



## The Middle East and North Africa

### 1 Overview

The Middle East and North Africa (the Middle East) is located in a geopolitically important area: the crossroads of Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and South Asia. The region is a vital supplier of energy, representing approximately 50% of the world's oil reserves and 40% of the world's natural gas reserves and also is a market with high potential, pursuing the diversification of economy and decarbonization, especially in the Gulf countries, against a backdrop of a high population growth rate.

Meanwhile, the region has gone through various conflicts and disputes throughout its history, and still faces a number of destabilizing factors and challenges. In recent years, there have been signs of a change in the situation in the region toward improving relations, including the normalization of diplomatic relations between Israel and some Arab countries, but a series of events triggered by the terror attacks against Israel by Hamas and others in October has once again exposed instability in the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The immediate release of the hostages, improvement of the critical humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and the early calming of the situation have become urgent issues, and Japan, in close cooperation with the countries concerned, has been vigorously engaged in humanitarian assistance and diplomatic outreach.

In some other countries and regions, tensions and severe humanitarian situations persist. In recent years, regional tensions have been growing over Iran. The civil war continues in Syria, resulting in a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons, and it has made a great impact on the stability of the entire region, including its neighboring countries. In Yemen, parties concerned, including the Government of Yemen and the Houthis, agreed on a temporary truce in April 2022, but this expired in October, and the severe security and humanitarian situation continues. In addition, since November,

there have been a series of attacks by the Houthis against civilian ships sailing in the waters around the Arabian Peninsula, including the Red Sea. There are fears that the developments in Israel and Palestine may further aggravate these situations and cause further instability in the region. Furthermore, in Afghanistan, the humanitarian situation has further deteriorated since the Taliban took control of Kabul in August 2021.

The Biden administration in the United States (U.S.), which was inaugurated in January 2021, has recently been working vigorously, particularly to address the rising regional tensions surrounding the situation in Gaza and the critical humanitarian situation, including by reaching out to Israel and other relevant countries. China has also been strengthening its ties in the Middle East, and in March it was announced that Iran and Saudi Arabia, which had cut diplomatic ties since 2016, had agreed to normalize diplomatic relations through China's mediation.

Japan imports over 90% of its crude oil from the Middle East, and it is extremely important for Japan's peace and prosperity to promote peace and stability in the Middle East and to maintain and develop good relations with countries in the region. From this perspective, Japan in recent years has been striving to strengthen relations with Middle Eastern countries in a wide range of fields that include the economy, politics, security, culture and people-to-people exchanges. Prime Minister Kishida visited Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar in July. He discussed with the leaders of these countries and others a wide range of topics, including regional and international affairs and bilateral relations, in addition to cooperation in various fields, including energy and decarbonization. In September, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. In Egypt, in addition to bilateral events, he attended the Third Japan-Arab Political Dialogue, where he affirmed further strengthening of cooperation with 21 member

## 2 Situation in the Middle East

### (1) Middle East Peace Process

#### A Developments in the Middle East Peace Process

The Middle East Peace Process has stagnated since negotiations between Israel and Palestine faltered in April 2014. After the inauguration of the Biden administration in the U.S., there were momentary signs that indicated the resumption of cooperation between the parties, and there were some positive developments such as high-level contacts. However, at the end of December 2022, a coalition government that included a far-right party was formed in Israel, and since then, violent acts and clashes have occurred intermittently in Israel and Palestine, including in Jerusalem, resulting in numerous casualties. Violent exchanges continued, including armed clashes between Palestinian militants in Gaza and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in May 2023 and a large-scale IDF mop-up operation in the West Bank city of Jenin in July.

Against this backdrop, on October 7, Hamas and other Palestinian militants launched thousands of rockets from the Gaza Strip, and a large number of fighters breached Israeli checkpoints and borders, killing and kidnapping IDF soldiers as well as civilians, including foreign nationals. At least 1,200 Israelis were killed and more than 4,500 wounded. In addition, more than 200 people, including foreign nationals, were taken into the Gaza Strip and held hostage. This prompted the IDF to launch large-scale airstrikes on the Gaza Strip, followed by a ground operation inside the Gaza Strip. According to the United Nations (UN) and the Palestinian Ministry of Health, as of December 2023, more than 20,000 people had been killed and 50,000 injured in the Gaza Strip, and approximately 1.9 million people, or 85% of the population, had been forced to evacuate.

Since October 8, armed clashes have continued on Israel's northern border, with Lebanese Hezbollah (anti-government forces) shelling IDF bases near the border and major cities in northern Israel, entering Israeli



Foreign Minister Hayashi attends the First Japan-GCC Foreign Ministers' Meeting (September 7, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia)

states and one organization of the League of Arab States and exchanged views on regional and international affairs. In Saudi Arabia, the first Japan-GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council)<sup>1</sup> Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held to strengthen not only bilateral relations but also relations with regional cooperating organizations. In response to the situation in Israel and Palestine, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Egypt in October to attend the Cairo Summit for Peace, visited Israel, Palestine, and Jordan in November, and held foreign ministers' meetings with Iran, Jordan, and Lebanon in Geneva in December to help calm down the situation as soon as possible, ensure the safety of citizens, and improve the humanitarian situation. In these meetings, Foreign Minister Kamikawa also affirmed close cooperation toward regional stability with the relevant countries. In addition, amid the instability in the energy market in the wake of the situation in Ukraine, Japan repeatedly conducted high-level outreach to the Gulf countries to help with stabilization of the international crude oil market, including through telephone calls.

In 2023, several natural disasters occurred in the Middle East, including an earthquake in southeastern Türkiye (February), an earthquake in central Morocco (September), flooding in eastern Libya (September), and an earthquake in western Afghanistan (October), causing extensive damage. Japan has decided on and implemented various forms of humanitarian assistance, including through international organizations, to address the damage caused by these disasters.

<sup>1</sup> Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Established in 1981 by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait. Its purpose is to promote coordination, integration, and cooperation among participating countries in all fields, including defense and economy.

territory, and the IDF returning fire. Since October 19, Yemen's Houthis have been conducting intermittent attacks on Israel using missiles and drones, and on November 19, a Japanese-related ship was "seized" off the coast of Yemen. The attacks on vessels have continued since then, seriously affecting the free navigation of vessels in the Red Sea and surrounding waters, which are important sea lanes for the global economy.

