

Section 2

Asia and Oceania

1 Overview

(General Overview)

The Asia-Oceania is a dynamic region where countries and regions at various stages of development exist, and 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 8.1 billion, approximately 3.8 billion live in East Asia Summit (EAS) participating countries⁽¹⁾ excluding the United States (U.S.) and Russia. This represents about 46% of the world's population.⁽²⁾ Their combined nominal gross domestic product (GDP) is 33.0 trillion U.S. dollars (2023), and accounts for more than 30% of the world total.⁽³⁾ Strong growth of the region with high potential, and close economic relations with the region, will also bring affluence and vitality to Japan.

On the other hand, the security environment in this 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, climate change, unstable demand and supply of food and resources, frequent natural disasters, terrorism, and aging populations coupled with declining birthrates.

Within this context, Japan has been actively engaging in diplomacy in this region, including at the leader and foreign ministerial levels, and is maintaining and developing good relations with neighboring countries. In April, Prime Minister Kishida attended the first Japan-U.S.-Philippines Summit in Washington, D.C. during his official visit to the U.S. as a State Guest. The leaders of the three countries emphasized their unwavering commitment to freedom of navigation and overflight, and concurred on strengthening cooperation, including responding to economic coercion and enhancing supply chain resilience.

In May, Prime Minister Kishida attended the Japan-China-Republic of Korea (ROK) Trilateral Summit, held in the ROK for the first time in about four and a half years, where the three leaders welcomed the revitalization of the trilateral process and concurred on promoting future-oriented practical cooperation. During his attendance at the NATO Summit held in Washington, D.C., in July, he held the Japan-Australia-New Zealand-ROK (IP4) Leaders' Meeting, held informal talks among the IP4 leaders and President Biden, and held the IP4+Ukraine Leader's Meeting. Also in July, Prime Minister Kishida hosted the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10) in Tokyo, co-chaired by Prime Minister Mark Brown of the Cook Islands. Japan and the Pacific Island countries and regions reaffirmed their relationships to "stride forward together" toward the future while tackling common challenges, and adopted the Leaders' Declaration and Joint Action Plan as outcomes of the discussions.

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

⁽²⁾ Source: United Nations Population Fund

⁽³⁾ Source: World Bank

In September, Prime Minister Kishida visited the ROK and held the Japan-ROK Summit Meeting, with President Yoon Suk Yeol, which marked the 12th meeting between them. Later in the same month, he attended the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders' Meeting in the U.S., where the four countries shared the intention to continue demonstrating their strong commitment to the common vision of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" to the international community. Moreover, in Delaware, Prime Minister Kishida held Summit Meetings with Australia and India, and also held Summit Meetings with Palau and Mongolia in New York.

In October, Prime Minister Ishiba visited Laos to attend the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings as his first overseas visit after assuming office as Prime Minister. Prime Minister Ishiba conveyed his strong determination to further strengthen the half-century-long relationship of trust between Japan and ASEAN. He also held summit meetings and informal talks with the leaders of the ROK, China, India, the Philippines, Laos, Viet Nam, Australia, and Thailand.

In November, in order to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting, Prime Minister Ishiba visited Peru, and held summit meetings and informal talks with the leaders of Malaysia, the U.S., China, Viet Nam, Indonesia, the ROK, and Peru. He also participated in the Japan-U.S.-ROK Summit Meeting, and the leaders concurred to establish the Trilateral Coordinating Secretariat and to continue working closely together, including through this Secretariat, in various fields such as policies toward North Korea.

In February, as well as visiting Samoa, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Fiji and attended the 5th Ministerial Interim Meeting of the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM), where she held bilateral meetings with ten countries. Later in the same month, during her visit in Brazil to participate in the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, she held a Japan-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting. She also attended the Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting, and the foreign ministers concurred to accelerate the momentum of the Japan-U.S.-ROK cooperation and reaffirmed that they would continue to work closely towards the complete denuclearization of North Korea.

In May, while attending the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Ministerial Council Meeting (MCM), Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a Japan-Laos Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Laos Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Saleumxay. She visited Sri Lanka and Nepal also in May, and visited Cambodia and the Philippines in July, paying courtesy calls on the leaders and holding foreign ministers' meetings in each country. In the Philippines, a Japan-Philippines Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting ("2+2") was held, and the Japan-Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement was signed. In July, she attended the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Laos, where she explained that broad cooperation is steadily progressing in line with the three pillars of the Joint Vision Statement. On this opportunity, she also held the Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting and held foreign ministers' meetings with Laos, China, the ROK, Indonesia, Singapore, and Timor-Leste. Later in July, she held the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Tokyo, where the four ministers emphasized the importance of adherence to international law for the rules-based maritime order and reaffirmed their strong opposition to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion. In August she visited India, participated in the Japan-India 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting, paid a courtesy call on the Prime Minister, and participated in a Japan-India Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue.

In September, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Australia to attend the Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations ("2+2"), and held a Japan-Australia Foreign Ministers' Working Dinner. In the same month, in order to attend the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, she visited New York, U.S., and on that occasion, she held a Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting as well as a Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting, where the three ministers concurred on further strengthening trilateral cooperation as the free and open international order based on the rule of law is facing serious challenges.

In November, Foreign Minister Iwaya, during his visit in Peru to attend the APEC Ministerial Meeting, he held a Japan-U.S. Foreign Ministers' Meeting, a

Japan-Peru Foreign Ministers' Meeting, and a Japan-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting, in addition to informal talks with the foreign ministers of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Viet Nam, New Zealand, and Canada. In December, he visited China, and held a Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Second Japan-China High-Level People-to-People and Cultural Exchange Dialogue.

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

The Japan-U.S. Alliance is the cornerstone of Japan's diplomacy and security, and the foundation for peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and the international community. 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 23 Summit Meetings and 36 Foreign Ministers' Meetings, including telephone calls (as of December 2024). 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 in China, North Korea, Russia and Ukraine, and the Middle East.

In April, Prime Minister Kishida, as the first Japanese prime minister in nine years to make an official visit to the U.S. with State Dinner, held a Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting with President Biden. Prime Minister Kishida remarked that the two countries are bonded by deep trust and multilayered friendship, and that based on these unprecedentedly strong bonds of friendship and trust, Japan and the U.S. have become global partners beyond bilateral or regional spheres, to uphold and bolster the free and open international order based on the rule of law.

The two leaders exchanged views on regional issues and reaffirmed that unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion are totally unacceptable anywhere in the world, and that they will resolutely

respond to them in coordination with allies and like-minded countries. In the joint statement released as the outcome of their meeting, it was confirmed that Japan and the U.S. pledge to continue their tireless work, together and with other partners, to realize a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and world. In his address to the joint session of the U.S. Congress, Prime Minister Kishida also stated his intention to work with like-minded countries to achieve a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific."

