spirit of this agreement, and that the Government of the ROK committed to the agreement. This agreement was welcomed by the international community, including then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the U.S. Government. In accordance with the agreement, in August 2016, the Government of Japan contributed 1 billion Japanese yen to "the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation" established by the Government of the ROK. As of December 31, 2023, the fund provided financial support to 35 out of 47 former comfort women who were alive at the time of the agreement, and to the bereaved families of 65 out of 199 former comfort women who were deceased at the time. The agreement has been received positively by many former comfort women.

However, in December 2016, a comfort woman statue<sup>14</sup> was installed on the sidewalk facing the Consulate-General of Japan in Busan. Later, the Moon Jae-in administration was inaugurated in May 2017. Based on the results of the assessment made by the Taskforce to Review the Agreement on Comfort Women Issue under the direct supervision of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ROK, the position of the Government of the ROK on the issue of comfort

women was announced to be as follows: i) it will not ask for a renegotiation with Japan; and ii) the 2015 agreement, which fails to properly reflect the wishes of the victims, does not constitute a true resolution of the issue. In November 2018, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family announced that it would proceed with its dissolution of "the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation" and has since moved ahead with the dissolution procedures. The moves to dissolve the Foundation are totally unacceptable for Japan in light of the 2015 Japan-ROK Agreement.

Moreover, on January 8, 2021, in the lawsuit filed by former comfort women and others against the Government of Japan, the Seoul Central District Court of the Republic of Korea rendered a judgment which ordered the Government of Japan, *inter alia*, to pay compensation to the plaintiffs, denying the application of the principle of State immunity under international law. On January 23, 2021, this judgment was confirmed.<sup>15</sup> On April 21 of the same year, in a similar lawsuit filed by former comfort women and others, the Seoul Central District Court dismissed the case, taking into account the principle of State immunity under international law, but on November 23, 2023, at the appeal in this case, the Seoul High Court rendered a judgement denying the application of the principle of State immunity under international law and allowing the plaintiff's lawsuit. Japan has repeatedly expressed its position that this lawsuit must be dismissed because for these comfort women lawsuits it is not acceptable for the Government of Japan to be subject to the jurisdiction of the ROK in accordance with the principle of State immunity in international law. As mentioned above, the issue concerning property and claims between Japan and the ROK, including the issue of comfort women, was "settled completely and finally," with the Agreement on the Settlement of Problem concerning Property and Claims and on the Economic Co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea of 1965. Furthermore, it was confirmed that the issue of comfort women was "resolved finally and irreversibly" with the agreement between Japan and the ROK in 2015. Therefore, these judgments are extremely

<sup>14</sup> For the sake of practical convenience, they are referred to as "comfort woman statues." However, the use of this term is not a reflection of the recognition that these statues correctly embody the reality of those women at that time.

<sup>15</sup> See References on the Issue of Comfort Women



regrettable and absolutely unacceptable, as it is clearly contrary to international law and agreements between the two countries. Japan has strongly urged the ROK to immediately take appropriate measures to remedy the status of its breaches of international law on its own responsibility as a country.

The Japan-ROK agreement in 2015 is an agreement between two countries, and abiding by promises made between two countries is the foundation of bilateral relations. The ROK has a responsibility to the international community to steadily implement the agreement. As stated above, the Government of Japan has implemented all measures it committed to under the Japan-ROK agreement. The Government of the ROK itself also acknowledges that this agreement is an official agreement between the two governments, and the Government of Japan will continue to strongly urge the ROK to steadily implement the Japan-ROK Agreement (See page 40 for the comfort women issue in the international community).

The below Ministry of Foreign Affairs website details Japan's Efforts on the Issue of Comfort Women.

[https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/postwar/page22e\\_000883.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/postwar/page22e_000883.html)



#### (D) Takeshima

Regarding the dispute between Japan and the ROK concerning the territorial sovereignty over Takeshima, Takeshima is indisputably an inherent territory of Japan both in light of historical facts and based on international law. However, the ROK has continued its illegal occupation of Takeshima with no legal basis

in international law, including stationing permanent security personnel. Japan has been keeping the world informed about Japan's position on the issue through various media platforms.<sup>16</sup> Japan has also repeatedly lodged strong protests against the ROK over matters such as South Korean citizens including members of the ROK's National Assembly landing on the island, and the ROK's military exercises and marine surveys in and around Takeshima. In 2023, military exercises were conducted on and around Takeshima and members of the ROK National Assembly landed on Takeshima. The Government of Japan considers these activities unacceptable in view of Japan's position and lodged strong protests.<sup>17</sup> Japan will continue to respond resolutely based on Japan's basic position regarding Takeshima.

For a peaceful settlement of the Takeshima dispute, Japan proposed to the ROK that the issue be referred to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1954, 1962 and 2012. However, the ROK rejected the proposal in all instances. Japan is determined to continue to engage in persistent diplomatic efforts to settle the Takeshima dispute in a peaceful manner in accordance with international law.

#### (E) Update on Licensing Policies and Procedures on Exports of Controlled Items to the ROK

With regard to issues concerning export control between Japan and the ROK,<sup>18</sup> on March 6, 2023, the Government of Japan and the Government of the ROK announced that they would hold a Japan-Korea Export Control Policy Dialogue so as to return to a pre-July 2019 state, and the Government of the ROK decided to suspend the WTO dispute settlement procedures during the Dialogue. On March 16, the ROK

<sup>16</sup> In February 2008, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a pamphlet entitled "Takeshima: 10 points to understand the Takeshima Dispute." It is available on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website in 11 languages: Japanese, English, Korean, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, Chinese and Italian. Furthermore, since October 2013, videos and flyers about Takeshima have been available on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website, and they are currently available in the above 11 languages. Furthermore, Japan has taken initiatives such as distributing a smartphone app that aims to increase awareness of the Takeshima issue. Further details are available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs here: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/takeshima/index.html>

<sup>17</sup> In May, Democratic Party of Korea lawmaker Jeon Yong-gi landed on the island. ROK armed forces conducted military training related to Takeshima in June and December 2023. The Government of Japan immediately conveyed to the Government of the ROK that such an act was unacceptable and extremely regrettable in light of Japan's position on sovereignty over Takeshima, and strongly protested against the act.

<sup>18</sup> On September 11, 2019, the Government of the ROK requested bilateral consultations with Japan under the World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute settlement procedures, claiming the update by the Government of Japan of the operation of measures related to Japan's export to the ROK of three items for semiconductors (fluorinated polyimide, resist and hydrogen fluoride), and the system for requiring individual export licenses, is in breach of the WTO Agreements. The Government of the ROK announced on November 22, 2019, that it suspended the effect of the notification of termination of the Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Korea on the Protection of Classified Military Information (GSOMIA), and in doing so said that it would also suspend its WTO dispute settlement procedures while the Japan-ROK Export Control Policy Dialogue would be held as normal. Subsequently Export Control Policy Dialogues were held in December 2019 and March 2020. However, the Government of the ROK resumed WTO dispute settlement procedures in June 2020, and the WTO Dispute Settlement Body decided to establish a panel in July 2020.





announced that it would withdraw its complaint to the WTO dispute settlement procedure regarding Japan's export control measures, and on the same day, Japan decided to revise its operation on the exports of three semiconductor-related items (fluorinated polyimide, resist and hydrogen fluoride) to the ROK applying the Special General Bulk Export License system (the circular notice was revised on March 23).<sup>19</sup>

Subsequently, in April, the Government of the ROK restored Japan to its "whitelist (countries with preferential treatment for export screenings)," and in July, Japan added the ROK to "Group A" under its Export Trade Control Order, after the public comment procedures and a Cabinet Decision.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the export control authorities in Japan and the ROK signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on a follow-up framework to take appropriate measures, including revision of their respective systems and operations.<sup>21</sup>

### (F) Exchanges and Travel

In 2018, the number of people making visits between the two countries was approximately 10.49 million people, but since early 2020, travel between Japan and the ROK significantly decreased due to the strengthening of border measures related to the spread of COVID-19, and in 2021, approximately only 30,000 people made trips between the two countries. In 2022, due to visa exemption measures resuming in both countries and the resumption of flights between Japan and the ROK including the Haneda-Gimpo route, the number of travelers has gone up with the number of visitors between Japan and the ROK reaching about 1.31 million people. In 2023, the number of travelers between Japan and the ROK increased significantly to approximately 9.27 million people as border control measures were lifted, and airline service between Japan and the ROK was restored to pre-COVID-19 levels.

In Japan, K-POP and related content is widely accepted mainly among younger generations, and

Korean dramas and movies have become widely popular amongst people of all ages. In 2023, the major Japan-ROK grassroots exchange program "Japan-Korea Exchange Festival" (Nikkan Koryu Omatsuri) was held in person in both Tokyo and Seoul, with a total of approximately 116,000 people from both countries participating. The Government of Japan works on promoting mutual understanding, primarily between Japanese and ROK youth, and building a friendly and cooperative relationship for the future through Japan's Friendship Ties Programs (JENESYS 2023). Since FY2020, online exchanges continued even when face-to-face exchanges were halted due to the spread of COVID-19, and in 2022 face-to-face exchange programs were partially resumed. In 2023, in light of the improvements in Japan-ROK relations, the two governments decided to fully resume face-to-face exchange programs in order to double the number of exchanges compared to the previous year, and are working to revitalize exchanges between the youth generation, who represent the future of both countries.

### (G) Other Issues

The Governments of Japan and the ROK concluded the Agreement on the Protection of Classified Military Information (GSOMIA) in November 2016 in order to strengthen cooperation and coordination between the two countries in the field of security and contribute to regional peace and stability. Afterwards, the agreement was automatically extended in 2017 and 2018. However, the Government of the ROK announced on August 22, 2019, its decision to terminate the GSOMIA in connection with Japan's update of licensing policies and procedures on exports (see (E) above) and notified the termination on the following day, August 23. Following this and after exchanges between Japan and the ROK, on November 22, 2019, the Government of the ROK announced that it would suspend the effect of the notification of termination

<sup>19</sup> See the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry website dated March 23, 2023, regarding the circular about the partial amendment of "Operation of the Cabinet Order on Export Trade Control": [https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2023/0323\\_001.html](https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2023/0323_001.html)

<sup>20</sup> See the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry website dated June 27, 2023, regarding the Cabinet Order to partially amend the Export Trade Control Order: [https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2023/0627\\_004.html](https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2023/0627_004.html)

<sup>21</sup> See the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry website dated July 11, 2023, regarding the Japan-Korea Export Control Policy Dialogue: [https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2023/0711\\_001.html](https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2023/0711_001.html)

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of August 23. On March 21, 2023, immediately after President Yoon's visit to Japan, the Government of the ROK officially notified that it would withdraw its notification of August 2019 to terminate the Japan-ROK GSOMIA. In view of the current regional security environment, the Government of Japan considers it important for the Agreement to continue operating in a stable manner.

Sea of Japan is the only internationally established name for the sea area concerned, and the UN and governments of major countries such as the U.S. adopt Sea of Japan as the official name. Objections to this name, however, were first raised by the ROK and North Korea in 1992. Since then, the ROK and North Korea have been objecting to the name at the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN),<sup>22</sup> the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and other international conferences. These assertions however are groundless, and Japan has firmly refuted these assertions each time they arise.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Japan has been urging the Government of the ROK through its diplomatic channels to return cultural properties that were stolen and are currently in the ROK<sup>24</sup> to Japan as soon as possible, and Japan will continue to take appropriate steps.

Japan has provided support and taken measures as much as possible from a humanitarian perspective in various fields, including responses for ethnic Koreans in Sakhalin,<sup>25</sup> addressing the issue of atomic bomb survivors living in the ROK,<sup>26</sup> and helping Hansen's disease patients admitted to sanitariums in the ROK.<sup>27</sup>

## C Economy

The total value of trade between the two countries amounted to approximately 10.90 trillion Japanese yen in 2023. Japan is the ROK's fourth largest trading partner, and the ROK is Japan's fifth largest trading partner. The ROK's trade deficit with Japan decreased by approximately 18.2% from a year earlier, reaching approximately 2.20 trillion Japanese yen (Trade Statistics of Japan, Ministry of Finance). Japanese direct investment in the ROK totaled approximately 1.30 billion U.S. dollars (down 14.7% from the previous year) (figures published by the ROK Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy), making Japan the ROK's fourth largest source of foreign direct investment (excluding the Cayman Islands from the ranking). Japan and the ROK also cooperate together as parties to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement and as members of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), and work together in various economic frameworks, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In December, the 15th Japan-ROK High-Level Economic Consultations were held for the first time in about eight years to discuss a wide range of topics, including bilateral economic relations and the international economic situation.

As for import restrictions on Japanese food products by the Government of the ROK, Japan is taking various opportunities to urge the ROK to remove the restrictions as soon as possible.