As the military conflict continued, on November 22, with the mediation of Qatar, Egypt, and the U.S., Israel and Hamas agreed to a deal for the release of the hostages, and between November 24 and 30, 81 Israeli hostages and 24 foreign nationals were released, and 240 Palestinians who had been imprisoned in Israel were released. During this time, fighting ceased and humanitarian supplies, including fuel, were allowed to enter the Gaza Strip. However, fighting resumed on December 1, with the IDF launching a ground operation into the southern Gaza Strip. The IDF claimed that Hamas and others were building underground tunnels, including within hospital grounds, for military use.

At the UN, after four draft resolutions were rejected by the UN Security Council, resolution 2712, which focused on the protection of children in the Gaza Strip and included calls for a humanitarian pause and the immediate and unconditional release of hostages held by Hamas and others was adopted on November 15, and resolution 2720, on expanding and monitoring humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip, was adopted on December 22. As a member of the UN Security Council, Japan worked actively towards the adoption of these resolutions. Furthermore, at the UN General Assembly, a resolution proposed by Jordan calling for a humanitarian ceasefire was adopted by a majority on October 27, and a resolution proposed by Egypt calling for a humanitarian ceasefire was adopted by a majority on December 12. Furthermore, on December 29, South Africa filed a lawsuit against Israel with the International Court of Justice (ICJ), requesting provisional measures against Israel. In response, on January 26, 2024, the ICJ issued an order for provisional measures ordering Israel to take measures to prevent genocide and incitement to genocide in its relations with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and to take measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance.

## **B** The Government of Japan's Efforts

In working toward achieving a "two-state solution" that would enable Israel and Palestine to coexist in peace, Japan, in cooperation with the international community, has actively contributed through the three pillars of political dialogue with stakeholders, confidence building among the concerned parties, and economic assistance for the Palestinians.

As Japan's unique initiative, it has been promoting the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative, aiming at facilitating economic self-reliance of Palestine over the mid- and long-term through regional cooperation among Japan, Palestine, Israel, and Jordan. As of the end of 2023, 14 Palestinian private companies are operating in the flagship Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP) project, creating approximately 200 jobs. In addition, Japan is mobilizing the resources and economic development knowledge of East Asian countries to support Palestinian nation building through the Conference on the Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD).

In response to the armed conflict between Israel and Palestinian militants such as Hamas since October 7, Japan has resolutely condemned the terror attacks by Hamas and others and confirmed that Israel has the right to defend itself and its people in accordance with international law. Japan has consistently called for the immediate release of the hostages and the assurance of the safety of civilians, for all parties to act in accordance with international law, and for a prompt calming of the situation. Japan has also made proactive diplomatic efforts towards a ceasefire in fighting and the securing of an environment enabling humanitarian assistance activities. Prime Minister Kishida held a summit meeting with Egypt, Israel, Qatar, Jordan, Iran (a telephone call), and Türkiye during the 28th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) in December and confirmed cooperation and communication for calming down the situation as soon as possible. Foreign Minister Kamikawa attended the Cairo Summit for Peace on October 21, and visited Israel, Palestine, and Jordan from November 3 to 4, holding foreign ministers' meetings with each country and region. Additionally, within the G7 framework, foreign ministers held frank discussions on the



Foreign Minister Kamikawa delivers a speech at the Cairo Summit for Peace (October 21, Cairo, Egypt)

situation in Israel and Palestine at the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in November and issued the "G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Situation in Israel and Gaza" on November 29. At the UN, as a member of the UN Security Council, Japan lobbied vigorously for the adoption of a resolution on the expansion of humanitarian assistance to and monitoring of the Gaza Strip, so that the UN Security Council could fulfill its responsibilities. Furthermore, since October, Japan has announced and implemented humanitarian assistance totaling approximately 75 million U.S. dollars to Palestine and material assistance through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in order to improve the critical humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Regarding the provisional measures order issued by the ICJ on January 26, 2024, the next day, on January 27, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement by the Foreign Minister expressing Japan's position, stating that "The order of provisional measures of the ICJ, the principal international judicial organ of the UN, is legally binding on the parties to the dispute, and to be observed in good faith," and that "As a country that attaches great importance to the rule of law in the international community, Japan avails this opportunity to reiterate its support for the ICJ's role in this regard."

## (2) Israel

Israel excels in the development of advanced technology and innovation, and holds importance for the Japanese economy as well as for the stability of the Middle East.

After the general election in November 2022, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu received a cabinet nomination,

and a coalition government including far-right parties was formed in Israel at the end of December of the same year. Under his administration, national opinion has so far been divided over the reform of the judicial system, and large-scale demonstrations have continuously occurred in the country. In addition, the administration has promoted a settlement policy in the West Bank, and clashes have repeatedly occurred between Palestinians and Israeli settlers.

Following the terror attacks by Hamas and others on October 7, Prime Minister Netanyahu declared a "state of war," established a united cabinet that included the main opposition party and launched a military operation against the Gaza Strip.

As for relations with Japan, regular direct flights between Japan and Israel began operation in March, and three meetings of the "Joint Study Group on the possibility of a Japan-Israel Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)" were held in 2023. In response to the October 7 terror attacks, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Israel in November and met with President Isaac Herzog and Minister of Foreign Affairs Eli Cohen, as well as with the families of those who were killed or kidnapped in the Hamas terror attacks.

## (3) Palestine

Based on the 1993 Oslo Accords and other agreements, the Palestinian Authority (PA) began self-rule in the West Bank of the Jordan River and Gaza Strip from 1995. Prime Minister Abbas assumed office as president after the presidential elections held in 2005. Following this, relations between the Fatah led by the president and Hamas deteriorated, and Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by military force. In 2017, an agreement in principle was reached through Egyptian mediation to transfer authority in Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. In 2022, through Algerian mediation, the Algiers Declaration, a reconciliation document between Palestinian factions, was signed, which includes the holding of Palestinian Legislative Council elections within one year, but the division remains, with the West Bank of the Jordan River still being held by Fatah and the Gaza Strip remaining under Hamas's de facto control.

Regarding relations with Japan, in September, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a meeting with Riad



Japan-Palestine Foreign Ministers' Meeting (November 3, Ramallah, Palestine)

Malki, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Palestine, during the Japan-Arab Political Dialogue in Cairo. In November, following the October 7 terror attacks on Israel by Hamas and others, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Palestine and held a foreign ministers' meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Malki.