In July, Secretary of State Blinken and Secretary of Defense Austin visited Japan for the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee (Japan-U.S. "2+2"). The Japanese side conveyed that the foundations of a free and open international order based on the rule of law continue to be shaken, that this is a critical juncture where the decisions both countries make today will determine the future, and that both countries must continuously strengthen the Alliance and increase its deterrence in order to protect and defend the existing international order. The U.S. side celebrated the extraordinary progress in enhancing the alliance's roles, missions, and capabilities, which support the ability to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

Under the Ishiba administration, which took office in October, strengthening the Japan-U.S. Alliance remains the top priority of its diplomatic and security policy. In November, Prime Minister Ishiba met with President Biden in Peru for a Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting, where they concurred on continuing cooperation to strengthen the Japan-U.S. Alliance, and to further develop networks of like-minded countries, including Japan-U.S.-ROK, as well as continuing to work closely together on issues regarding North Korea, including the nuclear and missile issues as well as the abductions issue. Foreign Minister Iwama also held a Japan-U.S. Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Secretary Blinken, where they exchanged views on regional situations such as issues related to China, policies toward North Korea including on the nuclear and missile issues and the abductions issue, and the situation in Ukraine. The two Ministers also concurred on implementing cooperation to further strengthen Japan-U.S. Alliance deterrence and response capabilities, and to further develop networks of like-minded countries.

In December, Secretary of Defense Austin visited Japan and paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister

Ishiba. They exchanged views on Japan-U.S. security and defense cooperation for strengthening the deterrence and response capabilities of the Alliance, bearing in mind the increasingly severe regional security environment, and also concurred on continuing efforts for upgrading the command and control of the Alliance, promoting defense equipment and technology cooperation, and strengthening the network of like-minded countries.

(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 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⁽⁴⁾ 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, the examination of the 2024 Ninth Periodic Report submitted in October 2024, and the examination of the Seventh Report of Japan under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in October 2022.

There have been installations of comfort woman statues⁽⁵⁾ 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 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(MOFA) website details Japan's Efforts on the Issue of Comfort Women.
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 second session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) was held. Premier Li Qiang delivered the Report on the Work of the Government and, in reviewing the previous year, stated that China had weathered external pressures, overcome domestic difficulties, successfully accomplished the main goals and tasks for the year, maintained social stability, and steadily advanced the comprehensive construction of a modern socialist country in all respects in the new era. With respect to policy direction for 2024, Premier Li noted that strategic opportunities continue to coexist with risks and challenges and that favorable conditions outweigh unfavorable factors. He stated that the GDP growth target for 2024 was set at roughly the same level as last year's initial goal, around five percent, but cautioned that meeting this year's goal will not be easy.

It was also announced that the post-session press conference by the Premier of the State Council for both domestic and foreign journalists, a post-session practice that had continued for about thirty years, would not take place this time or for several years going forward.

The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee (Third Plenary Session) was held in July, and it adopted the “Resolution on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization” (Resolution). The Resolution states that, faced with a complex and intertwined international and domestic situation, a new scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation, and the people's new expectations, advancing Chinese modernization requires further deepening of reform as a whole, and announces that the reform tasks set out in the Resolution will be completed by the 80th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 2029. “Deepening reform comprehensively”

⁽⁴⁾ For details, refer to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page24e_000163.html

⁽⁵⁾ 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.

⁽⁴⁾



was first proposed at the Third Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee in 2013, and this Resolution, in addition to those earlier reform items, also adds provisions on the objectives “to modernize China’s system and capacity for governance” and to “foster favourable external environment.” Additionally, in terms of personnel matters, the resignation of former Foreign Minister Qin Gang was accepted, and he was dismissed from his position as a Central Committee member.

Unlike the previous ones, Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee Political Bureau meeting in September focused on the economy. The Central Economic Work Conference was held in December as usual.

The year 2024 marked the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, and on September 30 a commemorative reception was held at the Great Hall of the People. In his keynote address, President Xi Jinping expressed gratitude to the leaders, martyrs, and heroes who contributed to the nation’s founding and development, and emphasized the building of a strong country through Chinese modernization. He also warned that “the road ahead cannot be smooth; there will inevitably be difficulties and challenges such as strong winds, high waves, and even raging storms that await us,” indicating his recognition of the severe tests to come.

2024 also marked the 25th anniversary of Macao’s return, and President Xi visited Macao to attend the 25th anniversary of Macao’s return to the motherland and the inaugural ceremony of the sixth-term government of the Macao Special Administrative Region.

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 been directly communicating its position to the Government of China, for example by also taking summit meetings and foreign ministers’ meetings as opportunities to express serious concern about these situations. In the communiqués from the G7 Apulia Summit in June and the G7 Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in April, the

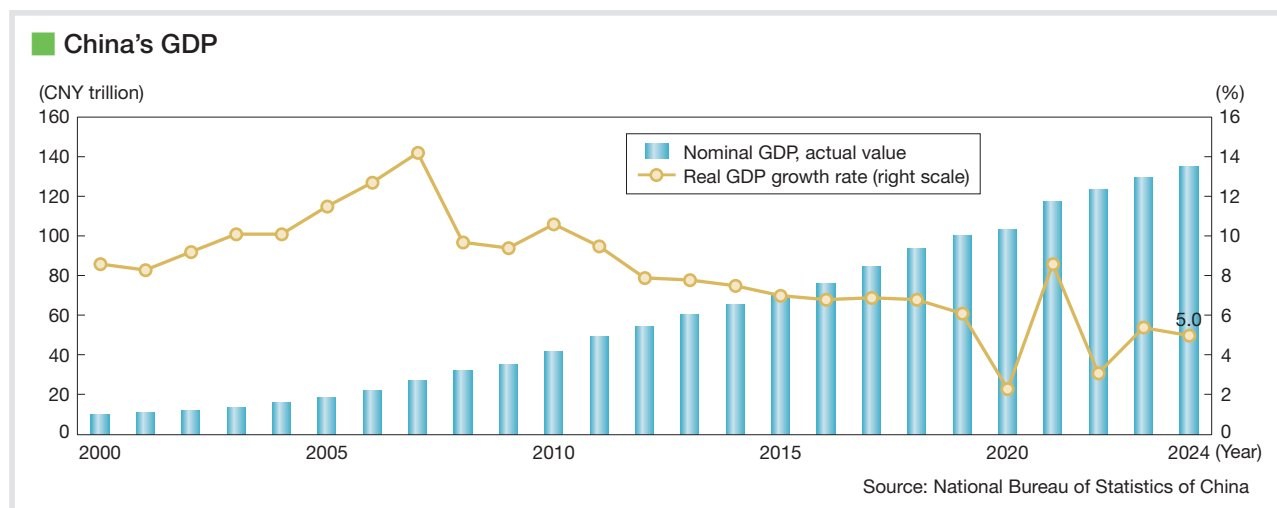
G7 concurred to continue expressing concern about human rights situation in China. Furthermore, at the UN, Japan has been the only member state from Asia to participate in a joint statement by like-minded countries expressing concerns about the human rights situation in China. In October, at the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, Australia delivered a joint statement on behalf of fifteen countries regarding human rights violations in the XUAR and the Tibet Autonomous Region, and Japan joined that 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 conservative growth rate target of around 5% was set for 2024, which was the same as the previous year. The deficit-to-GDP ratio was also maintained at 3.0%, and the upper limit for new local government special bonds was modestly raised to 3.90 trillion CNY (up from 3.80 trillion CNY the previous year). Premier Li Qiang also explicitly stated that “achieving this year’s targets will not be easy.” As a result, China’s full-year real GDP growth rate for 2024 increased by 5.0% year-on-year, achieving the target, and by quarter, the first quarter (January to March) increased by 5.3% year-on-year, the second quarter (April to June) increased by 4.7% year-on-year, the third quarter (July to September) increased by 4.6% year-on-year, and the fourth quarter (October to December) increased by 5.4% year-on-year.