<sup>22</sup> A UN conference where experts on place names and geospatial information from each country discuss, from a technical point of view, the definitions of terms related to place names and the notation methods for place names. In 2017, the UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Name, which had been held every five years, and the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names, which had been held every two years, were integrated into the United Nations Group of Experts on Place Names (UNGEGN).

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs website detailing the issue of the name of the "Sea of Japan": <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/maritime/japan/index.html>

<sup>24</sup> After being stolen in Tsushima City, Nagasaki Prefecture in 2012 and shipped to the ROK, the "Kanzeon Bosatsu Statue" was collected and stored by the Government of the ROK. A Korean temple asserting ownership of the statue has filed a claim seeking to have the Government of the ROK hand over the statue, and in January 2017 the Daejeon District Court issued a verdict of the first hearing to the plaintiff's side (the Korean temple), but in February 2023 the Daejeon High Court reversed the initial ruling and dismissed the plaintiff's claim. The plaintiffs have made an appeal, but in October 2023 the Supreme Court dismissed the appeal.

<sup>25</sup> For various reasons, before the end of World War II, people from the Korean Peninsula traveled to what was then known as Minami Karafuto (South Sakhalin) and were compelled to remain there for a long time after the war ended under the de facto rule of the Soviet Union, without being given the opportunity to return to the ROK. The Government of Japan is providing such people with support, such as to enable them to return home temporarily and to visit Sakhalin.

<sup>26</sup> This is the issue of provision of support to those who were exposed to the atomic bombs while living in Hiroshima or Nagasaki during World War II and subsequently went to live overseas. To date, Japan has provided support in the form of the Atomic Bomb Victim Health Handbook and allowances based on the Atomic Bombs Survivors' Assistance Act.

<sup>27</sup> In February 2006, the "Act on Payment of Compensation to Inmates of Hansen's Disease Sanatorium" was amended, and former residents of Hansen's disease sanatoriums outside of Japan, which were established by Japan before the end of World War II, were made eligible for compensation, similar to former residents of domestic sanatoriums. Additionally, in November 2019, the "Act on Payment of Compensation to Families of Former Patients of Hansen's Disease" was enacted, and the families of former Hansen's disease patients were also made eligible for compensation.

23





## 4 Southeast Asia

### (1) Indonesia

Indonesia is a major country in the Southeast Asia region with the fourth largest population in the world (at approximately 270 million people) and situated in a strategic location on sea lanes such as the Strait of Malacca. Indonesia plays a leading role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Indonesia was the ASEAN Chair for 2023) and has often been taking the initiative in efforts to address various challenges in the regional and international community while serving as the sole G20 member from ASEAN.

President Joko's second administration, which started in October 2019, is a stable administration where the ruling parties coalition occupies approximately 82% of the seats in the House of Representatives. This administration's priorities are (a) infrastructure development, (b) human resources development, (c) investment promotion, (d) bureaucratic reforms, and (e) appropriate execution of the state budget. Due to the impacts of COVID-19, Indonesia's economic growth rate, which had been maintained consistently at around 5% until then, recorded negative growth in 2020, but returned to positive growth of 5.3% in 2022. Japan is actively promoting cooperation in infrastructure development and human resources development, which are priorities of the second Joko administration.

2023 marked the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Indonesia. In May, President Joko Widodo visited Japan on the occasion of the G7 Hiroshima Summit and held a bilateral summit meeting, and in September Prime Minister Kishida visited Indonesia on the occasion of the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings and held a bilateral summit meeting. At the September Summit Meeting, in light of the comprehensive and continued developments of the Japan-Indonesia Strategic Partnership and in commemoration of the 65th anniversary of the Indonesia-Japan diplomatic relations as well as the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, the two leaders concurred to elevate the partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. In December, President Joko visited Japan and,



Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers' Meeting (March 6, Tokyo)

together with Prime Minister Kishida, co-chaired the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, and the two leaders also had a bilateral summit meeting and confirmed an agreement in principle on the substantially concluded negotiations to amend the Japan-Indonesia Economic Partnership Agreement. In March, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a Foreign Ministers' Meeting (Japan-Indonesia Ministerial-Level Strategic Dialogue) with Minister for Foreign Affairs Retno L.P. Marsudi, who was visiting Japan as a guest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in September Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the occasion of the UN General Assembly. At these summit meetings and foreign ministers' meetings, both countries closely exchanged views on the strengthening of bilateral relations as well as cooperation in addressing various issues in the region and the international community (See the Column on page 73).

### (2) Cambodia

Cambodia, located in the Mekong region, is a key country in strengthening connectivity and narrowing the development gap in the region. Cambodia had been averaging approximately 7% growth for the past 20 years, and, although GDP growth in 2020 was negative due to the impacts of COVID-19, in 2022 it returned to positive growth at 5.0%.

In terms of domestic affairs, the general election held in July saw the ruling Cambodian People's Party win a landslide victory after the Candlelight Party, which had become the largest opposition party in the 2022 commune council elections, was denied the right to register its candidates. Hun Sen, who had served as Cambodia's



## COLUMN

## Visit by Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress to Indonesia

Following a long-standing invitation, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress visited Indonesia from June 17 to 23 as their first international goodwill visit since the accession to the Throne. The year 2023 was a historic milestone, marking not only the 65th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Indonesia, but also the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. The visit by Their Majesties to Indonesia in such a memorable year demonstrated to Japan and beyond the deep friendly relations between the two countries.

Their Majesties received a grand welcome from President Joko Widodo and the First Lady, as well as officials of the Government of Indonesia, at a welcoming event and Luncheon at Bogor Palace. Before the Luncheon, President Joko himself drove a cart for Their Majesties to Bogor Botanical Garden, which Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita also had visited in 1991. Their Majesties received a cordial welcome as the President and First Lady guided them around the garden. Their Majesties also met and talked about exchanges between the two countries with local Japanese residents and Indonesians with ties to Japan, and had friendly exchanges with the younger generation via a visit to Darma Persada University and a vocational high school.



Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress responding to the media with President Joko and the First Lady at Bogor Palace (June 19, Bogor, Indonesia; Photo: Indonesian Presidential Palace)



His Majesty the Emperor heads to the banquet venue with Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono X (the Governor of Yogyakarta Special Region) at Kraton Palace (June 21, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; Photo: Kraton Palace of Yogyakarta)

His Majesty the Emperor is deeply interested in water issues and visited related facilities such as the Pluit Pumping Station in Jakarta, which was developed with Japanese cooperation, and the Sabo Technical Center in the ancient city of Yogyakarta, where he enthusiastically spoke about issues such as flood control with those involved. In Yogyakarta, His Majesty received a warm welcome from Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, the Governor of Yogyakarta Special Region, whom Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita met in 1991, and other members of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta. His Majesty also visited Borobudur Temple, a World Heritage Site located near Yogyakarta.

During the visit, Their Majesties received a warm welcome at various locations not just from officials of the Government of

Indonesia, but also by the Indonesian people at large, as they waved the national flags of both countries. This visit provided an opportunity to reaffirm the history of exchanges and cooperation between Japan and Indonesia, and to further deepen the friendly and cooperative relationship that both countries have cultivated over the years, including through exchanges with the younger generation. It is expected to play a bridging role between the two countries.



Prime Minister for many years, stepped down from his post, and a new Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Hun Manet was formed in August 2023.

Japan has cooperated with Cambodia's peace, reconstruction, and development efforts, including in the first full-scale deployment of UN peacekeeping operations (PKO) in 1992. Moreover, in recent years, investment by Japanese companies has progressed smoothly and economic relations have expanded, and cooperation is also progressing in new fields such as security and digital technologies.

2023 marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Cambodia, and the relationship between the two countries has been elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (See the Column on page 75). In September, Prime Minister Kishida and Prime Minister Hun Manet held their first Summit Meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia, and the two leaders also met again during the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit that was held in Tokyo in December. At that time, the two leaders concurred on the list of cooperation items in the digital area that Japan proposed to the Cambodian side as the Co-Creation for Common Agenda Initiative, which was newly introduced in the Development Cooperation Charter approved by the Cabinet in June, and also confirmed their intention to accelerate cooperation in improving communication networks and cybersecurity measures, which are essential for the development of the digital economy, and attended signing ceremonies for seven bilateral cooperation documents, including in digital and energy areas. Furthermore, at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting in January, the Foreign Ministers' telephone call in October, and the Foreign Ministers' Meeting in December, the two ministers confirmed that Japan and Cambodia would cooperate in the regional and international arenas.

### (3) Singapore

Singapore is the most economically advanced country within ASEAN. Based on its omnidirectional foreign policy, the country maintains friendly relations with major countries including the U.S. and China.

In Singapore, the People's Action Party (PAP), led by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, holds more than

90% of the seats from the 2020 general elections, and, with the basis of a stable political situation, has been pursuing policies to address the aging population, unemployment, and housing. In April 2022, the PAP chose Minister of Finance Lawrence Wong as a candidate for the next Prime Minister. In November 2023, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that he would step down and hand over power to Minister of Finance Wong by November 21, 2024, the 70th anniversary of the PAP.

Regarding Japan-Singapore relations, Prime Minister Kishida visited Singapore in May, and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong visited Japan in December during the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, following mutual visits between the leaders of Japan and Singapore since the previous year. On these occasions, summit meetings were held, and views were exchanged on further strengthening bilateral relations and on the various issues facing the region and the international community. The Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Singapore concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology was also signed in June.

The two countries have worked together to provide developing countries with technical assistance through the "Japan-Singapore Partnership Program for the 21st Century (JSPP21)," which was signed in 1997. To date, they have provided approximately 410 training courses with roughly 7,400 participants from ASEAN countries and other regions (as of the end of December 2023). The Japan Creative Centre (JCC), which was opened in Singapore in 2009 as a platform to promote Japanese culture, hosted a variety of outreaches and events.

### (4) Thailand

Thailand is one of the original member states of ASEAN, which was born from the "Bangkok Declaration" in 1967. It is located in the center of the Mekong region and is a geopolitically important country. Thailand has become a major production center for Japanese companies, including the automobile industry, and today Thailand is an indispensable part of the Japanese economy as a part of the global supply chain, with close to 6,000 Japanese companies operating in Thailand and more than 70,000 Japanese nationals living in Thailand.



## COLUMN

## The 70th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Cambodia



Japan and Cambodia established diplomatic relations in 1953. The following year, in 1954, Cambodia renounced its right to claim reparations from Japan for World War II, and in 1955 Japan invited His Majesty King Sihanouk (Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs) as a State Guest, passed a resolution of gratitude in the House of Representatives, and signed the Treaty of Amity between Japan and Cambodia.

Subsequently, there were periods when exchanges stagnated under the Khmer Rouge regime and during the civil war, but since the late 1980s, Japan's significant involvement in Cambodia's peace process has allowed the two countries to build a strong foundation of trust. Japan has contributed to Cambodia's nation building and reconstruction through the first deployment of Japan Self-Defense Forces in the UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) and development cooperation in diverse fields such as backbone infrastructure. Cambodia's 500 Riel banknote features the *Kizuna* Bridge and the *Tsubasa* Bridge, which were built with the support of the Government of Japan, along with the Japanese flag. In recent years, alongside Cambodia's economic growth, private sector investment has flourished and people-to-people exchanges have expanded in various fields, further deepening the relationship between the two countries.

In 2023, the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, Japan-Cambodia relations were upgraded to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership," and the public and private sectors worked together to carry out numerous commemorative events. To ensure that the 70th commemorative events were fruitful, an Executive Committee was established with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia and the Embassy of Japan in Cambodia taking the lead to coordinate closely. For the commemorative logo, the design by Sroeu Menglong was selected from among the many entries that were submitted. His design is based on the red and blue of the two countries' national flags, with the number 7 featuring a design known as "Jahva" that is used as a part of the roofs of Cambodian temples, and the number 0 featuring cherry blossoms (*Sakura*), Japan's national flower, inside, and the design was well received. The National Bank of Cambodia also issued a commemorative coin with the logo. In addition, about 70 commemorative events were carried out by private organizations in Cambodia.

On January 9, the anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, Prime Minister Kishida exchanged congratulatory messages with Prime Minister Hun Sen and Foreign Minister Hayashi with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn. Furthermore, later that month Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn visited Japan as a guest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a meaningful Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held. In September, a Japan-Cambodia Summit Meeting was held between Prime Minister Kishida and Prime Minister Hun Manet, who took office in August.

In February, the *Kizuna* Festival, Cambodia's largest event for introducing Japanese culture, was held, and singer and actress MINAMINO Yoko, serving as the goodwill ambassador from Japan for the "70th anniversary of Japan-Cambodia friendship," shared the stage with artist, song-writer and producer Laura Mam, the goodwill ambassador from Cambodia, thereby further enhancing the momentum for promoting friendship. The Embassy of Japan in Cambodia also held a Japanese speech contest, a *Tanabata* festival, and an orchestra performance to introduce Japanese culture and foster familiarity with Japan, all of which were great successes. Additionally, in cooperation with the media and academic institutions, Ambassador of Japan to Cambodia Ueno also gave a number of lectures on Japan-Cambodia relations. With the closing reception held in December, the 70th anniversary commemorative events closed as a resounding success. Japan will continue to work to further deepen the bilateral relationship as well as the bonds between the peoples of the two countries, which were strengthened throughout the year.