### (4) Afghanistan

Located at the nexus of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia, Afghanistan is a geopolitically important country that has historically been a crossroads of various religions, cultures, and ethnic groups.

The Taliban seized control of the capital, Kabul, in August 2021, and announced formation of a “transitional government” the following month, but a lack of ethnic and religious inclusiveness has been pointed out. The international community has also expressed its serious concern over reports of significant restrictions on the rights of women and girls, including the suspension of secondary and higher education for girls and the suspension of Afghan female staff from NGOs and UN agencies. Although security has improved, sporadic terrorist attacks by groups affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continue to occur in various parts of the country.

Against this backdrop, Japan continues to conduct

direct engagement with Taliban and call on to promote the social and political participation of all Afghan citizens, including women and social minorities, the elimination of restrictions, and the building of constructive relations with the international community, to avoid Afghanistan becoming once again a breeding ground for terrorism and isolation from the international community as it was in the 1990s. In 2023, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and penholder<sup>2</sup> on the situation in Afghanistan, Japan worked with the UAE to draft and coordinate relevant resolutions, contributing to the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2678 on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)<sup>3</sup> and resolution 2721 to implement the recommendations made in the independent assessment of Afghanistan<sup>4</sup> report, which provides guidance for the international community's engagement in Afghanistan.

According to a UN announcement, approximately two-thirds of the country's population needs humanitarian assistance, and Japan has continued to provide humanitarian assistance and support for basic human needs (minimum requirements for a basic human life) through international organizations even after the Taliban took control of Kabul. Also in 2023, in response to the damage caused by the large-scale earthquake that occurred in the western part of the country in October, Japan provided emergency relief supplies through JICA and 3 million U.S. dollars in emergency grant aid through international organizations. In December, Japan decided to provide additional support of approximately 58.4 million U.S. dollars in the FY2023 supplementary budget. As a result, the total amount of Japanese assistance since August 2021 is approximately 470 million U.S. dollars (as of the end of 2023).

### (5) Iran

Iran is a major Shiite regional power with a population of about 85 million that boasts abundant natural

<sup>2</sup> Refers to the member of the Security Council that leads discussions on a particular agenda item and drafts documents such as resolutions and the chair's statements.

<sup>3</sup> UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan): Established in 2002 based on UN Security Council resolution 1401, its mission includes providing political and strategic advice to the Afghan government on the peace process. Even after the Taliban took control of Kabul in August 2021, UNAMA has continued its activities in Afghanistan, lobbying the Taliban and coordinating humanitarian aid.

<sup>4</sup> Independent Assessment of Afghanistan: On March 16, 2023, the UN Security Council, through Resolution 2679, requested the UN Secretary-General to conduct an independent assessment of Afghanistan on ways to address the challenges facing the country. In response to this, in April the UN Secretary-General appointed Feridun Sinirlioglu, (a Turkish national) as the Special Coordinator to lead the assessment and had him prepare a report on the independent assessment, which he submitted to the UN Security Council on November 8. The report calls for building trust between the international community and Afghanistan, continued cooperation to address key challenges, and pursuing dialogue among Afghans, and recommends the establishment of mechanisms to strengthen engagement in Afghanistan, including the appointment of a special envoy for Afghanistan by the UN Secretary-General.

resources. Japan has developed a traditionally friendly relationship with Iran for more than 90 years.

Following the previous Trump administration's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), since July 2019, Iran has taken steps to undermine its commitment to the nuclear deal. As of the end of 2023, Iran has produced uranium enriched up to 60%, left some safeguard issues unresolved, suspended the implementation of the Additional Protocol that allowed unannounced inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and has withdrawn the designation of some IAEA inspectors of certain nationalities. Japan has consistently supported the Iran nuclear deal, and calls for a constructive response from Iran, including the full and unconditional implementation of the March 2023 joint statement between Iran and the IAEA. Under the Biden Administration, despite various diplomatic efforts for both the U.S. and Iran to return to the nuclear agreement, at this point in time (as of the end of December 2023), mutual return by the U.S. and Iran to compliance with their commitment under JCPOA has not been realized. Furthermore, eight years have passed since the adoption of the Iran nuclear deal on October 18, and some of the measures against Iran based on UN Security Council resolution 2231 regarding the Iranian nuclear issue have expired, and Japan also lifted its measures based on the resolution. On the other hand, Japan takes strict measures under the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Act with respect to the transfer of goods and technology related to the means of delivery of nuclear weapons, regardless of whether the provisions of the UN Security Council resolution.

Against this backdrop, the situation surrounding Iran continues to be highly tense. For example, in addition to the cases that the Iranian Navy captured a Marshall Islands-registered tanker and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy seized a tanker of Panamanian registry, the situation in Israel and Palestine since October led to attacks on U.S. interests in Syria and Iraq by forces believed to be close to Iran, as well as attacks on ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters, which led to retaliatory attacks by the U.S., the killing of a senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps military advisor in Syria, an explosion during

a memorial service for former Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander Qassem Soleimani, and Iran's retaliatory attacks in response to these incidents. Japan has used various opportunities, including at the heads of state and foreign minister level, to urge Iran to exercise restraint regarding the forces over which it has influence.

Meanwhile, there were also efforts to ease tensions regarding Iran. In March, Iran agreed to normalize diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, with which it had severed diplomatic ties in 2016, mediated by China after mediation efforts by Iraq and Oman. Moreover, in September, Iranian frozen assets in the Republic of Korea (ROK) were released and an exchange of detainees between the U.S. and Iran was achieved through mediation by Oman and Qatar.

Regarding Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the debate over accusations in the international community about Iran's provision of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) to Russia continues.

Japan is an ally of the U.S. but has maintained good relations with Iran for many years, continuing bilateral cooperation in areas that directly benefit the Iranian people, such as health and medical care, the environment, and disaster preparation, as well as aiding Afghan refugees in Iran. In addition, Prime Minister Kishida held talks with President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi in New York during his visit to the U.S. in September, as in the previous year, and held a Japan-Iran Summit telephone call in December. Foreign Minister Hayashi held a meeting with Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian when he visited Japan in August, and Foreign Minister Kamikawa also held a telephone call with him in October and in person in December. In addition to these high-level talks, Japan and Iran held Japan-Iran Vice-Ministerial Consultation in April and December, Japan-Iran Consular Forum in January, Japan-Iran Human Rights Dialogue in October, and Japan-Iran Consultation on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Issues in November. In this way, Japan has been making its own diplomatic efforts to ease tensions and stabilize the situation in the Middle East by directly communicating its concerns to Iran on various issues at every opportunity, while continuing multilayered dialogues with Iran at various levels.