China’s economy has remained stalled due to a sluggish real estate market and deteriorating consumer sentiment. Although the youth unemployment rate, which had climbed in 2023, was again published in 2024 (excluding students), it stood at 18.8% in August 2024, remaining at a persistently high level. Meanwhile, imports and exports trended higher than in 2023, driven by a rebound from the previous year’s weak performance and a precautionary last-minute demand due to concerns about various countries’ policies toward China regarding semiconductors and electric vehicles (EVs).

In July, the Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee was convened under the theme of “Chinese modernization,” and highlighted five



key priorities: (1) the Party's role as the driving force in economic-system reform; (2) institutional mechanisms that support all-around innovation; (3) comprehensively deepening reform; (4) unified planning for development and security; and (5) strengthening the Party's leadership over reform. Real estate, the cause of China's economic slowdown, is now considered to be a livelihood issue rather than an economic issue, with greater emphasis placed on medium- to long-term development centered on science and technology. In the latter half of July, in order to stimulate sluggish domestic consumption, the government announced an expansion of subsidy programs of approximately 300 billion CNY, to encourage the replacement of passenger cars and home appliances. At the meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC held at the end of July, President Xi Jinping reiterated that the economy went through bipolarization and designated stand-alone priorities: expanding domestic demand through consumption promotion and comprehensively revitalizing rural areas. As noted earlier, unlike the previous ones, the meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC in September focused on economic conditions. It assessed that "the fundamentals of the Chinese economy, and favorable conditions such as a vast market, strong economic resilience and great potential remain unchanged, but also new challenges have emerged in economic management." The meeting then set forth measures such as responding to economic fluctuations via fiscal and monetary policies, ensuring necessary fiscal outlays, supporting businesses facing difficulties, and ensuring the bottom line of people's livelihoods by providing assistance for jobseekers and low-income

individuals, and pledged to strive toward meeting the annual targets. From late September to the end of October, relevant ministries held press briefings to unveil specific policies, including in finance (cuts to mortgage interest rates), fiscal policy (strengthened aid for the poor and for students via increased scholarships), and real estate (expanded lending for projects listed on the so-called "whitelist"). In October, the Standing Committee of the NPC approved raising the local government debt limit by 6 trillion CNY to replace hidden debts. Moreover, by allocating 800 billion CNY from newly issued local government special bonds over five consecutive years starting in 2024, local fiscal resources for debt resolution will increase by 10 trillion CNY, thereby enabling the reduction of total hidden local government debt from 4.3 trillion CNY to 2.3 trillion CNY by 2028.

At the Central Economic Work Conference held in December, it was recognized that, despite facing a complex and severe situation marked by increasing external pressures and internal difficulties in 2024, economic management remained generally stable, and the principal goals and tasks of economic and social development were smoothly and successfully achieved. On the other hand, it was also acknowledged that the adverse effects of shifting external conditions are deepening, that the production and operations of some enterprises have become difficult primarily due to insufficient domestic demand, that employment and income growth for the populace are under pressure, and that numerous risks remain.

(C) Foreign Policy

At the Foreign Minister's press conference during the NPC sessions on March, Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, stated, "China will strive for stability in major-country relations, common progress with its neighboring countries, and rejuvenation with fellow countries in the Global South." In 2024, diplomatic activities at various levels, including high-level engagements led by President Xi Jinping, have remained active.

In relations with Russia, direct communication between the leaders of China and Russia remained frequent in 2024, and during President Vladimir Putin's first foreign visit of his overall fifth term, to China in May, the two leaders released a Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era in the Context of the 75th Anniversary of China-Russia Diplomatic Relations, which affirmed that the partnership's development aligns with the fundamental interests of both countries.

In relations with neighboring countries, China's exchanges with ASEAN member states have been more frequent than with other regions, and the President of Indonesia and the President of Viet Nam, who both took office in 2024, chose China as their first foreign destination.

As for relations with Global South countries, the Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was held in Beijing in September. At the Summit, President Xi Jinping announced that China would upgrade its bilateral relations with all African countries with which it has diplomatic relations to a "Strategic partnership," that it would upgrade its relations with Africa as a whole to an "all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era," and proposed cooperation in a wide range of fields, including security, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, green development, and food aid. In addition, the "Beijing Declaration" adopted at the meeting, included numerous Chinese positions, including

the "community with a shared future for mankind, Belt and Road cooperation, the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI)," as well as support for China's positions on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet, and measures to deter "decoupling" and unilateralism.

At the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Heads of State Council Meeting held in Astana, Kazakhstan, in July, Belarus's accession was approved. At the BRICS⁽⁶⁾ Summit held in Russia in October, the outcome document created a new category of "BRICS Partner Countries," reflecting China's emphasis on expanding multilateral platforms. Moreover, at the G20 Rio de Janeiro Summit in Brazil in November, President Xi Jinping reiterated his commitment to walking together with Global South countries.

With respect to U.S.-China relations, particularly since the U.S.-China Summit meeting at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting in San Francisco in November 2023, communication has taken place at various levels, including high-level exchanges, among defense authorities and in areas such as illicit drug control, artificial intelligence (AI), and climate change. A U.S.-China summit meeting was also held at the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Peru in November. President Xi Jinping noted that, over the past four years, U.S.-China relations have undergone turbulence yet have also engaged in dialogue and cooperation, thereby achieving overall stability, and he underscored that the Taiwan question, democracy and human rights, China's path and system, and China's development right are four red lines for China.

Meanwhile, economic confrontation between the U.S. and China, including economic security, has expanded since the previous year. In 2023 China added gallium, germanium, and graphite to the list of items subject to export control measures, and in September 2024, the list was further expanded to include anti-mony and items related to superhard materials. Also in September 2024, the U.S. decided to significantly

(6) BRICS: A term referring to Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. At the summit meeting in August 2023, invitations for new membership were announced for Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). (Argentina subsequently withdrew its application for membership due to a change of administration, and there are also reports that Saudi Arabia has not yet joined.) At the summit meeting in October 2024, the leaders concurred on creating a new category of BRICS Partner Countries, and 2024 chair country Russia announced that nine countries — Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan — will join as Partner Countries from January 2025. In January 2025, Brazil, 2025 chair country, announced Indonesia's full membership.

raise tariffs against China under Section 301 of the Trade Act. These tariffs applied to some Chinese products, such as EVs and semiconductors (worth a total of 18 billion U.S. dollars). President Biden stated that the tariffs protect American workers from China's unfair trade policies and practices. In response, China expressed "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition." In October, the U.S. announced that an Executive Order prohibiting Americans from investing in China's semiconductor and microelectronics, quantum information technology, and AI sectors in case such investments pose a particularly acute national security threat, would take effect in January 2025. Also in October, China implemented its Regulations on the Administration of Rare Earths. In December, the U.S. announced enhancement of its export-controls on semiconductors and semiconductor-manufacturing equipment bound for China. Later in December, Ministry of Commerce of China announced measures to tighten controls over the export on shipments to the U.S. of dual-use items related to gallium, germanium, antimony, and superhard materials. Stable U.S.-China relations are important not only for Japan, but also for the entire international community. Japan will continue to closely monitor future developments.