Japan-Cambodia Summit Meeting (September 7, Indonesia;  
Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)



*Kizuna* Festival (February 23, Phnom Penh, Cambodia)



2023 was a year of major changes in Thailand's domestic politics. Following the dissolution of the lower house of the National Legislative Assembly in March, a lower house election was held in May. As a result of the election, the former ruling and opposition parties formed a coalition framework before the election, Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin was elected from the Pheu Thai Party of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and a new government was inaugurated in September. Subsequently, high-level exchanges between Japan and Thailand were actively conducted to build relations with the new government. In October, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited four Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand (along with Brunei, Viet Nam, and Laos) on her first bilateral visit since assuming her position, and met with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Parnpree Bahiddha-nukara. In November, on the occasion of the APEC Leaders' Meeting that was held in San Francisco, U.S., Prime Minister Kishida held his first Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Srettha since the inauguration of the new administration in Thailand, and then once again met with Prime Minister Srettha when he visited Japan in December to attend the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, and the two leaders confirmed the strengthening of cooperation between the two countries in the economic field.

### **(5) Timor-Leste**

Timor-Leste, the first country that achieved independence in the 21st century, is strategically important in the Indo-Pacific region, and is situated in a critical sea lane between Australia and Indonesia. Japan established diplomatic relations with Timor-Leste upon its independence in 2002. In 2022, the country celebrated the 20th anniversary of its independence, has realized peace and stability with the support of the international community, and has been building the nation based on democracy. Elections for the National Parliament were held in May 2023, and a new government led by Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão was inaugurated in July. As its economy is highly dependent on natural resources such as petroleum and natural gas, the country has been working on industrial diversification as a matter of

the highest national priority. On the diplomatic front, Timor-Leste is continuing to work in coordination with relevant countries toward joining ASEAN and the WTO, and in May, ASEAN adopted a roadmap for Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN.

In July, State Minister for Foreign Affairs TAKEI Shunsuke became the first foreign ministerial-level official to visit Timor-Leste since the inauguration of the new Gusmão administration. During his visit, he conveyed his congratulations to Prime Minister Gusmão on assuming the office of Prime Minister and paid courtesy calls to President Jose Ramos-Horta and others. In September, Prime Minister Kishida held informal talks with Prime Minister Gusmão on the occasion of the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings, and conveyed that Japan would continue to support Timor-Leste's efforts to join ASEAN. In December, Prime Minister Kishida held a Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Gusmão, who was visiting Japan for the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, and expressed his intention to upgrade the bilateral relationship to a "Comprehensive Partnership toward Sustainable Growth and Development" and to further promote it. Additionally, in July, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Bendito dos Santos Freitas, where the two ministers exchanged views on bilateral relations and on various issues in the region and the international community. Japan has continued to support Timor-Leste since even before its independence, and has maintained good relations with the country. In August, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Government of Japan signed an Exchange of Notes on grant aid for the national broadcasting station in Timor-Leste, and in September, Kochi Prefecture began accepting technical intern trainees from Timor-Leste for the first time.

### **(6) The Philippines**

The Philippines is a maritime nation situated at a strategic point on sea lanes, and shares strategic interests with Japan. Although the Philippines' economy experienced negative growth in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19, in 2022 the country's economy recorded a growth rate of 7.6%, its highest in the past 46 years, making it one of the fastest growing economies in



Asia and the world. Now in his second year in office, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. continues to prioritize improving the quality of lives of the people through food, education, health, employment, and social security, as well as investments in public infrastructure. As for the Mindanao Peace Process, despite the delays seen in the decommissioning and disarmament work with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), based on the amended Bangsamoro Organic Law, the effort to conceive an autonomous government is continuing toward 2025. In July, President Marcos Jr. lifted the national state of emergency in the Mindanao region.

Since President Marcos's visit to Japan in February, there have been numerous high-level visits between Japan and the Philippines, and the strategic partnership is being further strengthened. In November, Prime Minister Kishida visited the Philippines for the first time since assuming the office of Prime Minister and held a Summit Meeting with President Marcos, and also delivered a policy speech to a joint session of the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives, which was the first such speech by a Prime Minister of Japan. In terms of security, the two countries signed and exchanged notes on the provision of a coastal radar system, which is the first Official Security Assistance (OSA) programme to be implemented since the establishment of OSA (See the Special Feature on page 219), and also concurred to begin negotiations on a Japan-Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA). Furthermore, with regard to economics and people-to-people exchanges, the 14th Meeting of the Japan-Philippines High Level Joint Committee on Infrastructure Development and Economic Cooperation was held in August, where there were discussions on how to strongly support the Philippines' entry into the upper-middle income states and its "Built, Better, More" infrastructure policy. In addition to these kinds of bilateral cooperation, Japan-U.S.-Philippines trilateral cooperation is also making strides, with discussions underway to solidify Japan-U.S.-Philippines cooperation, such as through the Trilateral Meeting Between the National Security Advisors of the U.S., Japan, and the Philippines in June; the Japan-U.S.-Philippines Foreign Ministers' Meetings in July and September; and the Japan-U.S.-Philippines leader's level informal talks in September.

## (7) Brunei

Its abundance in natural resources has enabled Brunei to realize a high economic standard and generous social welfare, and as such, the country enjoys political and economic stability. Under Brunei's constitutional monarchy, the Sultan concurrently serves as the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economy, Minister of Defense and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Located in the center of Southeast Asia, Brunei is one of the countries involved in the issue of the South China Sea and has adopted a balanced diplomacy built on the pillar of promoting ASEAN unity and centrality.

Brunei's economy is supported by natural gas production and oil refining ventures, but the Government of Brunei is aiming for economic diversification to avoid overreliance on energy resources.

Japan and Brunei established diplomatic relations in 1984, and the two countries are developing excellent bilateral relations in various areas. In October, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Brunei, where she had an audience with His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien; she also held a Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Minister for Foreign Affairs II Dato Seri Setia Haji Erywan bin Pehin Datu Pekerma Jaya Haji Mohd Yusof, and at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the two ministers exchanged views on bilateral cooperation and on various issues facing the region and the international community. In December, Prime Minister Kishida held a Summit Meeting with His Majesty Sultan Bolkiah, who was visiting Japan for the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, and exchanged views on deepening bilateral relations in



Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers' Meeting (October 9, Brunei)

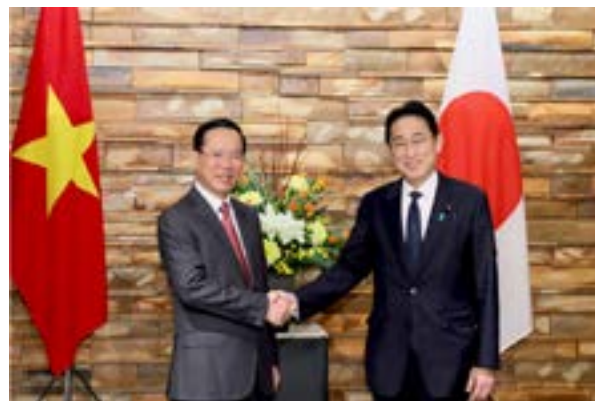


anticipation of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2024. Japan and Brunei are also continuing to build a close relationship between the imperial and royal families. Brunei is an important country for the stable energy supply to Japan. Around 70% of Brunei's liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports are bound for Japan, and LNG from Brunei makes up around 5% of the total LNG import to Japan.

### (8) Viet Nam

Located next to sea lanes in the South China Sea and sharing a long border with China, Viet Nam is a geopolitically important country. Given that the country embraces the third largest population in Southeast Asia, and is experiencing a surge in the number of people in middle-income brackets, Viet Nam is a promising market. At the same time, since the COVID-19 pandemic, the movement to diversify supply chains has been gaining momentum, and foreign firms, including Japanese companies, have continued moving their production bases to Viet Nam. The country is promoting GX (Green Transformation) and DX (Digital Transformation) with the aim of joining the ranks of developed countries by 2045 and of becoming carbon neutral by 2050, and is currently striving to achieve stable economic growth through the stabilization of the macroeconomy including control of inflation, the promotion of foreign investment by the development of infrastructure and the improvement of the investment environment. Viet Nam's economic growth rate from 2020 to 2021 fell to around the 2% level due to severe lockdowns caused by the spread of COVID-19, but, in 2022, it achieved an economic growth rate of 8.02% due to the shift to a "living with COVID-19" policy. Viet Nam's economic growth rate in 2023 is expected to be between 4.7% and 5.8%.

Japan and Viet Nam established diplomatic relations on September 21, 1973, and in 2023, the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, there were numerous visits by dignitaries, including visits to Japan by President Vo Van Thuong and his wife and by Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh (See the Column on page 79). In November, when President Thuong visited Japan, the two countries, which have been advancing cooperation in various fields, concurred to elevate the



Japan-Viet Nam Summit Meeting (November 27, Tokyo; Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

Viet Nam-Japan relationship to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia and the World," and issued a Joint Statement. At the Summit Meeting, the two leaders confirmed (a) the promotion of cooperation in the security field through defense exchanges, defense equipment and technology transfers, and Official Security Assistance (OSA), as well as further strengthening cooperation in the field of maritime security; (b) the promotion of cooperation in the fields of Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC), GX, and DX; cooperation in strengthening the resilience of supply chains through the development of supporting industries; and the expansion of the investment environment; (c) the promotion of cooperation to develop high-quality human resources and to resolve issues surrounding Vietnamese technical intern trainees, workers, and students. In addition, with regard to regional and international issues, the two leaders emphasized the importance of the principles of a free and open international order based on the rule of law and upholding the UN Charter. Regarding people-to-people exchanges, more than 500 commemorative events were held in both countries to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Viet Nam. In addition to the two countries respectively holding Viet Nam festivals and Japan festivals, in September "Princess Anio," an opera celebrating the 50th anniversary of Japan-Viet Nam diplomatic relations and based on the love story between Nagasaki merchant ARAKI Sotaro and Princess Ngoc Hoa, premiered in Viet Nam, and then in November a premiere performance was held in Japan. Furthermore, the number of Vietnamese residing in Japan, primarily



## The 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Viet Nam

The year 2023 marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Viet Nam. Since Japan and Viet Nam established diplomatic relations in September 1973, the relationship between the two countries has become closer than ever, and is now developing further in all areas, including politics, economy, and people-to-people exchanges.

Dating back, the friendly relationship between Japan and Viet Nam has been cultivated over a long history of exchanges that spans more than a thousand years. The first exchange began in the eighth century, when a Vietnamese Buddhist monk visited Japan. From the 16th to 17th century, trade routes were opened and the city of Hoi An, located in central Viet Nam, prospered as an international trading port, with visits by many trade vessels from Japan. A Japanese town was also built and flourished, with Japanese merchants living there. During the *Đông Du* (go-to-east-for-study) movement in the 19th century, many Vietnamese people came to Japan to study, and a strong friendship was fostered between the peoples of the two countries.

As such, exchanges between Japan and Viet Nam have been built over many years, and in recent years there have been a remarkable number of people-to-people exchanges. In 2012, there were about 50,000 Vietnamese people in Japan, and by 2022, this number had increased tenfold to about 500,000 Vietnamese people in Japan, spanning a diverse range of occupations, including technical intern trainees, people with specific skills, students, and nurses and care worker candidates under the Japan-Viet Nam Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA). With the declining birthrate and aging population in Japan, Vietnamese human resources are helping to support Japan's economy and society and are making great contributions. Currently, there are about 20,000 Japanese residents living in Viet Nam, working hand-in-hand with Vietnamese people and living lives that seamlessly blend into their local communities. Furthermore, there is very active traffic between the two countries: in 2019, about one million Japanese tourists visited Viet Nam, and about 500,000 Vietnamese tourists visited Japan. Thanks to this, Japanese manga and anime are popular among young people in Viet Nam, and Japanese foods such as *sushi* and *yakitori* are also popular, making Japan a familiar country to many Vietnamese people. In 2023, many cultural exchange events were also held in commemoration of the 50th anniversary, thereby providing even more opportunities to learn more about each other's culture for Japanese and Vietnamese people.

High-level visits between the two countries have also frequently been taking place since Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet's visit to Japan in 1993. In 2017, Viet Nam was the last country that Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita visited as Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress.

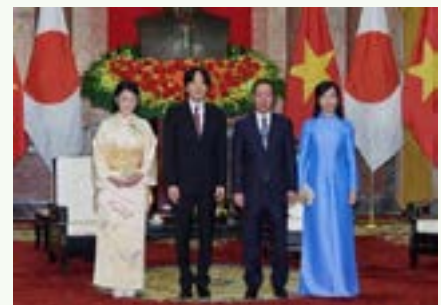
In 2023, Japan was visited by President Vo Van Thuong and his spouse (on an Official Visit in November) and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh (for the G7 Outreach Meeting in May and for the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation in December). Many dignitaries from Japan also visited Viet Nam in 2023, including Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino (September), President of the House of Councillors OTSUJI Hidehisa (September), and Foreign Minister Kamikawa (October).