## (6) Türkiye

Türkiye is an important regional power in various respects, including its geopolitical significance. As a member country of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Türkiye plays a significant role in regional security while proactively pursuing multifaceted diplomacy with Europe and the U.S., Russia, and countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Türkiye has traditionally been one of the friendliest countries with Japan, as epitomized by episodes such as the Ertuğrul Frigate incident in 1890.

In February 2023, a major earthquake with an epicenter in the southeastern part of Türkiye caused an unprecedented disaster, collapsing many buildings and claiming the lives of some 50,000 people. In recent years, high inflation has put a strain on people's lives, and the Turkish government has also faced backlash over its response to the earthquake. Amid this, presidential and parliamentary elections were held in May. In the presidential election, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was re-elected after a runoff vote, and in the parliamentary elections, the ruling coalition including President Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP)<sup>5</sup> won. The election victory means President Erdoğan's term will run till 2028, and local elections in 2024 will be held without the united opposition's candidate being elected.

On the diplomatic front, facing serious inflation and an economic crisis, and in the run-up to the presidential election, the country has prioritized pragmatic approaches in its efforts to improve relations with neighboring countries. As a NATO member, Türkiye approved Finland's application for membership. On the other hand, since the terror attacks by Hamas and others, the situation between Israel and Palestine has become tense, and Türkiye has taken a stance of strongly condemning Israel, with which it had been improving relations.

Regarding relations with Japan, following the major earthquake that struck southeastern Türkiye in February, the Government of Japan dispatched its Japan Disaster Relief Search and Rescue Team on the day of the disaster, followed by a medical team and a team of experts, including Self-Defense Forces aircraft

to transport materials and equipment necessary for support. Furthermore, in addition to providing emergency relief supplies through JICA, Japan provided emergency humanitarian assistance totaling 8.5 million U.S. dollars through international organizations and Japanese NGOs. In addition, for the purpose of recovery and reconstruction, Japan has announced a total of 5 billion Japanese yen in grant aid for debris removal and the provision of medical equipment and heavy machinery, as well as 80 billion Japanese yen in loans to support the recovery and reconstruction of the affected areas. Also, Prime Minister Kishida and President Erdoğan held summit meetings during the G20 New Delhi Summit in September and at COP28 in December.

## (7) Iraq

After the Iraq War in 2003, Iraq enacted a new constitution in 2005, and a government formed through democratic elections is in charge of running the country.

On the domestic political front, the country continued to be in a state of confusion after the election for the Iraqi Council of Representatives elections in 2021, with no cabinet being able to be formed. However, since the new government was formed in October 2022, Prime Minister Mohammed Al-Sudani has been running a stable administration with the support of a wide range of political forces. In June 2023, the budget law covering the three fiscal years from 2023 to 2025 came into effect, ensuring budgetary stability and administrative continuity. In addition, the first provincial council elections in 10 years were held in December, which are expected to strengthen local government and expand administrative services in the future.

Following the inauguration of the Sudani administration, domestic security in Iraq has improved significantly. However, since October, there have been successive attacks on U.S. military facilities in Iraq by pro-Iranian militia groups calling themselves the "Islamic Resistance of Iraq," and U.S. forces have also launched counterattacks against the pro-Iranian militia groups. The situation in Israel and Palestine has an impact on the situation in Iraq.

5 AKP : Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi

On the diplomatic front, Iraq is located between the regional powers of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye, and is seeking to strengthen relations with neighboring countries and pursue a balanced diplomacy. Iraq, along with Oman, contributed to the process of reaching an agreement on the normalization of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which was mediated by China in March.

Since 2003, Japan has consistently provided support to Iraq, including economic cooperation worth approximately 13.8 billion U.S. dollars (as of the end of 2023).

## (8) Jordan

The situation in Jordan remains relatively stable compared to other parts of the continuously turbulent Middle East region. Jordan has, under the leadership of King Abdullah II, played an important role in promoting the peace and stability of the region, such as with countermeasures against extremists, its acceptance of a large number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, and active involvement in peace in the Middle East. The country's role is highly regarded by the international community.

Regarding relations with Japan, the imperial and royal families of the two countries have traditionally enjoyed friendly relations, and in April King Abdullah II and Crown Prince Hussein visited Japan.

At the summit level, Prime Minister Kishida held a summit meeting with His Majesty the King in April where they reaffirmed that the two countries would further develop their cooperative relationship under a strategic partnership. In October, Prime Minister Kishida held a summit telephone call with the King regarding the situation in the Gaza Strip. Prime Minister Kishida held a summit meeting with His Majesty the King during COP28 in December, where they primarily discussed the situation in Gaza, and reaffirmed that they would work closely together for the long-term stability of the region.

At the foreign ministerial level, Foreign Minister Hayashi held the Third Japan-Jordan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ayman Al Safadi, who visited Japan in March, as well as a telephone call on the situation in Syria in May. In September, when Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Jordan, he paid a courtesy call to the King of Jordan



Fourth Japan-Jordan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue (September 3, Amman, Jordan)

and Prime Minister Bisher Hani Al-Khasawneh, and also held the Fourth Japan-Jordan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with Minister Safadi, where they shared the importance of realizing Middle East Peace on the basis of the "two-state solution" and supporting refugees. In October, Foreign Minister Kamikawa had a telephone call with Minister Safadi regarding the situation in Gaza, and in November also held a meeting with the Minister Safadi during her visit to Jordan. Foreign Minister Kamikawa also had another telephone call with Minister Safadi during her visit to San Francisco in the same month. The two ministers also met with each other during their visit to Geneva in December and welcomed the frequent meetings and deepening cooperation between them. They reaffirmed that they would work together to improve the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, calm down the situation as soon as possible, and further develop bilateral cooperation.

In addition, Japan has been cooperating in economic, security, and in other areas with Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, NISHIMURA Yasutoshi visiting Jordan in January, Chief of Staff, Joint Staff of the Japan Self-Defense Forces Yamazaki visiting in February, and Digital Minister KONO Taro visiting in July.