(D) 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." The defense budget published by China does not sufficiently disclose its breakdown or the intentions behind its increases, and is believed to represent only a portion of actual military expenditures. 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 intelligentization."

In 2024, in August, a Chinese military aircraft intruded into Japan's territorial airspace, and in September, the aircraft carrier of the Chinese Navy *Liaoning* navigated waters close to the territorial sea between Yonaguni Island and Iriomote Island, both of which were the first incidents of their kind. Joint navigations by Chinese and Russian naval vessels and joint flights by Chinese and Russian bombers in the vicinity of Japan were confirmed, continuing on from the previous years. Moreover, following Taiwan's presidential inauguration ceremony in May and the "Double Ten Day" celebrations in October, China conducted military exercises in the maritime and air domains surrounding Taiwan. At the Japan-China Summit Meetings held in May, October, and November, Prime Minister Kishida and Prime Minister Ishiba stated that Japan is closely monitoring relevant developments including military activities and reiterated that peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is extremely important for the international community, including Japan. In the South China Sea, China has been continuing and intensifying 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 actions to increase regional tensions, such as further militarization of disputed features and the dangerous and coercive use of coast guard and maritime militia vessels and aircraft against coastal States and others.

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 2024, 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 May 26, while visiting Seoul, ROK to attend the Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit, Prime Minister Kishida held a summit meeting with Premier Li Qiang of the State Council. Prime Minister Kishida stated that he hopes to continue dialogue at various levels and make progress on various challenges as well as issues of concern between Japan and China while materializing various possibilities that exist in Japan-China relations, in line with the broad direction of comprehensively promoting a "Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests" and building "constructive and stable Japan-China relations," which was reaffirmed by Prime Minister Kishida and President Xi Jinping in November 2023, and Premier Li Qiang expressed similar views.

On July 26, while visiting Laos to attend the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Foreign Minister Kamikawa welcomed the communication and exchange of views between the two countries, including the recent convening of the Japan-China Strategic Dialogue, under a broad direction of comprehensively promoting a "Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests" and building "constructive and stable Japan-China relations," and Foreign Minister Wang expressed similar views. The two Foreign Ministers concurred on making persistent efforts to rhythmically build multilayered communication, including mutual visits by the Foreign Ministers, which both sides have extended invitations for.

On September 23, while visiting New York to attend the UN General Assembly, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Foreign Minister Wang Yi. In relation to the incident in which a Japanese school student was attacked and later passed away in Shenzhen, Foreign Minister Kamikawa urged the Chinese side to clarify the truth. In addition, Minister Kamikawa strongly urged the Chinese side to take concrete measures to ensure the safety of Japanese nationals residing in China and to take actions against anti-Japanese social media posts. In response, Foreign Minister Wang expressed that China's position has been as stated by the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, and that what has happened is an isolated and individual case that China would not like to see happen, and that it will be dealt with in accordance with the Chinese law. Regarding the discharge of ALPS treated water⁽⁷⁾ into the sea and China's import restrictions on Japanese aquatic products, Minister Kamikawa reiterated Japan's consistent approach based on scientific evidence. Further, based on the shared recognition between Japan and China that was announced on September 20, Foreign Minister Kamikawa also stated Japan's intention to carry out the additional monitoring as soon as possible and ensure tangible progress toward the elimination of the restrictions.

On October 10, Prime Minister Ishiba, while visiting Laos to attend the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings, held a summit meeting with Premier Li Qiang. The two leaders confirmed that Japan and China continue to share a broad direction of comprehensively promoting a "Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests" and building "constructive and stable Japan-China relations." The two leaders also confirmed to maintain multilayered communications between Japan and China at all levels, including at the summit level, with a view to realizing concrete outcomes. In this context, Prime Minister Ishiba emphasized that while there is potential for cooperation as well as issues and concerns between the two countries, he hopes to work together to ensure that the people of both countries could benefit from the development of the relationship through the efforts

of both governments. The two leaders both expressed their appreciation for the announcements made by their respective governments regarding the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea and China's import restrictions on Japanese aquatic products. In this vein, Prime Minister Ishiba called for the early restoration of imports of Japanese aquatic products.

On November 15, Prime Minister Ishiba, while visiting Peru to attend APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, held a Japan-China Summit Meeting with President Xi Jinping. The two leaders confirmed that Japan and China continue to share a broad direction of comprehensively promoting a "Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests" and building "constructive and stable Japan-China relations." In addition, the two leaders affirmed to firmly uphold the principles and common recognition of the four basic documents between Japan and China and to build a relationship in which they could continue candid dialogue. Furthermore, under this broad direction, the two leaders confirmed to make joint efforts to further strengthen communication at all levels, including at the summit level, in a wide range of fields, and to reduce issues and concerns and increase cooperation and coordination. Prime Minister Ishiba emphasized that he seeks to build up concrete results through efforts by both sides so that the people of both countries could appreciate the positive development in Japan-China relations.

Additionally, the two leaders confirmed that they would make arrangements to realize mutual visits by their respective foreign ministers, including holding the Japan-China High-Level People-to-People and Cultural Exchange Dialogue and Japan-China High-Level Economic Dialogue at an appropriate time, in view of expanding cooperation and resolving issues of concern. The two leaders reaffirmed that both sides would steadily implement the announcements regarding the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea and China's import restrictions on Japanese aquatic products. In this vein, Prime Minister Ishiba called for the early restoration of imports of Japanese aquatic products. Prime Minister Ishiba called on the Chinese

(7) 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.



Japan-China Summit Meeting (November 15, Peru; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

side to promptly resume discussions on the resumption of Japanese beef exports and the expansion of exports of Japanese rice, and the two leaders confirmed that both sides would maintain communications. The two leaders also concurred on making efforts to make progress on concrete cooperation in fields such as green economy, including environment and energy conservation, as well as medical care, nursing care and healthcare. They also concurred to work together on global issues. Prime Minister Ishiba expressed Japan's serious concerns about the situation in the East China Sea, including the situation surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and the intensification of Chinese military activities, and called on the Chinese side to address them. Regarding incidents resulting in deaths and injuries, including of students at Japanese schools in Suzhou and Shenzhen, Prime Minister Ishiba also requested that the Government of China strengthen safety measures for Japanese nationals residing in China. In response, President Xi stated that China, a country ruled by law, will handle cases in accordance with the law, and that China will ensure to protect the safety of foreign nationals residing in China, including Japanese citizens. Prime Minister Ishiba stated that Japan is closely monitoring relevant developments including military activities and reiterated that peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is extremely important for the international community, including Japan. Prime Minister Ishiba expressed Japan's serious concerns about the situations in the South China Sea, Hong Kong, XUAR and others. In addition, Prime Minister Ishiba called for the early release of the detained Japanese nationals. The two leaders also exchanged views on the situation regarding North Korea, including the abductions issue.

On December 25, Foreign Minister Iwaya visited China, where he held talks with Foreign Minister Wang Yi and paid a courtesy call on Premier Li Qiang. Furthermore, Foreign Minister Iwaya and Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology ABE Toshiko held the Second Japan-China High-Level People-to-People and Cultural Exchange Dialogue with Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Minister of Culture and Tourism Sun Yue-li.