These exchanges at various levels have continued to deepen the trust between Japan and Viet Nam. The existence of people at a wide range of levels who are passionate about cooperating for the sake of both countries and about deepening the countries' friendship is a major driving force behind the development of relations between the two countries.

The relationship between Japan and Viet Nam has become one in which both countries truly need each other based on trust and friendship that have been built up over many years. 2023 is therefore a year to affirm the bonds between Japan and Viet Nam so as to build another 50 years of friendly relations.



A performance of the new opera *Princess Anio*, which commemorates the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Viet Nam (September, Hanoi, Viet Nam; Photo: Princess Anio Project Executive Committee)



Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino taking a commemorative photo with President Vo Van Thuong and his spouse (September, Hanoi, Viet Nam; Photo: Imperial Household Agency)



technical intern trainees, is continuing to increase, from approximately 40,000 in 2011 to over 520,000 by the end of June 2023, making Vietnamese nationals the second largest number of foreign residents in Japan by country after China. With the Treaty between Japan and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters also taking effect in August 2022, cooperation in the field of mutual criminal assistance is also progressing even further.

### (9) Malaysia

Comprised of the Peninsular Malaysia of the Malay Peninsula and the East Malaysia of Borneo, Malaysia is a geopolitically important country facing the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca that is situated in a crucial spot in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Furthermore, it is a federal state comprised of 13 states and three federal territories, and also a multiethnic state comprised of Bumiputra (Malay including indigenous peoples) (70%), Chinese (23%) and Indian people (7%), among others.

The Anwar administration, which took office after the general election in November 2022, has shown an emphasis on the economy, with Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar himself serving as Minister of Finance, and is pursuing Malaysia's traditional omnidirectional diplomacy in foreign affairs.

In November 2023, Prime Minister Kishida visited Malaysia for the first time since assuming the office of Prime Minister and held a Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Anwar. In December, Prime Minister Kishida held another Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Anwar, who was visiting Japan for the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, and the two leaders concurred to elevate Japan-Malaysia relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

In the field of human resources development, through the Look East Policy, which was begun by Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad in 1982, more than 26,000 Malaysian people have studied or have been trained in Japan so far. The two countries have been cooperating in making the Malaysia Japan International Institute of Technology (MJIIT), which was opened in September 2011, a base for Japanese-style engineering education in ASEAN countries. In addition, in order

to further contribute to the development of human resources who will bear the future of Malaysia, preparations are being made to establish a branch campus of the University of Tsukuba in Malaysia, and, if realized, it will be the first overseas branch campus to be established by a Japanese university. On the economic front, roughly 1,600 Japanese companies have been operating in Malaysia, which demonstrates a continued close relationship between the two countries.

### (10) Myanmar

Since the coup d'état by the Myanmar military on February 1, 2021, many civilians have died as a result of armed suppression by the Myanmar military, and in some areas, there have been intermittent clashes between the Myanmar military and ethnic armed organizations, the People's Defense Forces (PDF) and others. On the political front, the Political Parties Registration Law was announced in January, and in March, the registration for the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi was virtually cancelled. Additionally, the state of emergency, which was supposed to last for two years after the coup d'état, has been extended twice (until January 31, 2024), and the situation is deteriorating.

On February 1, 2023, two years after the coup d'état, the Government of Japan released a statement by Foreign Minister Hayashi that expressed serious concerns that the state of emergency had been extended without taking steps toward achieving political progress, such as the release of all detainees, and once again strongly urged the Myanmar military to take concrete actions to immediately stop the violence, release those who are detained, and swiftly restore Myanmar's democratic political system. Furthermore, when the NLD was deregistered, the Government of Japan released a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Secretary expressing serious concern that the military's actions go against a peaceful resolution of the situation, which Japan has consistently called for, and will make it even more difficult to improve the situation.

In order to break through the current situation, Japan has been cooperating with the international community and giving maximum support to ASEAN's efforts, including Indonesia, as ASEAN Chair, based



on the belief that it is important to achieve concrete results, especially ASEAN's "Five-Point Consensus."<sup>28</sup>

At the UN, Japan has been cooperating with the international community by co-sponsoring a resolution at the Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in Myanmar in April and by co-sponsoring a resolution at the UN General Assembly in December.

So far, in order to improve the humanitarian situation in Myanmar, which continues to deteriorate, the Government of Japan has actively provided humanitarian assistance that directly benefits the people of Myanmar. Since the coup d'état on February 1, 2021, Japan has provided more than 109.5 million U.S. dollars in humanitarian assistance (as of the end of December 2023). On February 28, the Government of Japan decided to provide additional humanitarian assistance totaling approximately 60.3 million U.S. dollars through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other international organizations to provide food, medical supplies, shelter, and water and sanitation infrastructure to people in Myanmar in need.

## (11) Laos

Laos is a landlocked country bordering China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Viet Nam, and therefore is a key country for Mekong connectivity. In 2023, Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone continued to address economic and fiscal issues on the domestic front, and, at the 6th Ordinary Session of the National Assembly's 9th Legislature held in October, he stated that he would continue to implement measures to stabilize the macroeconomy, control inflation to prevent an economic crisis, and stabilize prices and living costs. He also stated that Laos has both public debt and publicly guaranteed debt, and that the country is committed to continuing to repay its debts, particularly its external debts, and to prevent a default.

In May, President Thongloun Sisoulith visited Japan for a Summit Meeting, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Saleumxay Kommasith also met with Foreign Minister Hayashi. In October, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Laos, and in

November, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Saleumxay visited Japan, and a Japan-Laos Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held on each occasion. At both meetings, it was confirmed that the "Strategic Partnership" between the two countries would be further expanded in anticipation of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Laos in 2025. During Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Saleumxay's visit to Japan in November, the two ministers signed and exchanged notes concerning Japan's Cultural Grant Assistance up to the amount of 4.171 billion yen for "the Project for the Reconstruction of the Chao Anouvong Stadium." In December, Prime Minister Kishida met with Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, who was visiting Japan for the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, and exchanged views on cooperation toward 2024 when Laos will hold the ASEAN Presidency and on deepening bilateral relations toward the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Laos in 2025.

## 5 South Asia

### (1) India

India is now the world's most populous country, with the fifth largest economy, and is increasingly strengthening its presence in the international community. In terms of its economy, India has been achieving steady economic growth through various economic initiatives, including "Make in India." In diplomatic relations, India has been actively developing diplomacy, primarily in the Indo-Pacific region, under the "Act East" policy that it has laid down. In addition, as the G20 Presidency in 2023, India has been positioning itself as a voice for the "Global South" and is increasingly exerting influence in the international arena as a global power.

Japan and India are the two largest democratic countries in Asia, sharing common fundamental values as well as strategic interests. Under the "Japan-India

<sup>28</sup> The Five-Point Consensus was announced at the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting held on April 24, 2021. It calls for (1) immediate cessation of violence, (2) commencement of constructive dialogue among all parties concerned, (3) mediation of the dialogue process by a special envoy of the ASEAN Chair, (4) providing humanitarian assistance through the AHA Centre, and (5) visiting Myanmar to meet with all parties concerned by the ASEAN special envoy and delegation.



Special Strategic and Global Partnership,” the two countries have broadly deepened cooperation in their economies, security, people-to-people exchanges, etc. Additionally, India is an important partner in realizing a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),” and multi-lateral cooperation, such as between Japan, Australia, India, and the U.S., is steadily progressing. The deepening of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Japan, which faces the Pacific Ocean, and India, which is located in the center of the Indian Ocean, will greatly contribute to the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region. The Japan-India relationship is blessed with the greatest potential for development of any bilateral relationship in the world, and its importance is increasing as the uncertainty of the existing international order increases. India is also an indispensable player in building the economic order in the Indo-Pacific region, and in that sense, it is expected that India will return to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement in the future.

In 2023, Japan and India had frequent high-level exchanges of views, including summit meetings. A Japan-India Foreign Ministers’ Meeting was held in India in March on the occasion of the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers’ Meeting. In addition, during his visit to India in March, Prime Minister Kishida and Prime Minister Narendra Modi confirmed their commitment to discuss and work together on various issues in the international community as Japan and India serve as the G7 Presidency and the G20 Presidency, respectively. With regard to bilateral relations, the two leaders discussed the progress they had made so far and future cooperation in the fields of security, economic cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges. At the Japan-India Summit Meeting held during the G7 Hiroshima Summit in May, the two leaders shared a recognition on the importance of FOIP and confirmed that they would advance cooperation in various fields. In addition to the 15th Japan-India Foreign Ministers’ Strategic Dialogue that was held in New Delhi in July, a Japan-India Summit Meeting was held at the G20 New Delhi Summit in September and a Japan-India Foreign Ministers’ Meeting was held at the UN General Assembly in New York in September. Furthermore, a number of working-level discussions have been held between Japan and



Japan-India Summit Meeting (March 20, Delhi, India; Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

India, and in September, the 16th Joint Committee Meeting on Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Railway and the Fifth Japan-India Cyber Dialogue were held.

## (2) Pakistan

Pakistan is situated in a strategic location connecting Asia and the Middle East, and its political stability and economic development are essential for the stability and growth of the region. The country has a population of more than 200 million and approximately 65% of the total population is under 30 years old, which makes its economic potential high, although the government faces challenges in its fiscal situation and in overcoming low growth.

In terms of foreign relations, the India-Pakistan relationship has remained tense. Under the “All Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership,” Pakistan’s relationship with China has been enhanced in a wide range of fields, including the construction of an economic corridor between China and Pakistan (CPEC), which is an important constituent element of China’s “Belt and Road” initiative. On the domestic political front, the coalition government led by Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif dissolved the lower house of the National Assembly in August, and a caretaker government led by Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar was formed to oversee elections. For the general election in February 2024, Japan dispatched an election observer mission led by Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan WADA Mitsuhiro.

As for relations with Japan, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a Japan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in July when Minister of Foreign Affairs Bilawal Bhutto Zardari visited Japan. At the meeting, Foreign Minister



Hayashi welcomed Minister of Foreign Affairs Bhutto's visit to Japan, the first visit by a Pakistani Foreign Minister in four years, and the two ministers concurred to further develop the two countries' traditional friendship in all fields. Prior to this meeting, the 12th Japan-Pakistan Vice-Ministerial-level Political Consultation was held in June.

In recent years, Japan has provided grant aid to Pakistan, mainly in the fields of health, water and sanitation, education, and disaster prevention. In 2022, Japan provided emergency relief supplies and emergency grant aid as support for the flood damage that had occurred that year. In addition, at the International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan that was held in Geneva in January, Japan announced that it would provide approximately 77 million U.S. dollars in assistance, including in the areas of disaster prevention, health and medical care, and agriculture, and has been steadily implementing this aid.

### (3) Bangladesh

Bangladesh, in which Muslims account for around 90% of the population, is located in the Bay of Bengal, at the intersection between India and ASEAN, and in recent years has been experiencing sustained and stable growth (economic growth rate of 7.1% in 2022). With a population of around 170 million people, Bangladesh has drawn attention as a production base with abundant high-quality labor and as a potential market with considerable infrastructure demand, and the number of Japanese affiliated companies developing business in the country has increased from 61 in 2005 to 302 in 2022. Securing a stable supply of electric power as well as infrastructure improvement remain challenges for foreign companies investing in the country, and Japan has also been supporting its development through the provision of yen loans and other means. Additionally, with the deterioration in peace and order in Rakhine State of Myanmar since August 2017, more than 700,000 displaced persons have flooded into Bangladesh (as of December 2023), but their return has not yet been realized. There are concerns that their prolonged displacement will put a growing burden on the host community and that local peace and order will deteriorate. In domestic affairs, the 12th general election was held in January 2024 and



Japan-Bangladesh Summit Meeting (April 26, Tokyo; Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

the Bangladesh Awami League, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, will continue to lead the government.

As for relations with Japan, Prime Minister Hasina made an Official Visit to Japan in April and then had a Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Kishida. On this occasion, the two leaders announced that they would elevate the bilateral relationship to a "Strategic Partnership." Under this partnership, the two leaders also concurred on advancing cooperation in various fields, including the commencement of negotiations on the Agreement concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology; strengthening security cooperation, including through the use of the "Official Security Assistance (OSA);" promoting joint studies on a possible Japan-Bangladesh Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA); strengthening cooperation under the "Industrial Value Chain" concept that connects the Bay of Bengal to the North Eastern region of India; the first bilateral friendship city affiliation agreement; and the resuming dispatches of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers of JICA. In July, Japan-Bangladesh Foreign Ministers' Meeting was also held during the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings that were held in Indonesia. In addition to the 4th Japan-Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Level Consultation in February, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs TAKAGI Kei visited Bangladesh in May to attend the 6th Indian Ocean Conference and Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs KOMURA Masahiro visited Bangladesh in October to attend the opening ceremony in Dhaka City for Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport's Terminal 3. In November, as one of the OSA's first fiscal year projects, there was also a signing and exchange of notes for the



OSA grant aid on the provision of patrol boats (See the Special Feature on page 219).