## (9) The Gulf States and Yemen

In recent years, the Gulf States have been working on socioeconomic reforms with decarbonization and industrial diversification as key issues. The Gulf States are important partners for Japan from the perspective of energy security and other factors. In addition, Japan is promoting cooperation in a wide range of

areas under “Japan-Saudi Vision 2030” with Saudi Arabia and the “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Initiative (CSPI)” with the UAE, based on the view that these reforms will contribute to the long-term stability and prosperity of the Middle East. Prime Minister Kishida visited Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar in July and held talks with the leaders of each country where he proposed the concept of making the Middle East a global supply hub for clean energy and critical minerals and stated that the relationship with Japan would evolve from the traditional oil-producing and consuming countries to that of partners in a wide range of fields. In addition, regarding the Japan-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which had been suspended since 2009, Japan and the GCC countries shared the view that both sides should resume negotiations in 2024. In September, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Saudi Arabia and attended the Japan-GCC Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, as well as holding bilateral meetings with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Japan also held telephone calls with Gulf countries in response to the situations in Sudan and Gaza.

Saudi Arabia plays a leading role in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and is an important energy security partner, supplying about 40% of Japan’s crude oil imports. It is also the only Arab member of the G20 and is the leader of the Arab Islamic world, home to two of Islam’s holiest sites. In 2023, Saudi Arabia played a leading role in foreign policy discussions among Arab and Islamic countries, including normalizing diplomatic relations with Iran, holding direct talks with the Houthis in Yemen, encouraging Syria to return to the Arab League, and hosting an emergency joint summit of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in response to the situation in Gaza. Furthermore, under “Saudi Vision 2030,” the country is promoting new initiatives in various fields with the aim of comprehensive socio-economic reforms. Through various measures, such as two meetings between Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman and Prime Minister Kishida in July and September, two telephone calls in October, a telephone call and a meeting between Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud and Foreign Minister Hayashi in April and in

September respectively, a telephone call with Foreign Minister Kamikawa in October, and Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs FUKAZAWA Yoichi’s attendance at the 7th Ministerial Meeting of the Japan-Saudi Vision 2030 in December, the two countries reaffirmed their intention to further promote cooperation in various fields under the framework of Japan-Saudi Vision 2030, as well as cooperation under the Saudi-Japan Lighthouse Initiative for Clean Energy Cooperation, and strengthen their strategic partnership.

The UAE is also an important partner in terms of energy security, supplying approximately 40% of Japan’s crude oil imports. In addition, in 2023, the country served as the chair of COP28, and as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, it has played an important role in the international arena, including leading discussions with Japan on the issues surrounding Afghanistan and proposing a draft resolution on the situation in Gaza. Japan reaffirmed that it would further promote cooperation in various fields under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Initiative (CSPI) framework, as well as cooperation under the “Japan-UAE Innovation Partnership” and the “Global Green Energy Hub” concept, and strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries, through efforts such as a meeting between Prime Minister Kishida and President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in July, telephone calls in October and December, meetings by Foreign Minister Hayashi with Minister of State Ahmed bin Ali Al Sayegh in January and with Dr. Sultan Al Jaber, Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology, Special Envoy to Japan of the UAE in April and Foreign Minister Abdullah in April



Japan-UAE Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (June 12, Tokyo)

(by telephone) and June, and the first ministerial level CSPI meeting between Foreign Minister Kamikawa and Minister Jaber in September, and a telephone call with Foreign Minister Abdullah in October. In addition, in the defense field, the Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology, which was signed in May, entered into force in January 2024.

Qatar is one of the world's largest gas-producing countries, and it has been increasing its presence by leveraging its own channels with Iran, the Taliban, Hamas, and others to mediate peace talks between the U.S. and the Taliban, negotiations over the exchange of detainees between the U.S. and Iran, and hostage release negotiations between Israel and Hamas. During Prime Minister Kishida's visit to Qatar in July, the two leaders upgraded the comprehensive partnership between the two countries to a strategic partnership. Prime Minister Kishida also held a telephone call with the Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, in October and a meeting in December. In addition, the Second Japan-Qatar Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue was held between Foreign Minister Hayashi and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani in January, and a telephone call between Foreign Minister Kamikawa and Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulaziz AlKhulaifi, in October.

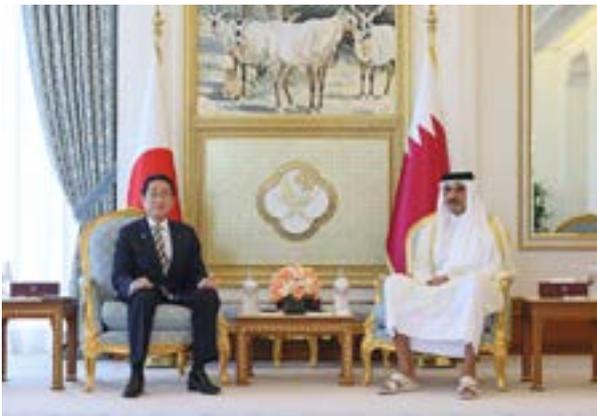
Oman leveraged its own channels with Iran and the Houthis to mediate negotiations on the normalization of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, negotiations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis,

and negotiations on the exchange of detainees between the U.S. and Iran. Foreign Minister Hayashi held meetings with Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi in March and September, while Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a telephone call with him in November.

Regarding Kuwait, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs TAKAGI Kei visited the country in January, and Foreign Minister Hayashi met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah AlJaber Al-Sabah in September. Following the passing of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in December, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan MORI Eisuke (member of the House of Representatives) paid a condolence visit to Kuwait and conveyed his condolences to the new Emir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Regarding Bahrain, the Japan-Bahrain Investment Agreement came into force in September, and later that month Foreign Minister Hayashi met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani.