During the Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the two foreign ministers, under a broad direction of comprehensively promoting a "Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests" and building "constructive and stable Japan-China relations" as confirmed by the leaders of both Japan and China, concurred that they would make joint efforts to reduce issues and concerns and increase cooperation and coordination. In addition, to this end, the two ministers confirmed that they would further strengthen communication at various levels and in a wide range of fields, accelerate necessary consultations and work, and make utmost efforts to realize concrete results by utilizing opportunities including high-level communication and interaction, including between the leaders and foreign ministers.

At the courtesy call on Premier Li Qiang, both sides concurred that they would expand cooperation in the area of people-to-people exchange and economic field, and on the importance of promoting mutual understanding between both countries and their people through the promotion of exchange and dialogue at various levels and by making efforts to improve public sentiment toward each other's country, and also concurred that both Japan and China would work together to fulfill their responsibilities as major powers which have responsibility in the region and the world.

During the Second Japan-China High-Level People-to-People and Cultural Exchange Dialogue, both sides confirmed that the Governments of Japan and China would support exchanges between the two countries in order to revitalize two-way people-to-people and cultural exchanges between Japan and China. Furthermore, both sides concurred to work together to enhance opportunities for youth exchanges and exchanges between experts, as well as to improve the quality of these programs; additionally, both sides

concluded to deepen exchanges with the view of contributing to the regional revitalization of both Japan and China.

In addition, in July the Japan-China Strategic Dialogue was held; in October various face-to-face meetings at the working level were held, 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, Japan-China Defense Ministerial Meetings were held in June and November.

2024 was also a year in which exchanges between Japanese and Chinese lawmakers and political parties became more active. In May, Liu Jianchao, head of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, visited Japan and engaged with Japanese officials, including political party officials; in July, Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare TAKEMI Keizo, Chairperson of Diet Affairs Committee MORIYAMA Hiroshi, and Vice-Speaker of the House of Representatives KAIEDA Banri visited China; in August a delegation from the Japan-China Friendship Parliamentarians' Union, led by Chairman NIKAI Toshihiro, visited China for the first time in five years; and a delegation led by Constitutional Democratic Party Secretary-General OKADA Katsuya also visited China.

(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 42.2 trillion Japanese yen (3.8% decrease year-on-year), and China has been the largest trading partner for Japan for 18 consecutive years.

Moreover, according to Chinese statistics, Japan's direct investment in China was about 3.88932 billion U.S. dollars (15.5% increase year-on-year, as estimated from officially published information on investment) in 2023. Japan ranks third in terms of the amount of direct investment to China (Singapore ranks first and the Netherlands ranks second). According to balance of payment statistics, China is Japan's 14th largest

investment destination, and is a source of direct investment income of approximately 2.7 trillion Japanese yen.

In addition, in 2024, economic exchanges at the private sector level between Japan and China became even more active. In January, a joint delegation to China, comprised of the KEIDANREN (Japan Business Federation), Japan-China Economic Association, and the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, visited China for the first time in about four years, where it held meetings with Premier Li Qiang and Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao. In July, the Japan Association for the Promotion of International Trade visited China; in November, the KEIZAI DOYUKAI (Japan Association of Corporate Executives) and a delegation of representatives from the Kansai business community traveled to China; and in December, the 10th Japan-China Entrepreneurs and Former Senior Government Officials Dialogue (Japan-China CEO Summit) was held in Beijing.

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

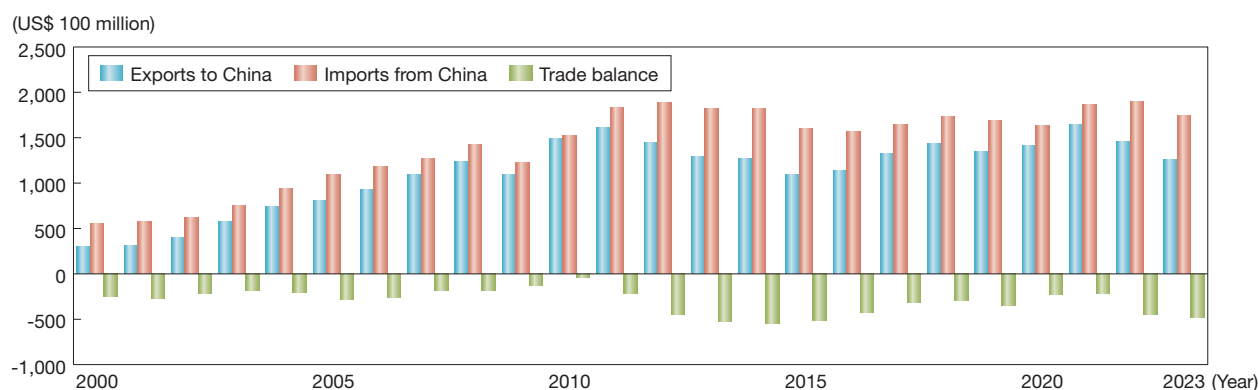
(Current situation of people-to-people exchanges between Japan and China)

In 2024 the number of visitors to Japan from China reached approximately 6.981 million (provisional value from the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO)), marking a substantial increase from approximately 2.425 million visitors in 2023 (finalized value from JNTO) and recovering to roughly 70 percent of the 2019 level.

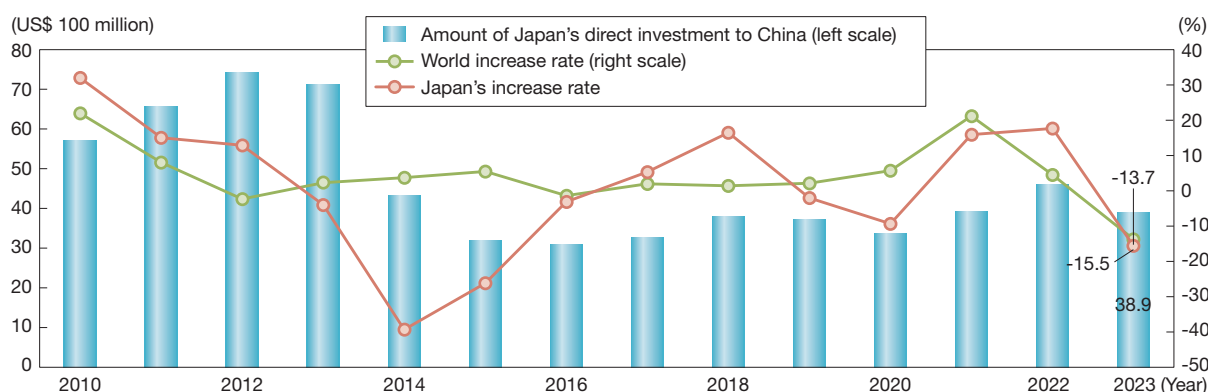
A wide range of cultural, economic, educational, and regional exchanges have been built up between Japan and China.

As for youth exchange programs for the next generation, these were resumed following the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the JENESYS program to promote mutual understanding and understanding of Japan, visiting Chinese high school and university students deepened mutual understanding through interactions with Japanese youth, and sector-specific delegations also deepened their understanding and interest in Japan's initiatives through site visits and briefings. Likewise, the Japan-China International Solidarity Project for Afforestation and Tree Planting invited young people from China to participate in tree-planting activities,

■ Japan's Value of Trade with China



■ Japan's direct investment to China



environmental and disaster-prevention seminars, and visits to companies and related facilities, all aimed at raising awareness of environmental and disaster prevention issues and of further promoting understanding of Japan.