### (4) Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is situated in a strategic location on the sea lanes in the Indian Ocean, and its geopolitical importance is note-worthy. President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was inaugurated in July 2022 after the resignation of the previous president following an economic crisis, has held discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to receive IMF assistance, and as a result, the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) with Sri Lanka was approved by the IMF Executive Board in March 2023, and the first contribution of approximately 330 million U.S. dollars was made. The Government of Sri Lanka is currently working on various reforms that are required by the EFF program. As for Sri Lanka's debt restructuring, an official creditor committee was launched in April under the co-chairmanship of Japan, France, and India. Since the first meeting in May, discussions have been held at various levels, and in November a basic agreement on debt restructuring was reached between the official creditor committee and the Government of Sri Lanka. On the economic front, Sri Lanka is gradually recovering from the 2022 economic crisis, and its inflation rate has fallen from 70% in September 2022 to 1.3% in September 2023.

In terms of relations with Japan, in February, State Minister for Foreign Affairs TAKEI Shunsuke attended the ceremony for the 75th Anniversary of Sri Lanka's Independence. Additionally, in May, President Wickremesinghe visited Japan and held a Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Kishida, where the two leaders confirmed the importance of transparent and fair debt restructuring. Furthermore, in July, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Sri Lanka, and in October, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura visited Sri Lanka to participate in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Council of Ministers Meeting.

### (5) Nepal

Nepal is an inland state in South Asia between the great powers of China and India, and has been moving forward as a democratic country since the promulgation of its new constitution in 2015. In domestic affairs,

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal assumed his post in December 2022 following the results of federal elections in November for the House of Representatives. Economically, Nepal is gradually recovering from the negative growth caused by the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, with an economic growth rate of 5.6% for 2021-2022, but escaping from low growth has remained a challenge.

As for Nepal's relationship with Japan, the two countries have traditionally built friendly relations through people-to-people exchanges such as mountaineering, and many Nepalese people live in Japan and are active in various fields. In April, the 4th Japan-Nepal Political Dialogue between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs was held. Japan has also been a major donor country to Nepal for many years, providing economic cooperation in a variety of fields, including the three priority areas of poverty reduction, disaster prevention and climate change countermeasures, and strengthening democratization. In particular, with regard to strengthening democracy in Nepal, where transition from a monarchy to a federal democracy took place in 2008, Japan has continued to provide support toward the consolidation of democratization and the strengthening of governance, such as by dispatching experts to assist in the improvement of legal system and the capacity of the media sector for peace building and promoting democratization, among others.

### (6) Bhutan

Bhutan is a landlocked country located between China and India, and has close ties with Japan with a rich history of exchanges between the Japanese Imperial and Bhutanese Royal families. Bhutan sets Gross National Happiness (GNH) as a guideline of the administration and is working on the priority issues of reducing poverty, improving the quality of healthcare and education, gender equality, the preservation of the environment, culture and traditions, stabilization of the macroeconomy, etc., under the 12th Five-Year Plan (from July 2018 until June 2023). In domestic affairs, a general election for the lower house of Parliament was held in January 2024, in which the People's Democratic Party won, resulting in a change of government, and former Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay was then inaugurated for his second term as Prime Minister since 2014. In



foreign affairs, Bhutan only has diplomatic relations with 54 countries, including Japan, the EU, and neighboring countries, and has close ties with India in areas such as national defense.

In its relations with Japan, Minister of the Environment NISHIMURA Akihiro visited Bhutan in July.

## (7) The Maldives

Situated in a strategically important location on sea lanes, the Maldives is an important partner to Japan in realizing FOIP. The Maldives' primary industries are fishery and tourism, which account for about 30% of its GDP, and although it was affected by the spread of COVID-19, the country's per-capita GDP has reached the highest level in the South Asia region. Domestically, following the presidential election held in September, Mohamed Muizzu was inaugurated as President in November.

In terms of relations with Japan, in April, the 4th Round of Japan-Maldives Policy Dialogue was held, and in May, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdulla Shahid visited Japan and had a Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Foreign Minister Hayashi. In July, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited the Maldives and met with Foreign Minister Shahid, and the two ministers concurred to develop the bilateral cooperation in wide-ranging fields. In September, an election observer mission led by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Takei visited the Maldives for the first round of the Maldives' presidential election. In November, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura attended the Maldives' presidential inauguration as a Special Envoy of Prime Minister Kishida.



Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura pays a courtesy call to President Mohamed Muizzu as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan (November 18, Maldives)

## 6 Oceania

### (1) Australia

#### A Brief Summary and Overview

In the Foreign Policy White Paper issued by the Australian Government in November 2017, it was announced that as the guidelines for the foreign policy of the next 10 years, Australia will, among others, promote an open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, oppose protectionism, promote and protect international rules, while also strengthening cooperation with partners, including Japan. This foreign policy basically has continued to be upheld even after Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (Labor Party) replaced Prime Minister Scott Morrison (Coalition) in May 2022.

With the region facing a variety of issues, the “Special Strategic Partnership” between Japan and Australia, which share fundamental values and strategic interests, is more important than ever. The two countries' strategic visions toward maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order based on the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific region are aligned in wide-ranging areas. With the close coordination between the Prime Ministers and between the Foreign Ministers serving as the basis, the two countries have been further deepening multi-layered cooperation and collaboration in all areas toward stability and prosperity of the international community.

Furthermore, Japan is not just steadily strengthening Japan-Australia bilateral relations, but also multilateral coordination such as Japan-U.S.-Australia and Japan-U.S.-Australia-India relations. In particular, in July, a Japan-Australia-New Zealand-ROK Leaders' Meeting was held, during which the four leaders issued a Joint Statement strongly condemning the ballistic missile launch by North Korea that had taken place immediately prior to the meeting; exchanged views on cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region; and concurred on the importance of deepening cooperation with ASEAN and the Pacific Island countries.

Both Japan and Australia are exercising leadership in promoting free trade, including the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic



Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, and in building a free and fair economic order based on the rule of law. Australia is the fifth largest trading partner for Japan, and Japan is the second largest trading partner for Australia. The two countries are further developing mutually complementary economic relations through the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), which marks the ninth anniversary of its effectuation, the CPTPP that entered into force in December 2018, and the RCEP Agreement that entered into force in January 2022.

In their March 2023 telephone call, Prime Minister Albanese gave an explanation about AUKUS<sup>29</sup>, Prime Minister Kishida stated his consistent support for the initiative, and the two leaders concurred to continue to strengthen coordination with the US, their common ally, and the UK, a like-minded country, toward the realization of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).” In May as well, Prime Minister Kishida held informal talks with Prime Minister Albanese, who had visited Japan to participate in the G7 Hiroshima Summit. In September, at the Japan-Australia Leader’s Meeting, when the two leaders exchanged views on Japan’s handling of the ALPS-treated water, Prime Minister Albanese commented that Japan had been working in a responsible manner and in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and commended positively on the measures that Japan had taken. In November, at the Japan-Australia Leader’s Meeting, the two leaders exchanged views on various issues in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as on pressing international issues, including the situation surrounding Israel and Palestine, and also affirmed that they support sustainable and resilient development of the Pacific Island countries.

In July, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a Foreign Ministers’ Meeting with Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong, where the two ministers confirmed that Japan and Australia share a common strategic view and direction to peace and stability in the region, and concurred to work closely together in the framework of Japan-Australia and Japan-Australia-U.S. and steadily implement concrete cooperation. At the September Foreign Ministers’ Meeting immediately after her



Japan-Australia Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (September 19, New York, U.S.)

appointment as Foreign Minister, Foreign Minister Kamikawa stated that she would look forward to working closely with Minister Wong to further deepen the “Special Strategic Partnership” between Japan and Australia, as well as realize FOIP. The foreign ministers of Japan and Australia have also held close and timely talks on various issues facing the international community. In an October telephone call, the two ministers discussed the situation in the Middle East, and in November, during informal talks with Minister for Foreign Affairs Wong, who was stopping by Japan after a visit to China, the two ministers exchanged views on various issues in the Indo-Pacific region in light of Prime Minister Albanese’s visit to China, and concurred that Japan and Australia will continue to work closely together.

Through such frequent high-level dialogues, Japan and Australia have communicated and contributed as the core of cooperation among like-minded countries in various fields as described below.

### **B Cooperation in the Security Field**

To ensure peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region, Japan and Australia have continued to steadily strengthen and expand cooperation in the field of security.

In particular, the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement entered into force in August. This is the first reciprocal access agreement that Japan has concluded. It is expected that the entry into force of the Agreement will facilitate the conduct of cooperative activities between the defense forces of the two countries, further

<sup>29</sup> A framework for security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region that was launched in September 2021 by Australia, the UK, and the U.S.



promote bilateral security and defense cooperation, and enable Japan and Australia to further contribute to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region. At the Japan-Australia Leader's Meeting in September, the two leaders welcomed progress in defense cooperation, including the joint exercises involving F-35 fighter jets visiting each country under the Agreement, and also concurred on strengthening concrete cooperation, guided by the new Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation<sup>30</sup> signed in 2022.

### **C Economic Relations**

As shown by Japan and Australia spearheading the CPTPP, which entered into force in December 2018, the two countries are working closely and demonstrating leadership in promoting the regional free trade order, including the RCEP Agreement, as well as in building a free and fair economic order based on the rule of law. At the Japan-Australia Leader's Meeting in November, the two leaders had candid discussions on the CPTPP from a strategic perspective and confirmed that they will continue to closely work together.

Mainly industrial products such as automobiles are being exported from Japan to Australia, while mainly energy resources such as coal and natural gas, and agricultural products such as beef are being imported into Japan from Australia, in mutually complementary economic relations that have been developed steadily over the years. In particular, in recent years new cooperation efforts have been progressing, such as hydrogen-related efforts. At the Japan-Australia Leader's Meeting in September, the two leaders confirmed that both countries would continue to engage in close dialogues in the fields of resources and energy and concurred to work together on decarbonization in Asia through the "Asia Zero Emissions Community (AZEC)" initiative and cooperation in the hydrogen and ammonia sectors.

### **D Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges**

There exists a foundation for affinity toward Japan in Australia cultivated over many years, as shown by the fact that approximately 415,000 people in Australia learn the Japanese language (the fourth largest group in the world), and that there are over 100 sister city

relations. A variety of initiatives are implemented in order to strengthen the foundation of Japan-Australia relations, including the promotion of mutual understanding through JENESYS, an exchange program to promote understanding of Japan that includes young people, and the "New Colombo Plan" as well as the Young Political Leaders Exchange. Both Japan and Australia will continue to work on the appropriate and steady operation of the Japan-Australia Working Holiday Program.

### **E Cooperation in the International Community**

In order to make an active contribution to peace and stability in the international community, the two countries have been strengthening cooperation in wide-ranging areas. In particular, cooperation has been deepened in addressing various issues facing the Indo-Pacific region, such as maritime security and nuclear and missile development by North Korea. Australia deployed the Royal Australian Navy frigate HMAS *Anzac* in late May and the frigate HMAS *Toowoomba* from late October to mid-November to undertake surveillance operations in the adjacent ocean areas around Japan. By doing so, for the ninth and 10th times since 2018, Australia has engaged in surveillance operations against illicit maritime activities, including ship-to-ship transfers with North Korean flagged vessels, which are prohibited by UN Security Council resolutions. Furthermore, from early February to early March and from late August to mid-September, Australia engaged in surveillance operations for the 11th and 12th times since 2018 by aircraft, using Kadena Air Base.

## **(2) New Zealand**

### **A Brief Summary**

Japan and New Zealand share fundamental values, such as democracy and a market economy. The two countries have been maintaining good relations over the years. In recent years, under the "Strategic Cooperative Partnership," the two countries have been strengthening bilateral cooperation in areas including the economy, security, defense cooperation and people-to-people exchanges, as well as cooperative relations

<sup>30</sup> Document signed at the October 2022 Japan-Australia Leaders' Meeting outlining the direction of Japan-Australia security and defense cooperation for the next 10 years.



on issues facing the region and the international community. On November 24, following the results of the general election that was held on October 14, a three-party coalition government was formed between New Zealand's National Party (1st party), ACT New Zealand and New Zealand First.