Stability in Yemen is important not only for the peace and stability in the Middle East as a whole, but also from the perspective of securing sea lanes, which are directly related to Japan's energy security. In Yemen, the Houthis have continued to fight against the Government of Yemen and the Arab Coalition, but a nationwide ceasefire was agreed upon in April 2022, and although the agreement expired in October of the same year, the situation remains stable. In 2023, several rounds of direct talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, mediated by Oman, have been held, showing positive moves towards a lasting peace in Yemen. Japan is also continuing its diplomatic efforts to hold dialogue between Yemenis, including through efforts by Special Assistant to the Minister for Foreign Affairs Hayashi to the leader of the Houthi negotiating team. In response to the situation in the Gaza Strip, in November, the Houthis, who stand in solidarity with Hamas, declared they would attack vessels related to Israel and "seized" a Japan-related vessel in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen, and have carried out a series of attacks against ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Japan firmly condemns these actions by the Houthis, calls for them to refrain from any actions that impede the free and safe navigation of ships, and



Japan-Qatar Summit Meeting (July 18, Doha, Qatar; Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

is working in cooperation with relevant countries to achieve the early release of Japanese-related ships and crew members, and to stabilize the surrounding waters. In January 2024, the UN Security Council adopted the resolution 2722, co-sponsored by Japan and the U.S. to demand an immediate cease of all attacks by the Houthis against vessels in the Red Sea. Meanwhile, due to the protracted conflict, Yemen is facing a severe humanitarian situation that has been described as the “worst in the world.” Since 2015, Japan has cooperated with international organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to Yemen totaling approximately 430 million U.S. dollars (as of the end of 2023).

## (10) Syria

### **A** Changes in the situation

The Syrian crisis, which began in March 2011, has spanned over a decade, sees neither prospects of stabilization nor political resolution, and discussions under the Constitutional Committee, which was established in 2019 through the mediation of the UN to bring together the Government and dissidents, has not been in session for over a year. Meanwhile, the major earthquake that occurred in the southeastern part of Türkiye on February 6 also caused extensive damage in Syria, mainly in the north (with more than 5,900 casualties). The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria will reach 16.7 million in 2024, and the number of internally displaced persons exceeded 7.2 million as of the end of 2023, indicating that humanitarian needs are the highest since the crisis began.

In foreign relations, while Syria maintains cooperative relations with Russia and Iran, both of which supported the Assad administration, it was decided at an extraordinary meeting of Arab League Foreign Ministers on May 7 to reinstate Syria as a member as part of its efforts to improve relations with Arab countries that have been observed in recent years. In addition, in September, President Bashar al-Assad visited China for the first time in 19 years. Meanwhile, European countries and the U.S. remain cautious about resuming relations with the Government of Syria due to the Assad administration’s use of chemical weapons and human rights violations.<sup>6</sup>

On the military and security front, security in the capital Damascus is generally maintained, but the situation remains unstable, especially in the northern part of the country. Furthermore, tensions have risen between Israel and Palestine following the terror attacks against Israel by Hamas and others on October 7, and this has affected the situation in Syria, including an increase in airstrikes and other attacks in Syria.

### **B** The Government of Japan’s Efforts

Japan has consistently maintained its position that the crisis in Syria cannot be resolved by any military means, and a political solution is indispensable, while continuous assistance is important for the improvement of humanitarian situation.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs YAMADA Kenji attended “the Supporting the future of Syria and the region, Brussels VII Conference” in June, and expressed Japan’s unwavering commitment to humanitarian assistance. Since 2012, Japan has provided humanitarian assistance totaling approximately 3.5 billion U.S. dollars to Syria and its neighboring countries (as of the end of 2023).

## (11) Lebanon

Faced with various challenges due to the complex crisis, Lebanon has been in a political vacuum since the end of former President General Michel Aoun’s term at the end of October 2022, with no conclusion reached in parliamentary talks due to conflicts among political forces, and neither has a new president been elected nor has a new cabinet been formed. Administrative and financial reforms outlined in the working-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are significantly delayed, and the economic crisis is dragging on, with public services not functioning and high inflation. Since July, there have been incidents of military clashes in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. In addition, the situation in Gaza since October 7 has been affected by the ongoing military attacks between Israel and Hezbollah and others in the southern part of the country bordering Israel, with some pointing out a further deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation.

<sup>6</sup> The state’s power violates the fundamental human rights of the people guaranteed by the Constitution.

Japan has provided a total of more than 290.9 million U.S. dollars in assistance (including broad-based assistance) since 2012 (as of the end of 2023). In August, Deputy Foreign Minister Yamada visited Beirut and held meetings with Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berry, among others. Furthermore, during her visit to Geneva in December, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a foreign ministers' meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants Abdallah Bou Habib and the two Ministers confirmed that the two countries would continue to work together to improve the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and to calm down the situation as soon as possible.

### 3 The Situation in North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco)

#### (1) Egypt

Located at the geopolitical crossroads of the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, Egypt is a regional power in the Middle East and North Africa with a population of over 100 million. Since the terror attacks by Hamas and others on October 7, the situation between Israel and Palestine has become increasingly tense. In response to the situation, Egypt has been playing an important role in the stability of the region by evacuating foreign nationals and others from the Gaza Strip, accepting humanitarian aid supplies from international organizations and countries around the world and transporting them to the Gaza Strip. Egypt has also been engaged in diplomatic efforts such as hosting the Cairo Summit for Peace, in order to calm the situation and prevent destabilization of the entire region and has lead discussions on the urgency of improving the humanitarian situation. In the presidential election held in December, the incumbent President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi was elected to a third term with 89.6% of the total vote through public support for his response to the situation in Gaza, paving the way for a long-term administration.

In relations with Japan, Prime Minister Kishida visited Egypt in April, becoming the first Japanese prime minister in eight years to do so, and held a summit meeting with President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, and the



Foreign Minister Hayashi attends the Third Japan-Arab Political Dialogue (September 5, Cairo, Egypt)

two sides announced they would elevate bilateral relations to a strategic partnership (See the Special Feature on page 180). In September, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Cairo, paid a courtesy call to President El-Sisi and held a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry. He also took part in the Japan-Egypt-Jordan Trilateral Ministerial Consultations on the Middle East and the Third Japan-Arab Political Dialogue. In response to the worsening situation in Gaza, Prime Minister Kishida held telephone calls with President El-Sisi on October 17 and November 29, and also held the Japan-Egypt Summit Working Dinner with the Egyptian President on December 1 during the 28th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), held in the UAE. The two leaders exchanged views on bilateral relations and regional and international situations, and affirmed their close cooperation. In addition, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held telephone calls with Minister of Foreign Affairs Shoukry on October 12 and November 14, and also attended the Cairo Summit for Peace in October, which was attended by other high-level officials from major countries, and exchanged views with the summit chair, President El-Sisi.