Moreover, personnel at various levels and fields such as politics, economics, governments, and academia in the central and regional settings are invited to Japan in an effort to build and strengthen wide-ranging partnerships. Through these exchanges, it is expected that invitees and Japanese counterparts will forge strong relationships and that an accurate understanding of Japan will be fostered.

(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, 2 vessels

belonging to China's State Oceanic Administration intruded into Japanese territorial sea surrounding the Senkaku Islands for the first time.⁽⁸⁾

During 2024, 39 incidents were recorded in which China Coast Guard vessels intruded into the Japanese territorial sea surrounding the Senkaku Islands (there were 34 incidents in 2023 and 28 incidents in 2022), and the number of confirmed days in 2024 in which China Coast Guard vessels navigated the contiguous zone around the Senkaku Islands reached a record high of 355 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 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 2024, in August, a Chinese military aircraft intruded into Japan's territorial airspace, and in September, the aircraft carrier of the Chinese Navy *Liaoning* navigated waters close to the territorial sea between Yonaguni Island and Iriomote Island, both of which were the first incidents of their kind. Continuing on from the

previous year, Japan also confirmed instances in which a Chinese naval survey ship navigated Japanese territorial sea around Yakushima. With regard to the air-space intrusion in particular, Japan has strongly urged the Chinese side, at various levels, to provide a prompt and appropriate explanation, and the Chinese side has acknowledged the facts of the incident and explained that it will strive to prevent similar incidents from recurring. The Government of Japan will remain mindful of this and will continue to monitor China's future actions. As for China-Russia military cooperation around Japan, joint flights by Chinese and Russian strategic bombers were confirmed in November, and joint navigation by Chinese and Russian naval vessels were confirmed in July and October, continuing on from the previous years. On multiple occasions Chinese naval vessels were also confirmed to be navigating waters surrounding Japan including in those around the Senkaku Islands. Japan has serious concerns in light of these recent developments by Chinese military in the sea and airspace around Japan. In addition, because the joint actions by the Chinese and Russian militaries around Japan are serious security concerns for Japan, 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 2013 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 Exclusive Economic Zone (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

(8) 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>





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



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 Japan-China Summit Meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President Xi Jinping in Osaka 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.”

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 lodged protests with the Chinese side at every level, including at the leader and foreign ministerial levels, on multiple occasions, and has repeatedly and strongly called for the immediate

removal of the buoy. In February 2025, it was confirmed that the buoy does not present within Japan's EEZ. Regarding a new buoy confirmed in December 2024 within Japan's EEZ south of Yonaguni Island, the Government of Japan has likewise urged on China to immediately remove it, including at the Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in December.

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.

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)

Regarding Japan's responses to Chinese fishing vessels engaging in illegal fishing in the waters around the Yamato Bank in the Sea of Japan, the number of vessels warned to depart by Japan Coast Guard patrol vessels and Fisheries Agency enforcement vessels was 57 in 2023 and 32 in 2024, and illegal fishing by Chinese fishing vessels continues to be confirmed. In light of this situation, Japan has repeatedly conveyed its concerns to the Chinese side, making use of opportunities such as the Japan-China High-Level Consultation on Maritime Affairs, and has strongly urged the Chinese side to take effective measures, including strengthened guidance for fishermen.

(Japanese Food Import Restrictions Issue)

Regarding China's import restrictions on Japanese food products, Japan has repeatedly and strongly urged for their elimination as soon as possible, at all levels, including at the leader and foreign ministerial levels.

In August 2023, in response to the start of the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea, the Government of China announced a temporary suspension of all imports of Japanese aquatic products. China's introduction of new measures in addition to existing import restrictions is a response that is not based on scientific evidence, and is entirely unacceptable.

In September, Japan and China announced a "Shared Recognition between Japan and China"⁽⁹⁾ regarding the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea and China's import restrictions on Japanese aquatic products. After conducting additional measures under the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Chinese side will initiate adjustment of its import restrictions on Japanese aquatic products, and will steadily restore imports of Japanese aquatic products. In October, as part of the additional measure, analytical laboratories of participating countries including China, collected sea water samples near

TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station under the IAEA framework. In January 2025, the Government of China announced that its laboratory had completed its analyses and found no abnormality.

At the Japan-China Summit Meeting held in Peru in November, Prime Minister Ishiba and President Xi Jinping confirmed that both countries would properly implement the announcements regarding the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea and the import restrictions on Japanese aquatic products, and Prime Minister Ishiba called for early restoration imports of Japanese aquatic products. At the Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in China in December, Foreign Minister Iwaya and Foreign Minister Wang Yi shared the view that both countries would properly implement the announcements, published in September, regarding the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea and the import restrictions on Japanese aquatic products, as confirmed by the two leaders, and Foreign Minister Iwaya called for the early lifting of import restrictions on Japanese aquatic products.

Furthermore, in response to China's August 2023 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 formal meetings, 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.

Based on the "Shared Recognition between Japan and China" that was announced in September, Japan will continue to call on China to realize the early restoration of imports of Japanese aquatic products at all levels, including at the leader and foreign ministerial levels.

⁽⁹⁾ Ministry of Foreign Affairs website detailing the "Shared Recognition between Japan and China" that was released on September 20, 2024: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_00598.html



(Cases of Detainment of Japanese Nationals)

Since May 2015, 17 Japanese nationals have been detained on charges related to China's "national security." 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, one Japanese national died of illness while serving the sentence, six Japanese nationals have returned to Japan after serving their sentences, and as of the end of 2024 five Japanese nationals are being detained (three of which are currently serving their sentence, and two are awaiting trial).

In March 2023, one Japanese national was detained in Beijing. The Government of Japan has strongly urged the Government of China to ensure early release of detained individuals; to increase transparency in law enforcement and judicial processes, including the reasons for detention under the revised Counter-Espionage Law; to appropriately protect the rights of Japanese nationals; and to ensure fairness and impartiality, as well as humane treatment. In 2024, the Government of Japan raised these issues with the Government of China at various levels and opportunities, including at the leader and foreign ministerial levels, such as the Japan-China Summit Meetings in October and November, the Japan-China foreign ministers' telephone call in September, and the Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in December, and will continue to persistently urge them to do so. 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, the Embassy of Japan in China, and the Consulates General 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 MOFA's Overseas Safety website has been updated to provide more detailed and specific warnings.

(Incidents of Attacks on Japanese School Children in Suzhou and Shenzhen)

In June, in Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province, a man attacked the school bus of the Japanese School of Suzhou while it was stopped at a bus stop, injuring a Japanese mother and child and killing a Chinese female attendant. In September, in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province, a man attacked and killed a student from the Shenzhen Japanese School as the child was on the way to school. In both cases, the perpetrators were apprehended at the scene and, in January 2025, received death sentences at their respective trials.

In response to these deeply distressing incidents, the Consulate General of Japan in Shanghai and the Consulate General of Japan in Guangzhou provided support to those affected and to their families. At successive meetings at the leader and foreign ministerial levels, Prime Minister Ishiba urged President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang, and Foreign Minister Kamikawa and Foreign Minister Iwaya urged Foreign Minister Wang Yi, to clarify the truth, including the motives; to take concrete measures to ensure the safety of Japanese nationals residing in China, especially that of children; and to take thorough and immediate actions against unfounded, malicious and anti-Japanese social media posts. MOFA, after securing the necessary budgetary measures, has also supported enhanced security measures at Japanese schools across China, including increasing security personnel on school buses, and Japanese embassies and consulates in China have worked with their respective local authorities to exchange information and strengthen cooperation to prevent recurrence.