### **B** High-Level Consultations

Amidst the complicated regional situation, Japan has been closely exchanging views at the leaders' and foreign ministers' levels with New Zealand, which is located in the Asia-Pacific region and shares fundamental values with Japan. In February, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Nanaia Mahuta and released the "Joint Declaration between the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand on Cooperation in the Pacific Islands Region." Under the Joint Declaration, the two ministers concurred to further promote cooperation toward the shared goals of the resilience and unity of the Pacific Island countries, in line with the priorities of the region, such as maritime security, climate change, infrastructure, and supporting "The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent" (refer to (3) A below) of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). Furthermore, in July, at the Japan-New Zealand Summit Meeting, two leaders concurred on the importance of maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order based on the rule of law, confirmed that Japan and New Zealand will work together toward realization of FOIP, and concurred on the importance of coordination among like-minded countries in the Pacific Island countries. In December, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a telephone call with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Winston Peters, during which the two ministers confirmed that they will closely work together for stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, including for Pacific Island countries, and concurred to cooperate toward the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10) to be held in 2024.

### **C** Economic Relations

The two countries enjoy complementary economic relations and have closely cooperated on the steady implementation of the CPTPP and RCEP Agreement; on the promotion of free trade structures including WTO reforms, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF); and on building a free and fair economic order based on the rule of law. In February at the Japan-New Zealand Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the two ministers welcomed that concrete bilateral cooperation is making progress in fields such as hydrogen and ammonia.

### **D** Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges

People-to-people exchanges between Japan and New Zealand, such as for youths, take place through exchange programs like JENESYS, and a cumulative total of more than 1,100 people had participated by 2023. By 2023, more than 3,400 people have also participated in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program, which invites foreign youth (on average approximately 100 people annually), and active exchanges are continuing. Additionally, exchanges between the 44 sister cities with the aim of promoting mutual understanding among youth are making progress.

### **E** Cooperation in the International Community

The two countries are cooperating closely for the peace and stability of the international community in the international arena, including the UN. The two countries are playing a proactive role in regional stability and development, for example by cooperating in regional cooperation frameworks such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM), and by strengthening cooperation in the Pacific Islands region.

## **(3) Pacific Island Countries<sup>31</sup>**

### **A** Brief Summary and Overview

The Pacific Island countries and Japan are bound by the Pacific Ocean, have deep historical ties, and are important partners in such areas of cooperation in

<sup>31</sup> Pacific Island countries: Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue, Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea



the international arena and the supply of fisheries and mineral resources. They are becoming increasingly important as a cornerstone of FOIP, as they are located at the heart of the Pacific Ocean and are also positioned as a key region in the New Plan for FOIP that was released in March. As one of Japan's important policies in diplomacy with Pacific Island countries, Japan has been hosting the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) once every three years since 1997. In July 2021, at the Ninth Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM9) that was held via video conference, the Pacific Bond (KIZUNA) Policy was announced to further strengthen cooperation between Japan and the Pacific Island countries, and Japan is working to further strengthen relations with the Pacific Island countries, centered on the five priority areas of (a) COVID-19 Response and Recovery, (b) Sustainable Oceans based on the Rule of Law, (c) Climate Change and Disaster Resilience, (d) Strengthening the Foundation for Sustainable and Resilient Economic Development, and (e) People-to-People Exchanges and Human Resource Development. In the lead up to PALM10, which is scheduled to be held in 2024, Japan will continue making further efforts to resolve issues facing Pacific Island countries.

Furthermore, Japan is promoting cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), a regional cooperation framework composed of the Pacific Island countries and regions. At its Leaders Meeting in 2022, the PIF announced the “The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent,” which outlines the ideal political, economic, and other conditions and strategic measures for Pacific Island countries and regions in 2050. Japan has expressed strong support for the Strategy. Japan will continue to support regional unity, respect the agendas (action plans) of the Pacific Island countries themselves, and continue to cooperate in a way that utilizes Japan's strengths.

## **B Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP)**

PBP was established as a cooperative framework between like-minded countries to support the prosperity, resilience, and security of the Pacific region, and a June 2022 meeting of senior officials from like-minded countries (Japan, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and the UK) concurred to launch the PBP, with the

first PBP Ministerial Meeting then being held in New York, the U.S. in September 2022. The second PBP Ministerial Meeting was held in September 2023, with Canada, Germany, and the ROK joining as like-minded countries, and it was confirmed that the PBP will continue to advance dialogue with Pacific Island countries and promote concrete cooperation.

## **C Meetings with Dignitaries**

2023 saw active visits by dignitaries between Japan and Pacific Island countries, marking a milestone in diplomacy with the Pacific Island countries.

In January, State Minister for Foreign Affairs TAKEI Shunsuke visited Vanuatu and paid courtesy calls to President Nikenike Vurobaravu and Prime Minister Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau. The Embassy of Japan in Kiribati was opened in January, enhancing the system for maintaining and strengthening the good bilateral relationship and for more effectively gathering a variety of information and providing various types of support in emergency situations.

In February, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mark Stephen Brown of the Cook Islands; Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Kitlang Kabua of the Marshall Islands; and Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat Henry Puna visited Japan. Prime Minister Kishida met with the delegation, touching on the long-standing cooperative relationship between Japan and the PIF, stated that he hopes to further deepen the *kizuna* (bonds) with Pacific Island countries and regions under the FOIP vision, and the leaders also shared the view on the importance of intensive dialogue regarding the ALPS-treated water. Foreign Minister Hayashi met with the delegation, and a Japan-Cook Islands Summit Meeting and Japan-Marshall Islands Foreign Ministers' Meeting were also held. Also in February, Prime Minister Kishida held a Summit Meeting and working dinner with the Federated States of Micronesia President David W. Panuelo, who was visiting Japan as a guest on an official visit. During the meeting, President Panuelo stated that regarding the ALPS-treated water the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) now has deep trust in Japan's intentions and Japan's technological capabilities in not harming our shared oceanic assets and resources. Following the summit meeting, a signing ceremony of the Exchange of Notes on the provision



of medical equipment (under the Grant Assistance for Economic and Social Development Program) was held in the presence of the two leaders, and the two leaders issued a Joint Statement between Japan and FSM.

In March, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Solomon Islands and the Cook Islands, where he paid courtesy calls to Prime Minister Manasseh Damukana Sogavare of Solomon Islands and to Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Brown of the Cook Islands. Foreign Minister Hayashi met with Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade Jeremiah Manele of Solomon Islands, and at each meeting, the two foreign ministers respectively concurred to further strengthen bilateral relations between their two countries and cooperation with the Pacific Islands region, and Foreign Minister Hayashi once again explained Japan's position on the ALPS-treated water.

In April, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Takei visited Vanuatu and Fiji. In Vanuatu, he paid a courtesy call to Prime Minister Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau and to Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and External Trade Napat; and in Fiji he paid a courtesy call to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for External Trade, Cooperatives, and SMEs Kamikamica, and held a meeting with Secretary General Puna of the PIF Secretariat. In May, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Takei also visited Fiji and Tuvalu. In Fiji, he inspected patrol boats that had been provided through Japan's grant aid, and in Tuvalu, he paid courtesy calls to Prime Minister Natano and to Minister of Justice, Communication and Foreign Affairs Simon Kofe, and also inspected the northern tip of Funafuti Island, which is known as a place symbolizing the impacts of climate change. Also in May, Prime Minister Kishida met with Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Brown of the Cook Islands, who was visiting Japan to attend the Outreach Meeting of the G7 Hiroshima Summit. The two leaders confirmed that both countries would cooperate closely for the PALM10 in 2024, given that the Cook Islands is the PIF chair country.

In June, Prime Minister Kishida held a Summit Meeting with President Surangel S. Whipps of Palau, meeting with him for the first time since September 2022, and the two leaders discussed further strengthening bilateral relations. President Whipps, touching on his visit to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power



Foreign Minister Hayashi attends a dinner hosted by Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Brown of the Cook Islands (March 20, Rarotonga, Cook Islands)

Plant on the previous day, stated that Palau believes in science regarding the ALPS-treated water, and that this visit strengthened confidence in the efforts Japan has made to ensure people's health and safety under the leadership of Prime Minister Kishida. Also in June, there was a signing and exchange of notes for the "Economic and Social Development Plan" grant aid for Kiribati and Nauru in the "East Micronesia Cable Project" (a collaborative project between Japan, the U.S., and Australia to strengthen the communication infrastructure of the three island nations).

In July, Ambassador on Special Mission FURUYA Keiji (Member of the House of Representatives) visited the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and attended the inauguration ceremony of President Wesley W. Simina. Prior to the ceremony, Ambassador Furuya paid a courtesy call to the President and stated Japan's intention to further strengthen Japan-FSM relations and to continue cooperating for the social and economic development of FSM by leveraging Japan's advantages.

In September, Prime Minister Kishida, who was visiting Indonesia to attend the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings and prior to the East Asia Summit (EAS), held an informal talk with Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Brown of the Cook Islands, which was the third meeting that year. Prime Minister Brown stated that he supports Japan's efforts on ALPS-treated water.

In October, State Minister for Foreign Affairs HORII Iwao visited Papua New Guinea to attend the opening ceremony of the Nadzab Tomodachi International Airport, which was built with assistance from Japan, and also paid a courtesy call to Prime Minister James





State Minister for Foreign Affairs Horii attends the Dialogue Partners Meeting of the PIF as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan (November 10, Rarotonga, Cook Islands)

Marape of Papua New Guinea. During the courtesy call, the Prime Minister Marape stated that he supports Japan's efforts to ensure the safety of the discharge of the ALPS-treated water.

In November, the first Dialogue Partners Meeting of the PIF in about four years was held on Rarotonga in the Cook Islands. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Horii (Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan) attended and participated as a panelist in a thematic dialogue on Oceans and Environment, Climate Change and Disasters. He focused on climate change, which Pacific Island countries position as the greatest threat among Japan's strong commitments to the Pacific Islands region, and also gave a courteous explanation on the safety of discharging ALPS-treated water into the sea. He also took the opportunity of the Dialogue to meet with Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Brown of the Cook Islands, Premier Dalton Tagelagi of Niue, Prime Minister Hu'akavameiliku of Tonga, and Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa of Samoa.

In December, Prime Minister Kishida met with President Kabua of the Marshall Islands, who was visiting Japan, and Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs Lorin S. Robert of the Federated States of Micronesia.

In January 2024, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Minister of State Gustav Aitaro of Palau.

In February 2024, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Samoa and Fiji. Her visit to Samoa was the first visit by a Japanese Foreign Minister, and there she met with Head of State Tuimaleali'ifano Va'aletoa Sualauvi II; Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Foreign Affairs Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa; and Minister of Women, Community and Social Development Mulipola Anarosa Ale Molio'o. There was also a signing and exchange of notes for grant assistance for the Improvement of Facilities at the Faculty of Health Science, National University of Samoa, and Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited the Pacific Climate Change Center (PCCC). During the meeting with Prime Minister Fiamē, the strength of the trust between the two countries was confirmed, supported by a history of people-to-people exchanges even amidst the drastically changing circumstances surrounding the region. In Fiji, Foreign Minister Kamikawa attended the 5th Ministerial Interim Meeting of the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) as co-chair and conducted follow-up discussions on PALM9 and discussions toward PALM10, which is scheduled to be held in July 2024. She also took the opportunity of her visit to hold individual meetings with 10 Pacific Island countries and to discuss regional situations in addition to bilateral relations.

Through these and other meetings, Japan has reiterated that it will provide strong support to the Pacific Island countries, has exchanged views on international and regional situations, and has confirmed that it will continue to closely work together with the Pacific Island countries.

### **D Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges**

At PALM9, "People-to-People Exchanges and Human Resource Development" were positioned as one of the five priority areas, and Japan announced that over the next three years it would actively engage in human exchanges and human resource development for more than 5,500 people at various levels and in various fields. As part of those efforts, Japan has been implementing people-to-people exchanges among university students through JENESYS. Furthermore, from FY2016 Japan commenced the Pacific Leaders' Educational Assistance for Development of State (Pacific-LEADS) for young government administrators of Pacific Island countries.



Currently, through a program called the SDGs Global Leader Course, Japan is accepting young government officials and private human resources from Pacific Island countries to universities and graduate schools in Japan.

In preparation for PALM10 in July 2024, Japan will continue working to further revitalize cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

## **7 Regional and Inter-Regional Cooperation**

In the Indo-Pacific region, the world's growth center, it is important to ensure peace and prosperity for the entire region, and by extension for the world, by realizing a free and open order based on the rule of law. From this perspective, Japan strategically advances initiatives toward realizing a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" through various regional cooperative frameworks, including cooperation with like-minded countries such as Australia, India, ASEAN countries, and Europe, Japan-ASEAN, Japan-Mekong cooperation, ASEAN Plus Three (Japan, China and the Republic of Korea (ROK)), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), while maintaining the Japan-U.S. Alliance as the cornerstone of its foreign policy. In particular, the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP),"<sup>32</sup> adopted by ASEAN in 2019, shares fundamental principles with FOIP, such as openness, transparency, inclusivity, and respect for international law. While respecting the ASEAN centrality and unity, Japan will further expand the support of the international community for AOIP, and intends to implement concrete Japan-ASEAN cooperation conducive to the principles of AOIP, and, as an "Indo-Pacific State," contribute to the stability and prosperity of the entire Indo-Pacific region.