Since April 2019, Japan has dispatched two Self-Defense Force (SDF) personnel to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) stationed in the Sinai Peninsula, while an additional two staff officers have been dispatched since July, bringing the total to four. Japan continues to contribute to peace and stability in the region.

### (2) Libya

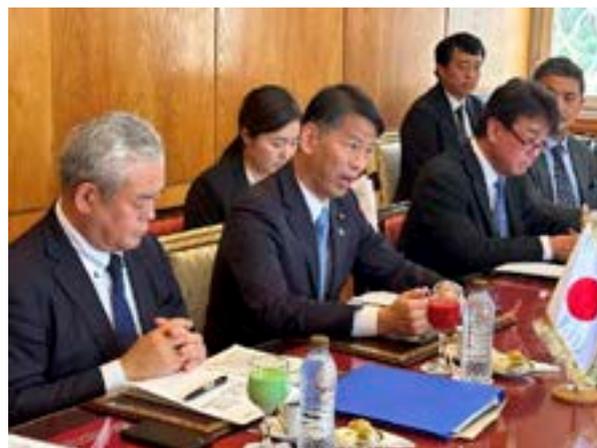
Although Libya is an energy powerhouse boasting the greatest oil reserves in Africa, after the collapse of the Qadhafi regime in 2011, the country remains unstable with political power split between the east and the west of the country. In April 2019, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, powerful commander of the eastern “Libyan National Army (LNA),” ordered an advance on Tripoli, leading to armed clashes. Since the two forces signed a permanent ceasefire agreement in October 2020, incidents of armed clashes between the eastern and western forces have decreased significantly. In September 2023, floods caused extensive damage, particularly in the eastern region of Derna.

On the political front, a basic agreement was reached at the United Nations-led political dialogue to hold a series of national elections, including a presidential election, on Independence Day, December 24, 2021, but these have yet to be held as of the end of 2023. Since February when Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya, Abdoulaye Bathily, announced an initiative to hold elections within 2023, efforts led by the UN have continued to progress.

In response to the floods that occurred in eastern Libya in September, Japan provided emergency relief supplies through JICA and also provided emergency grant aid totaling 3 million U.S. dollars. In addition, in light of the certain extent of improvement in the security situation, the Embassy of Japan in Libya resumed operations in Tripoli in January 2024 for the first time since it was temporarily closed in July 2014.

### (3) Maghreb Countries (Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco)

The Maghreb region is of great economic importance in Africa due to its geographical advantage of being located at the junction of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, and its great potential thanks to its abundant young labor force but continues to be faced with the challenge of how to overcome increasing poverty, regional economic disparities, high unemployment rate, and the impact of soaring food prices. There are also concerns about the security implications of the flow of weapons and illegal immigrants from Libya and the Sahel region.



State Minister for Foreign Affairs Yamada, chair of the 11th Japan-Tunisia Joint Committee (June 16, Tunis, Tunisia)

In Tunisia, under the new constitution that came into effect in 2022, elections for the national assembly were held in December of that year and January 2023, and a new assembly was established. With Tunisia’s economy and finances affected by factors such as Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and climate change, attention is focused on whether the country will be able to undertake economic and social reforms.

In relations with Japan, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Yamada visited Tunisia in June and paid courtesy calls to Head of the Government Najla Bouden and Minister of Foreign Affairs Nabil Ammar. Mr. Yamada also served as the head of the Japanese delegation at the 11th Japan-Tunisia Joint Committee, where he exchanged views on general bilateral relations, the regional situation, and cooperation in the international arena. In September, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a Foreign Ministers’ Meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Ammar on the occasion of the Japan-Arab Political Dialogue in Egypt. Cooperation on the political front also progressed, with the Third Session of the Japanese-Tunisian Dialogue on Security and Counterterrorism being held in December.

In Algeria, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune newly took office in December 2019. As part of economic reforms aimed at realizing “a New Algeria« l’Algérie nouvelle»,” in 2022, he made amendments to the investment law among other changes. In November 2023, President Tebboune appointed Mr. Nadir Larbaoui as prime minister, and attention will be focused on how the administration will operate in the run-up to the president’s re-election in the upcoming election in 2024.

In relations with Japan, economic relations are expected to become stronger with the signing of the Tax Convention between Japan and Algeria in February (effective January 20, 2024), and the Agreement for Establishment of the Japan-Algeria Intergovernmental Joint Economic Committee in July. In June, the Japan-Algeria Policy Consultations were held, and in December, bilateral Consultations on Counter Terrorism and Other Related Security Matters were held for the first time in 10 years. At these meetings, the two countries exchanged views on the circumstances of their regional situations and confirmed their close cooperation within multilateral frameworks, including the UN Security Council, on which they will share seats in 2024. Moreover, bilateral relations are developing not only diplomatically but also in various other fields, such as the dispatch of fisheries experts from Japan through a JICA technical cooperation project and the participation of a Japanese film director in the Algiers International Comic Festival (Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d'Alger, FIBDA).

In Morocco, the coalition cabinet led by the leader of the National Rally of Independents (RNI), Aziz Akhannouch, which was formed following the September 2021 lower house elections, is focusing on implementing the “New Development Model”

proposed by King Mohammed VI, in addition to reforms in health, education, social security, and taxes. Furthermore, Morocco is actively working toward a transition to a green economy to deal with climate change risks such as floods and droughts. In the wake of the magnitude 6.8 earthquake that struck the mountainous region of central Morocco in September, which caused extensive damage, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) held their annual meetings in Marrakech in October, with Finance Minister SUZUKI Shunichi and Bank of Japan Governor UEDA Kazuo attending from Japan.

Regarding relations with Japan, Speaker of the House of Representatives Rachid Talbi El Alami made an official visit to Japan in March and met with members of the Diet. In September, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Nasser Bourita during the Third Japan-Arab Political Dialogue held in Egypt, and the two ministers affirmed that they would further strengthen cooperative relations between the two countries in a broad range of fields. Additionally, in response to the earthquake that occurred in central Morocco that month, Japan provided emergency humanitarian assistance totaling 3 million U.S. dollars.

COLUMN

## Japanese Pop Artists Enthusiastically Celebrated in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is considered a conservative and insular major power in the Middle East, where once movies and music were banned. Now, the country is changing at a level previously unimagined, such as lifting its ban on tourism and further advancing women in society, and exchanges with Japan are becoming more active.