Ensuring the safety of Japanese nationals traveling or residing abroad is one of the most important responsibilities of the Government of Japan, and it will continue to strongly urge the Chinese side to guarantee the safety of Japanese nationals in China and will advance necessary advisories and other measures.

(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 2024, Japan carried out excavation, recovery, and destruction operations of Abandoned Chemical Weapons (ACW) in the Harbaling area of Dunhua City, Jilin Province, and destruction operations of ACW in Harbin City, Heilongjiang Province, and Wuhan City, Hubei 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 2024 approximately 119,000 ACW have been destroyed).

(2) Taiwan**A Domestic Affairs and Economy**

On January 13, 2024, Taiwan held presidential and legislative elections, and Vice President Lai Ching-te, an official candidate of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), won the presidential election with 40.05% of the vote. In the legislative elections, the Kuomintang (KMT) party gained 15 seats for a total of 52 seats, making it the largest party, while the DPP lost 11 seats for a total of 51 seats, and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), which was formed in 2019, gained 3 seats for a total of 8 seats, but no party gained a majority. In addition, Ko Wen-je, chairman of the TPP, was arrested in August on suspicion of corruption, indicted in December, and resigned as chairman the following month.

The presidential inauguration took place on May 20, with Lai Ching-te becoming the 16th President. In June, President Lai announced three new bodies as part of Taiwan's development strategy: the National Climate Change Committee, the Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee, and the Healthy Taiwan Promotion Committee.

Taiwan's economy is expected to see its annual real GDP growth rate rise from 1.31% in 2023 to 4.6% in 2024 (forecast), due to strong demand for AI and information and communications equipment.

B Cross-strait Relations and External Relations

From May 23 to 24, immediately following President Lai Ching-te's inauguration, the People's Liberation Army Eastern Theater Command of China conducted military exercises, code-named "Joint Sword-2024A," around Taiwan Island as a "strong punishment for the separatist acts of 'Taiwan independence' forces and a stern warning against the interference and provocation by external forces." On May 26, China published "Opinions on Punishing Crimes of Separatism and Inciting Separatism by 'Taiwan independence' Diehards in Accordance with Law," and then on May 30 announced that, effective June 15, it would cancel zero-tariff treatment on 134 items, including lubricants, under the Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA).

On September 25, China suspended zero tariffs on 34 agricultural and fishery products. Following this, on October 14, after the Double Ten Day celebrations in Taiwan on October 10, the PLA Eastern Theater Command held the "Joint Sword-2024B" exercises in the Taiwan Strait, as well as to the north, south, and east of Taiwan Island. According to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense, a total of 153 Chinese military aircraft were confirmed around Taiwan, the highest number of aircraft confirmed in a single day to date.

From November 30 for one week, President Lai visited the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, and Palau, nations that diplomatically recognize Taiwan, stopping in Hawaii and Guam while en route. Following his trip, on December 9, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense announced that Chinese naval fleets and coast guard vessels had entered the Taiwan Strait and the Western Pacific and were engaged in activities such as long-distance navigation in blue water areas, although China had not announced any military exercises.

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. Since 2021, including most recently at the G7 Apulia Summit, the G7 Leaders' Communiqués have consistently reaffirmed the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and called for the peaceful resolution of cross-strait issues.

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. The Apulia G7 Leaders' Communiqué mentioned for the first time in a G7 summit-level outcome document that "we support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations, including in the World Health Assembly and WHO technical meetings, as a member where statehood is not a prerequisite and as an observer or guest where it is."

In addition, the United States-Japan Joint Leaders' Statement issued at the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting between Prime Minister Ishiba and U.S. President Trump on February 7, 2025, confirmed that "The two leaders emphasized the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity for the international community. They encouraged the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues, and opposed any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion. The two leaders also expressed support for Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations."

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 based on the 1972 Joint Communiqué between Japan and China. Following Taiwan's presidential election in January, Foreign Minister Kamikawa released a statement congratulating Taiwan on the smooth implementation of the democratic election and Lai Ching-te on his election victory, and approximately 170 people from Japan, including members of the Diet and friendly organizations, attended the presidential inauguration ceremony on May 20.

On February 24, the opening ceremony for Japan Advanced Semiconductor Manufacturing, Inc.'s (JASM) Kumamoto first plant was held, and in a video message Prime Minister Kishida announced the Government of Japan's support for a second plant, thereby demonstrating further progress in Japan-Taiwan cooperation in the semiconductor supply-chain sector.

On June 5, Japan lifted a ban on imports of Taiwanese dragon fruit (purple-fleshed and red-fleshed varieties), and on October 30, Japan lifted a ban on imports of Taiwanese Dragon-Tiger grouper, a luxury fish from Taiwan. In addition, Taiwan announced on September 25 that it would ease import restrictions imposed after TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident, thereby enabling the export of all foods distributed in Japan. On the other hand, import restriction measures such as the requirement to submit certificates remain in place. Japan continues to persistently urge Taiwan to lift these restrictions as soon as possible based on scientific evidence.

Japan and Taiwan both experience many large-scale disasters, and in the past have offered each other assistance when disasters occur. In 2024, when the Noto Peninsula earthquake occurred in Japan on January 1, the Taiwanese authorities donated 60 million Japanese yen in relief funds, and the people of Taiwan provided a great deal of support through special support accounts. In addition, when the Hualien earthquake occurred in Taiwan on April 3, the Government of Japan provided Emergency Grant Aid of 1 million U.S. dollars to the Taiwanese side through the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, and at the private level as well a great deal of relief money was collected and donated to the disaster-stricken areas.

In terms of people-to-people movements, while the number of overseas travelers from Japan is still recovering, the number of visitors from Taiwan to Japan reached 6.04 million, significantly exceeding the 4.98 million in 2019 and setting a new record high.

(3) Mongolia

A Domestic Affairs

Since around January, Mongolia has suffered extensive damage from the dzud (heavy snow disaster unique to Mongolia). Many people were affected, property

damage occurred, and livestock animals, which are vital to the livelihoods of the nomads in the country, also died in large numbers. In response, the UN and many nations, including Japan, provided emergency assistance.

In June, the 9th State Great Hural (Parliament) general election was held under a system of both large electoral districts and proportional representation, with the number of seats significantly expanded to 126 due to constitutional amendments. As a result, the Mongolian People's Party, the ruling party before the election, won with an outright majority (68 seats), but the main opposition party, the Democratic Party, performed strongly and won 42 seats, and a third party, the HUN Party, also won 8 seats. In July, reappointed Prime Minister L. Oyun-Erdene called for the opposition parties to join the government, and formed a grand coalition cabinet consisting of the Mongolian People's Party, the Democratic Party, and the National Labour Party.

In August, the new administration formulated a government action plan for 2024-2028 under an agreement between the ruling coalition parties to cooperate to quickly and effectively resolve pressing issues related to social and economic development. Through this action plan, the Government of Mongolia set a total of 620 policy objectives, including the implementation of 14 mega infrastructure projects, with the aim of effectively implementing existing medium- and long-term development policies such as Vision 2050 and the New Recovery Policy.