### **(1) The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**

Located in the geopolitically important heart of the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN is key to the realization of FOIP. At the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings held in November 2015, ASEAN declared to establish three communities; "ASEAN Political-Security Community," the "ASEAN Economic Community" and the "ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community" within 2015 (2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Community). Moreover, "ASEAN2025: Forging Ahead Together" was adopted as a guiding policy for the ASEAN Community for the 10 years from 2016 to 2025. In June 2019, the AOIP was adopted.

In East Asia where ASEAN plays an important role as a center of regional cooperation, multi-layered regional cooperation, such as ASEAN Plus Three (Japan, China and the ROK), EAS and ARF, is operating with ASEAN at its center, and cooperative relationships in a wide range of areas including politics, security and the economy have been established.

On the economic front, ASEAN has established the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) as well as other EPAs and FTAs with various countries including Japan, China, the ROK and India, thereby expanding the ASEAN centered free trade zone. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, which consists of ASEAN countries, Japan, Australia, China, the ROK, and New Zealand, entered into force on January 1, 2022. While working closely with participating countries to ensure the transparent implementation of the RCEP Agreement, Japan will continue to play a leading role for the future participation of India in the Agreement, as India declined signing.

### **(2) Issue of the South China Sea**

In the South China Sea, there are issues over sovereignty, and China has been continuing and intensifying its unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and actions to increase regional tensions against the rule of law and openness, such as further militarization

<sup>32</sup> AOIP is a guideline for ASEAN's engagement in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, and was adopted at the ASEAN Summit Meeting in June 2019. In addition to strengthening ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific region, AOIP sets out to promote cooperation in areas such as maritime cooperation, connectivity, SDGs, and the economy based on the principles of openness, transparency, inclusiveness, rules-based frameworks, good governance, respect for sovereignty, non-interference, complementarity with existing cooperation frameworks, equality, mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual benefit, and respect for international laws including the UN Charter, the UNCLOS, and other relevant UN conventions.



of disputed features (See Chapter 3, Section 1, 3 (4) d) and coercive actions against coastal countries and other countries. China also has not changed its position of not accepting the Arbitral Tribunal's award<sup>33</sup> to the Philippines and China, and has continued to assert maritime claims that are inconsistent with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In 2023, following collisions between the Philippine and Chinese vessels, the Government of the Philippines issued multiple statements condemning the actions of Chinese vessels against Philippine vessels in the South China Sea.

The issue concerning the South China Sea is directly related to the peace and stability of the region and is a legitimate concern of the international community. It is also an important matter of interest for Japan, as Japan relies on sea transport for most of its resources and energy and also is a stakeholder that makes use of the South China Sea.

The international community, including Japan, has expressed serious concerns about China's unilateral attempts to change the status quo and its actions that further increase regional tensions including repeated dangerous actions in the area. Japan strongly opposes unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and any actions that increase tensions. From the standpoint that the three principles of the rule of law at sea should be consistently adhered to (See Chapter 3, Section 1, 6 (2)), Japan has also consistently emphasized the importance of all the concerned parties related to the South China Sea to work toward peaceful settlement of disputes based on international law, in particular UNCLOS. Additionally, Japan has pointed out that China's assertions regarding baselines in the South China Sea are not based on relevant provisions of UNCLOS and that it is important to protect the freedom of navigation and overflight, including in the sea and airspace surrounding and above maritime features found to be low-tide elevations that do not have territorial sea and territorial airspace of their own according to the award of the Arbitral Tribunal. Japan has also pointed out that the basis of the "historical rights"

asserted by China is not clear under international law, and the Arbitral Tribunal ruled that the "historical rights" based on the "nine-dash line" claimed by China were found to be contrary to UNCLOS and were clearly denied. Foreign Minister Hayashi issued a statement reiterating Japan's position on the importance of the rule of law and on the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law in July 2022 and July 2023, in addition to the statement issued in July 2021, which marked five years since the Arbitral Tribunal's award as to the disputes between the Philippines and China. Coordination among Japan, the U.S., and the Philippines is also being strengthened. In September, Prime Minister Kishida held informal talks with President Marcos and Vice President Harris in Jakarta to discuss the situation surrounding the South China Sea. Japan-U.S.-Philippines Foreign Ministers' Meetings were held in July and September, and, based on the recent severe strategic environment including the situation in the South China Sea, the three ministers concurred to further strengthen coordination among the three countries and promote the materialization of the trilateral cooperation.

In 2018, negotiations on the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea commenced between China and ASEAN. At the ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in July, the second reading of the draft COC and the adoption of "Guidelines" to accelerate the early conclusion of the COC were announced, drawing expectation of some progress in the negotiations. Japan has stated its position that the COC should be effective, substantive, consistent with UNCLOS, and respect the legitimate rights and interests of all stakeholders that make use of the South China Sea.

### (3) Japan-ASEAN Relations

Realizing a more stable and prosperous ASEAN, the key to the realization of FOIP, is absolutely essential to the stability and prosperity of the region as a whole. Japan is actively supporting ASEAN's efforts in accordance with "ASEAN Community Vision 2025" for further integration even after the establishment of

<sup>33</sup> In January 2013, the Government of the Philippines instituted arbitral proceedings under UNCLOS as to the disputes between the Philippines and China regarding the South China Sea. The Arbitral Tribunal organized by these proceedings rendered the final award on July 12, 2016. Japan issued a statement by the Foreign Minister on the same day, stating, "As the Tribunal's award is final and legally binding on the parties to the dispute under the provisions of UNCLOS, the parties to this case are required to comply with the award. Japan strongly hopes that the parties' compliance with the award will eventually lead to the peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea."



the ASEAN Community, while steadily implementing the “Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation” adopted at the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit to commemorate the 40th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation in 2013. Furthermore, based on the “Joint Statement of the 23rd ASEAN-Japan Summit on Cooperation on ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” adopted in 2020, Japan has been building up concrete cooperation in line with AOIP’s priority areas of maritime cooperation, connectivity, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economic and other possible areas of cooperation. The Statement was the first joint statement on AOIP adopted by ASEAN with external partners, and has been followed by similar joint statements between ASEAN and other dialogue partners. In March 2023, marking the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, Prime Minister Kishida announced a new plan for FOIP, clearly positioning Southeast Asia as an important region, and announced a new contribution of 100 million U.S. dollars to the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF) and a revamp of the Japan-ASEAN Connectivity Initiative.

Japan’s consistent support for ASEAN centrality and unity was reaffirmed in July at the ASEAN-Japan Foreign Ministers’ Meeting by Foreign Minister Hayashi and in September at the ASEAN-Japan Summit by Prime Minister Kishida. In particular, at the ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum (AIPF) that was held as a side event to the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings in Jakarta in September, the Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative was newly announced to further strengthen connectivity through both hard and soft cooperation. Furthermore, at the ASEAN-Japan Summit in September, a Joint Statement was adopted to establish the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).

ASEAN countries expressed their appreciation for Japan’s longstanding cooperation in a wide range of areas, its support for ASEAN centrality and the AOIP and its contribution of 100 million U.S. dollars to the JAIF. In addition, they welcomed the establishment of the CSP and the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative and also expressed their appreciation to the Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) initiative. ASEAN countries also mentioned synergy

effects between FOIP and AOIP. Many ASEAN leaders also expressed their hope that the Commemorative Summit in December 2023 would set out a new vision for the relationship and further strengthen it.

Prime Minister Kishida also addressed the regional and international situation, noting that, in order for the region to remain as a center of growth, it is essential that peace and stability be maintained in the regional and international community. He also addressed and clearly stated Japan’s position including on Myanmar, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the East China Sea and the South China Sea, the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, economic coercion, North Korea, and ALPS treated water.

In response, ASEAN countries emphasized the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, the importance of international order based on the rule of law, and the importance of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and resolution of the abductions issue.

In December, the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation was held in Tokyo; after recapping the past half century of ASEAN-Japan relations, the Joint Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, which set out a new vision for cooperation, and its Implementation Plan were adopted. The Joint Vision Statement, subtitled “Trusted Partners,” indicates that the trust built over a half century is the foundation of ASEAN-Japan relations. It also set forth the vision of the world that ASEAN and Japan aspire to, in which all nations can pursue peace and prosperity, and the principles of democracy, the rule of law, good governance, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are upheld. Prime Minister Kishida indicated that ASEAN and Japan would, first, pass on and strengthen their longstanding relationship of trust to the next generation as “Heart-to-Heart Partners across Generations;” second, find solutions to common challenges as “Partners for Co-creation of Economy and Society of the Future;” and third, promote a Free and Open Indo-Pacific as “Partners for Peace and Stability.” Furthermore, Japan announced the following concrete actions for these pillars. First, it will launch the “Partnership to Co-create a Future with the Next Generation: WA Project 2.0,”





Prime Minister Kishida attending a joint press conference with Indonesian President Joko, who served as co-chair at the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation (December 17; Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

a comprehensive people-to-people exchange program including intellectual/cultural exchanges and NIHONGO (Japanese language) Partners, and will further promote two-way exchanges with young business leaders and others. Second it will further encourage private sector investment by utilizing new ODA initiatives, such as Co-creation for Common Agenda Initiative, with an emphasis on strengthening connectivity, combating climate change including AZEC initiative, and supporting small, medium, and micro enterprises and startups, while working on cooperation between the public and private sectors, and launch the “ASEAN-Japan Co-Creation Initiative for the Next-Generation Automotive Industry.” Third it will promote the development of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation based on the “Hiroshima Action Plan”; cooperation on law and justice; Women, Peace and Security (WPS); cybersecurity; and defense cooperation exchanges; and Official Security Assistance (OSA).

In response, ASEAN countries expressed their great appreciation for the achievements of the long-standing ASEAN-Japan cooperation in a wide range of fields. They also expressed high expectations for Japan’s new initiatives. At the Commemorative Summit, regional and international situations were also addressed in discussions about the three pillars mentioned above, and Prime Minister Kishida reiterated Japan’s position, stating that it is essential to uphold and reinforce the free and open international order based on the rule of law (See the Special Feature on page 96).

#### (4) Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting (Participating Countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and Japan)

The Mekong region (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam) is the core of the Indo-Pacific and is Japan’s Strategic Partner with strong economic growth and potential. Peace and prosperity in the Mekong region are extremely important to Asia as a whole, including Japan, since it contributes to narrowing the development gap in the region and promoting regional integration within ASEAN. From this perspective, Japan has been holding the Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting every year since 2009. Although since 2021 the Mekong-Japan Summit Meetings were postponed due to circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the situation in Myanmar, Japan will continue to steadily implement Mekong-Japan cooperation and to maintain its steadfast commitment to the region. Japan will continue to contribute to the prosperity and development of the region as a reliable partner for Mekong region countries.

#### (5) ASEAN Plus Three (Participating Countries: 10 ASEAN countries and Japan, China and the ROK)

The ASEAN Plus Three was established in 1997, when the Asian financial crisis triggered the addition of three countries (China, Japan, and the ROK) to ASEAN. ASEAN Plus Three has developed with a focus on areas such as finance and food security. Today, it covers cooperation in 24 areas, including finance, agriculture and food, education, culture, tourism, health, energy and the environment. Further cooperation is progressing in each area under the “ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Work Plan (2023-2027).”

At the ASEAN Plus Three Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held in July, Foreign Minister Hayashi stated that Japan would continue to fully support the mainstreaming of the AOIP, and promote concrete cooperation in the four priority areas of the AOIP as follows: (a) Maritime cooperation: Training operators to support maritime navigation, and supporting the formulation of plans for measures against marine plastic waste, and supporting marine monitoring; (b) Connectivity: Planning renewal of the Japan-ASEAN



SPECIAL  
FEATURE

## The 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

### ● The Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

In 2023, Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) celebrated the historic milestone of 50 years of friendship and cooperation. In December, ASEAN leaders were invited to Tokyo to hold the Commemorative Summit, where they adopted the Joint Vision Statement, which outline a new vision for cooperation, and the Implementation Plan for it (See Chapter 2, Section 2-7 (3)).



ASEAN-way group photo at the Commemorative Summit (December 17, Tokyo. Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

### ● The Development of ASEAN-Japan Relations

Japan initiated dialogue with ASEAN in 1973, ahead of the rest of the world. In the half century since then, ASEAN has expanded, integrated, and dramatically developed. Although ASEAN-Japan relations have had many twists and turns, Japan has supported ASEAN's own initiatives in various fields through development cooperation and has walked together with ASEAN on the path to development and integration. Japan has also been ASEAN's major trading partner and direct investor for many years. In recent years, Japan has made an average of approximately 2.8 trillion yen in direct investments per year in ASEAN countries. Furthermore, there are approximately 15,000 Japanese companies operating in ASEAN countries, where they produce products, provide services, and create jobs, thereby contributing to economic development while also playing a role in incorporating the vitality of the rapidly growing ASEAN into the Japanese economy.

The relationship between ASEAN and Japan goes beyond business. It is a relationship of mutual trust that is based on heart-to-heart contact. This relationship has been nurtured through cooperation and exchanges in a wide range of fields over the years since the "Fukuda Doctrine"<sup>1</sup> of 1977.