One such change has been the country's regular hosting of large-scale national entertainment events. In 2023, the "Jeddah Events Calendar 2023" was held in Jeddah, about an hour's drive from the Islamic holy city of Makkah ("Mecca" in English). From April to June, one event on the Calendar was the "Anime Village," an event area for experiencing Japanese culture. There, many Japanese artists gave enthusiastic performances in the evening, and young locals turned out with great excitement.

In addition, "Japan Anime Town" was established in the "Boulevard World"<sup>1</sup> entertainment area in the capital city of Riyadh on the occasion of the "2022 Riyadh Season." Japanese artists performed weekly here for about a month in December 2022.

A Japanese anime song singer, halca, who actually performed theme songs such as for the anime "Boruto: Naruto Next Generations" at events in Jeddah and Riyadh, offered the following about her impressions.



halca Concert in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia during Jeddah Events Calendar 2023 - Anime Village at City Walk

### (Comment from halca)

The time and experiences I have had in Riyadh and Jeddah have been invaluable to me. I feel great joy and gratitude for everything that happened to me in Saudi Arabia.

Wherever I went and whoever I met, everyone had a smile, and their rich expressions of emotion came through in many ways during my live performance. Some listened with hands raised in a gentle swaying motion, some used their fingertips, palms, and entire body to make heart signs at me, and others applauded loudly when I held my notes. Everyone seemed to be enjoying the music in their own way, which was so brilliant to see.

Both Riyadh and Jeddah were filled with extremely enthusiastic cheering, which made me feel fulfilled with passionate emotion, and I still feel that this experience was such a confidence booster for me. Through my own experience, I felt the potential for people to achieve great growth by recognizing and loving each other.

The memories of everyone in Saudi Arabia who welcomed me will stay with me for a long time to come. I also want to bring these beautiful feelings and memories back to Japan and tell everyone there how wonderful Saudi Arabia and its people are. I hope that the bonds between the two countries will be strengthened by putting our thoughts and feelings into music, animation, and many other things that transcend words.

Sony Music Entertainment (Japan) Inc., which was contracted to dispatch Japanese artists to Jeddah, commented: "We are aware of the broad embrace of Japanese entertainment such as animation, games, and music in Saudi Arabia, where social and cultural liberalization has been remarkable. We hope to continue developing content and events that will please the people of Saudi Arabia."

In 2023, progress was made with political as well as cultural exchanges between the two countries. In July, Prime Minister Kishida told Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, with whom he met in Jeddah, that he named the second chapter of the “Japan-Saudi Vision 2030,” a cooperation framework between the two countries, as “The Journey,”<sup>2</sup> and he hoped to further expand cooperation. As the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Saudi Arabia approaches in 2025, it is expected that as the two countries embark on a new journey, even more Japanese people will be able to experience the charms of this new Saudi Arabia and those exchanges will be deepened in an even wider range of fields and at an even more diverse level.



Prime Minister Kishida being greeted by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed (July 16, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

- 1 “Boulevard World” was an area that showcases the cultures and cuisines of 10 countries around the world, including Japan, and allows visitors to experience each country through restaurants, markets, and arts
- 2 This name was inspired by the title of the animated film “The Journey,” a Japan-Saudi co-production in 2021 from a Saudi animation production company under the Misk Foundation, established by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed, and a Japanese animation production company

## COLUMN

## Anecdote on Grand Egyptian Museum Construction – Airplane Etiquette Bags Sometimes Make History!

**SUZUKI Akira, JICA Expert and First Assistant Executive Director  
of the Grand Egyptian Museum**

Prime Minister Abe once said that “the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) construction plan is a new landmark of friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries.” To bring about this future that he envisioned, Japan has been providing comprehensive cooperation toward the opening of the museum, including providing yen loans of approximately 84.2 billion Japanese yen (about 60% of the total construction cost) through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for the construction of GEM, providing technical cooperation for preserving and restoring collections and exhibits, exhibition methods, and museum operations, and assisting with restoring “King Khufu’s Second Solar Boat,” which will be displayed in the annex.

GEM, located about two kilometers north of the three Great Pyramids of Giza, is the largest museum in the world devoted to a single civilization (covering an area of approximately 47 hectares) and has a beautiful, modern design that is breathtaking. The exterior features a façade of translucent alabaster that changes its appearance from noon to night. Upon entering the building, visitors are greeted by the Grand Hall, which extends six-stories skyward to accommodate a colossal statue of Ramses II, who reigned about 3,200 years ago. Up the grand staircase lined



Colossal statue of Ramses II in the Grand Hall

with ancient Egyptian stone statues are the Tutankhamun Gallery, which houses the world-renowned collection of King Tutankhamun, and the permanent exhibition space, which features a collection spanning more than 3,000 years from the Old Kingdom to the Greco-Roman era. One can also enjoy a full view of the pyramids from large all-glass windows at the end of the grand staircase. What kind of architect designed such a stunning and wonderful museum worthy of displaying the greatest treasures of ancient Egypt?

More than 20 years ago, in January 2002, a museum design competition was announced to the entire world under the auspices of UNESCO. Ms. Heneghan and Mr. Peng of Dublin (Ireland) based architecture firm, heneghan peng architects, hopped on a plane to Egypt and rushed to the proposed site to conduct an inspection in preparation for submitting an application. Standing in that vast desert overlooking the pyramids of Giza, what did the two think about, what did they discuss, and what kind of design concepts did they envision? On the flight back to Dublin, they tore open a British Airways sickness bag from in front of their seats with their hands, and on it they drew a sketch of the museum design based on three axes, connecting the northern end of the proposed museum site with each summit of the three great pyramids of kings Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure, rising south of the site.

On June 2, 2003, in the following year, out of 1,557 entries from 83 countries, the up-and-coming Dublin-based heneghan peng architects won the Grand Prize, beating out a host of other world-class firms.

The “first step” of the construction of this beautiful GEM, which now soars before my eyes and fits in with the history of the pyramids of Giza, was a small drawing on an airplane sickness bag. It is a surprising and funny story worth being recorded as a part of the history behind this major museum construction project.

GEM has the attention of the world as it prepares to open. Many treasures that have never been exhibited before, including Tutankhamun’s golden masks, will be on display. I have no doubt this grand project, achieved with support from Japan, will truly build a bridge between the two countries.



heneghan peng architects’ proposed architectural design connecting the pyramids from the north end of the museum (left)  
Image of the current museum taken from a drone (right)