ASEAN and Japan have also reached out to each other in times of great hardship, such as the Asian financial crisis, the Sumatra Earthquake and Indian Ocean Tsunami, the Great East Japan Earthquake, and, more recently, the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to this accumulated history of cooperation, for the fifth year in a row, a survey by a well-known ASEAN think tank has ranked Japan as ASEAN's most reliable partner amongst major countries.

### ● Challenges Facing ASEAN and Japan

The international community is currently at a turning point in history, with the free and open international order based on the rule of law facing serious challenges. The world is also being confronted by complex and interrelated challenges, including climate change, disparities, public health crises, digitalization, and AI governance.

In this context, ASEAN and Japan, which share fundamental principles such as a prohibition on the use of force, the rule of law, good governance, democracy, fundamental freedom and human rights, are being called upon to cooperate more closely than ever before.

ASEAN is the cornerstone to achieving a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" based on the rule of law, which Japan advocates. Japan has strongly and consistently supported ASEAN Centrality and unity, and will support the mainstreaming of the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)."



Prime Minister Kishida, co-chair (December 17, Tokyo. Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)



### ● The Future of ASEAN-Japan Relations

In 2023, a total of 13 ministerial-level meetings were held between ASEAN and Japan, demonstrating the breadth of their cooperation. Numerous commemorative events and exchange programs were also held by both the public and private sectors.

The Joint Vision Statement that was adopted at the Commemorative Summit to conclude this 50th year, states (1) that as “Heart-to-Heart Partners across Generations,” ASEAN and Japan will strengthen and pass on their long-standing relationship of trust to the next generation; (2) that as “Partners for Co-creation of Economy and Society of the Future,” ASEAN and Japan will find solutions to common challenges; and (3) that as “Partners for Peace and Stability,” ASEAN and Japan will promote FOIP. Going forward, Japan will continue to work with ASEAN as a “Trusted Partner” to “co-create” peace and stability in the region and the world and a sustainable and prosperous future.

<sup>1</sup> The three ASEAN diplomatic principles that Prime Minister FUKUDA Takeo announced during his visit to Manila in the Philippines are that (1) Japan will never be a military power, (2) Japan will establish a “Heart-to-Heart” relationship with ASEAN, and (3) Japan and ASEAN are equal partners.

Connectivity Initiative; (c) SDGs: Implementing support for ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) and the ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS), the early operation of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED), and measures to address climate change; and (d) Economy and finance: Contributing to discussions on Disaster Risk Financing (DRF), Asian Bond Markets Initiative (ABMI) and the impact of financial digitalization in the region. Foreign Minister Hayashi also clearly explained Japan’s position that ALPS treated water will be discharged into the sea in accordance with international standards and practices, taking into consideration the conclusion of the IAEA Comprehensive Report.

At the ASEAN Plus Three (Japan-China-ROK) Summit, Prime Minister Kishida stressed the importance of upholding and reinforcing the free and open international order based on the rule of law in order for the Indo-Pacific region to remain an “Epicentrum of Growth.” As examples of Japan’s positive contributions to ASEAN Plus Three, he introduced Japan’s efforts in regional financial cooperation, food security, and post-COVID-19 measures, noting Japan’s support for ASEAN centrality and unity and the importance that Japan places on cooperation in line with the AOIP.

Regarding regional and international issues, Prime Minister Kishida clearly stated Japan’s position on the situations in North Korea and Myanmar and called for the continued understanding and cooperation toward the immediate resolution of the abductions issue. He also explained that the discharge of ALPS

treated water into the sea has been conducted in full accordance with international standards and practices. Finally, Prime Minister Kishida expressed his determination to strengthen cooperation under ASEAN+3 so that ASEAN will take the lead in efforts to uphold and reinforce the free and open international order based on the rule of law.

### (6) East Asia Summit (EAS) (Participating Countries: 10 ASEAN countries and Japan, China, the ROK, Australia, New Zealand, India, the U.S. and Russia)

EAS was launched in 2005 with the aim of implementing strategic dialogue and cooperation on political, security, and economic issues of common concern to the region. As the region’s premier Leaders-led forum, it is expected that EAS will contribute to maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order based on the rule of law.

At the EAS Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held in July, Foreign Minister Hayashi emphasized the importance of the free and open international order based on the rule of law, stated that unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force should never be tolerated anywhere in the world, and stated Japan’s position on Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the Taiwan Strait, the situation in North Korea including the abductions issue, the situation in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and the situation in Myanmar. He also clearly explained Japan’s position on the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea.





Foreign Minister Hayashi attends the 13th EAS Foreign Ministers' Meeting (July 14, Jakarta, Indonesia)

At the 18th EAS held in September, Prime Minister Kishida expressed Japan's support for ASEAN centrality and unity as well as the mainstreaming of AOIP; and pointed out that it is even more important to realize an international community characterized by cooperation, not division and confrontation, through upholding and reinforcing the free and open international order based on the rule of law. He also stated that Japan opposes unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force anywhere in the world.

As for regional and international issues, Prime Minister Kishida pointed out that the global economy has facing increasingly serious challenges by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and underlined the need for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops and the importance of achieving a just and lasting peace in Ukraine. He also stressed that Japan absolutely cannot accept Russia's nuclear threats, let alone its use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances, and will promote realistic and practical efforts toward the realization of a world without nuclear weapons under the "Hiroshima Action Plan."

With regard to North Korea, he expressed serious concern over its intensified nuclear and missile activities and stated that it is essential for the international community to be united and to fully implement UN Security Council resolutions in order to achieve the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of all of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges. He also called for continued understanding and cooperation toward the immediate resolution of the abductions issue.

Prime Minister Kishida stated that he strongly opposes the continued and intensified activities in the East China Sea that infringe upon Japan's sovereignty. He also pointed out that militarization and coercive activities are continuing in the South China Sea, and that claims of maritime rights and activities in the sea should be conducted in accordance with the relevant provisions of UNCLOS. He pointed out the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and stated that Japan would engage itself in mutual efforts to build a "constructive and stable relationship" between Japan and China, together with President Xi Jinping, and that Japan would continue to have close communication at all levels for this purpose.

As for Myanmar, Prime Minister Kishida expressed serious concern over the continued deterioration of the situation in Myanmar and the lack of political progress, including the release of detainees such as State Counsellor Aung Saung Suu Kyi, and stated that he would provide maximal support to ASEAN efforts to resolve the situation.

Finally, he explained that the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea is being conducted in accordance with international standards and practices, with full precautions being taken to ensure safety.

### (7) Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Cooperation

Trilateral cooperation among Japan, China and the ROK continues to be vital from the perspective of promoting exchanges and mutual understanding among the three countries that enjoy geographical proximity and share deep historical ties. Furthermore, as the three countries play a major role in the world economy and serve as the force driving prosperity of the East Asian region, the trilateral cooperation has huge potential in efforts to tackle various issues in the international community.

On November 26, a Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Busan, ROK for the first time in four years. At the meeting, the three ministers reaffirmed the importance of promoting a future-oriented and practical cooperation between Japan, China and the ROK for peace and prosperity of the region and beyond from a broad perspective. The three ministers also concurred on advancing efforts in various areas such as (a) people-to-people exchange, (b)





The Tenth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting (November 26, Busan, ROK)

science and technology, (c) sustainable development, (d) public health, (e) economic cooperation and trade, and (f) peace and security as the future direction of concrete cooperation, and promoting concrete discussions among the three countries in preparation for the next Summit.

In terms of regional and global situations, the foreign ministers also discussed current international situations, including North Korea's launch on November 21, using ballistic missile technology for the purpose of a satellite launch, the Israel-Palestine situation, and Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Regarding North Korea in particular, Foreign Minister Kamikawa stated that we should firmly make efforts toward the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, including through the full implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions, and once again asked for continued understanding and cooperation from China and the ROK toward the immediate resolution of the abductions issue.

### **(8) Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (See Chapter 3, Section 3, 3 (3) )**

Consisting of 21 economies (countries and regions) in the Asia-Pacific region, APEC promotes regional economic integration and cooperation across the region among the member economies on a voluntary basis. As the Asia-Pacific region is positioned as the “world's growth center,” strengthening economic cooperation and trust in economic aspects in this region is crucial in pursuing Japan's further economic development.

At the APEC Leaders' Meeting held in San Francisco, U.S. in November, the leaders adopted the

“Golden Gate Declaration,” and the U.S. released a Chair's Statement on the situation in Ukraine and the Israel-Palestinian situation. Prime Minister Kishida, who attended the Summit, expressed his determination to contribute to sustainable growth in the Asia-Pacific region.

### **(9) South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**

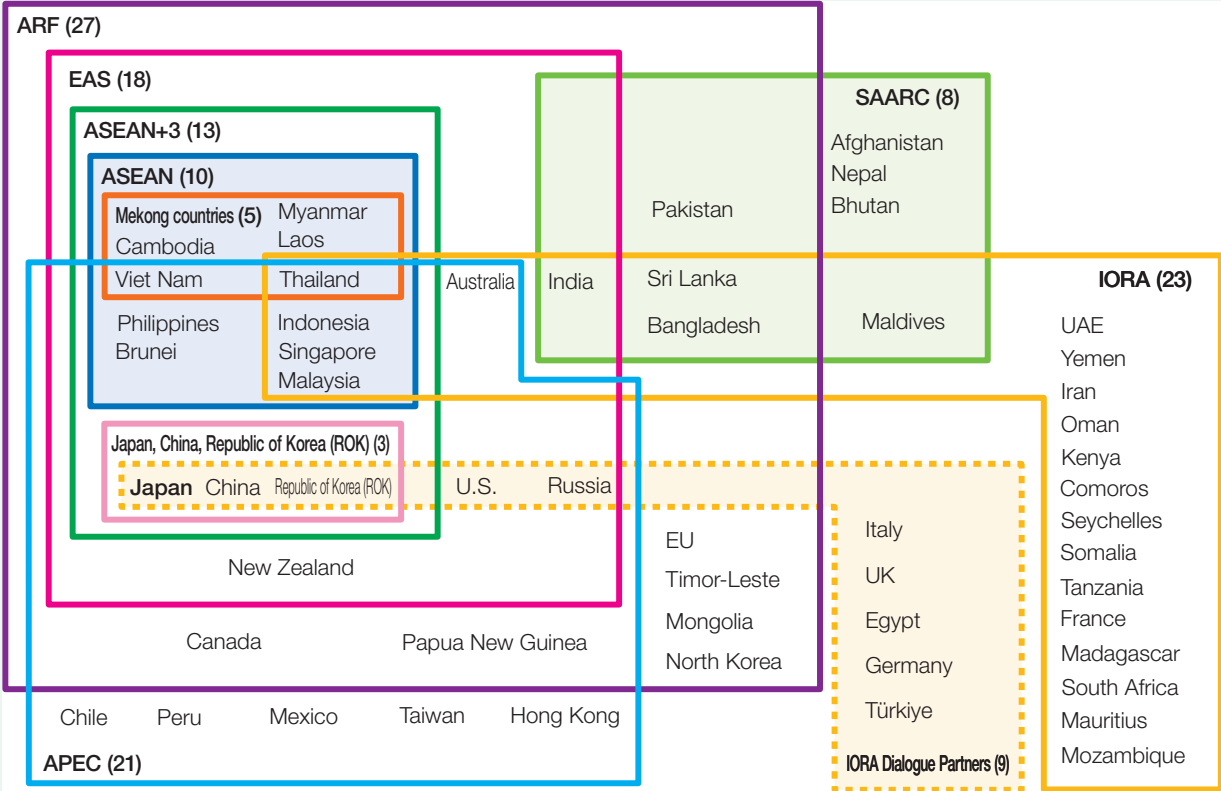
SAARC was officially inaugurated in 1985 with multiple objectives such as enhancing the welfare of citizens of the South Asian countries, and cooperation and collaboration in economic and social development and cultural areas. As of December 2023, SAARC has eight member states (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives and Afghanistan) and nine observer countries and institutions including Japan. As a relatively loose framework of regional cooperation, SAARC has worked primarily on economic, social and cultural areas, through summit meetings and meetings of the Council at the ministerial level (Foreign Ministers' meetings). However, no Summit Meeting has been held since 2014, and no Ministerial Meeting has been held since 2016. As part of the youth exchange between Japan and SAARC, Japan has invited 8,758 people as of the end of 2023.

### **(10) Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**

IORA is a regional organization whose main purpose is to promote economic cooperation in the Indian Ocean rim region, and Japan has been participating as a dialogue partner country since 1999. Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs KOMURA Masahiro attended the 23rd IORA Meeting of the Council of Ministers held in October and gave a speech stating that Japan will continue to cooperate with IORA as a partner country to realize FOIP.



Major Frameworks of the Asia-Pacific Region



<Abbreviations>  
 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)  
 EAS (East Asia Summit)  
 ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum)  
 APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation)  
 SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation)  
 IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association)