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 2024 as well, the leaders of Viet Nam and Kazakhstan visited Mongolia in September and October, respectively, and President U. Khurelsukh, Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene, and Foreign Minister B. Battsetseg, each actively visited foreign countries and engaged in active dignitary diplomacy.

In terms of Mongolia's relations with its two neighboring countries, Russian President Putin and Chinese Vice President Han Zheng each visited Mongolia in September to mark the 85th anniversary of the victory in the Nomonhan Incident. Furthermore, in October on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Pakistan, Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene held a trilateral leaders' meeting between Mongolia, China and Russia to discuss cooperation among the three countries.

C Economy

In 2024, the Mongolian economy continued to record positive growth, with robust exports of mineral resources such as coal and copper to China. The inflation rate was 6.8%, more stable than in 2023. The economic growth rate in the third quarter of 2024 increased by 5.0% when compared to the previous year. In addition, Mongolia's trade value for 2024 increased by 3.9% in terms of exports and increased by 25.5% in terms of imports when compared to the previous year.

D Japan-Mongolia Relations

In regard to relations with Japan, high-level exchanges and dialogues continued in 2024. In addition, various anniversary events were held in both countries to mark the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of the Agreement on the Establishment of Cultural Relations between Japan and Mongolia. In response to the damage caused by the Noto Peninsula earthquake in January, the Government of Mongolia provided 100,000 U.S. dollars in aid, and many Mongolian citizens sent messages of support and condolences.

In May, Chairman of the State Great Hural G.Zandanshatar visited Japan to attend the 29th Nikkei Forum, "Future of Asia." In addition, Prime Minister Kishida's planned visit to Mongolia, which was scheduled for August, was postponed due to the response to the earthquake in Japan, but he held a Japan-Mongolia Summit Meeting with President Khurelsukh during the UN General Assembly in September. At the meeting, the two leaders reaffirmed that the principles set out in the 2022 Joint Statement, such as maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order based on the rule of law, are becoming increasingly important amid the deepening of conflict and division

in the international community. The two leaders also concurred to further strengthen and expand the cooperative relationship between the two countries, which are “Special Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity,” in both political and economic areas.

In particular, with regard to bilateral cooperation and with a view to promoting economic exchange, in November the 11th Japan-Mongolia Government and

Business Sector Joint Committee and the second meeting of the Sub-Committee on Cooperation established under the Japan-Mongolia Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) were separately held in Mongolia. Furthermore, in December, the Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of Mongolia concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology was signed in Mongolia.

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 achieving the normalization of 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 2024, North Korea repeatedly conducted launches of ballistic missiles and others with high frequency and in various manners, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM)-class ballistic missiles and launches 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 and seek the complete dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs in cooperation 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, as well as a matter of infringement of the sovereignty of Japan in nature. Japan continues to call on North Korea to implement the May 2014 Japan-North Korea agreement (the agreement in Stockholm)⁽¹⁰⁾ 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.

In 2024, North Korea launched ballistic missiles 11 times (at least 22 launches). On January 14, it launched a ballistic missile, and it also launched ballistic missiles which it announced as “super-large multiple rocket launchers” on March 18. On April 2, it launched a ballistic missile which it announced as a “new type intermediate-range solid-fueled ballistic missile loaded with hypersonic gliding warhead;” and on April 22, it launched ballistic missiles which it announced as “super-large multiple rocket launchers with simulated nuclear warheads.”

On May 27, North Korea notified that it would launch a satellite between that day and June 4, and it conducted a launch using ballistic missile technology on the same day. On May 27, it announced that “the ‘Malligyong-1-1’ military reconnaissance satellite had been launched” and that “the launch failed due to the air blast during the first-stage flight.” Furthermore, on May 30, it launched ballistic missiles which it announced as “super-large multiple rocket launchers.”

⁽¹⁰⁾ 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.

North Korea also launched a ballistic missile on June 26, and announced that “it had successfully conducted the separation and guidance-control test of individual mobile warheads.” Ballistic missiles were also launched on September 12 and 18.

On October 31, North Korea launched an ICBM-class ballistic missile from near Pyongyang. It was estimated that the missile flew for approximately 86 minutes with a maximum altitude exceeding 7,000 kilometers, and this was the longest flight time and highest altitude to date. North Korea referred to the launched ballistic missile as the “latest intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) ‘Hwasongpho-19,’” and it was reported that North Korean President of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong-un declared on the spot that North Korea would never change its line of bolstering up its nuclear forces. Furthermore, at least seven ballistic missiles were launched on November 5.

Faced with these series of launches in violation of Security Council resolutions, Japan, as a member of the Security Council from 2023 to 2024, has diligently worked to take a resolute action at the Security Council, including by calling a series of meetings in cooperation with relevant countries including the U.S. and the ROK, but the Security Council has not been able to take unified action due to the reluctance of some countries. On March 28, the draft Security Council resolution on the activities of the Panel of Experts for UNSC 1718 Sanctions Committee was rejected due to the veto of Russia. As a result, the Panel of Experts, which had extended its mandate by unanimous vote every year since its establishment based on UN Security Council resolution 1874 in 2009, and had played an important role in improving the effectiveness of relevant Security Council resolutions, ended its activities at the end of April. In response to the termination of the mandate of the Panel of Experts, like-minded countries including Japan, the U.S., and the ROK released a joint statement on October 16 and established the Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team (MSMT).⁽¹¹⁾ The MSMT is expected to contribute to the full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions by sharing

information among participating states on violations and evasions of sanction measures, and by disseminating that information to the international community.

In addition, the Government of Japan has taken measures against North Korea, designating a total of 144 entities and 133 individuals as being subject to asset freezes and other measures.

With regard to North Korea's nuclear activities, on September 13, North Korea publicized that President Kim had inspected the “Nuclear Weapons Institute” and “the production base of weapons-grade nuclear materials” that includes a uranium enrichment facility, and announced that President Kim had set forth “important tasks concerning a long-term plan for increasing the production of weapons-grade nuclear materials.” During the 10th Session of the 14th Supreme People's Assembly held in January, President Kim was reported to have stated that, “if the enemies ignite a war, our Republic will resolutely punish the enemies by mobilizing all its military forces including nuclear weapons.”

Furthermore, North Korea continues to engage in illicit cyber related activities, which is suspected to be the funding source for its nuclear and missile programs. In the past reports on measures against North Korea based on UN Security Council resolutions, the Panel of Experts for the UNSC 1718 Sanctions Committee pointed out that North Korean cyber groups continued to target cryptocurrency-related companies and exchanges, that North Korean IT workers generated income by obtaining work with false identification, and that their earnings were used as a source of funding for North Korea's nuclear and missile development.

(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

⁽¹¹⁾ MSMT: Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team (See the Special Feature on page 247.)
For the joint statement on the establishment of the MSMT, refer to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website:
https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_00652.html



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 heads of state and foreign ministers of various countries. On November 5, a G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on the launch of an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile by the DPRK was 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 stable collaboration at multiple levels, including through holding meetings among leaders, Foreign Ministers, and Vice-Ministers. At the leaders' level, the Japan-U.S.-ROK Summit Meeting was held on November 15 on the occasion of the APEC Summit in Lima, Peru, and a Japan-U.S.-ROK Joint Leaders' Statement was released after the meeting. At the foreign ministerial level, Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meetings were held on February 22 on the occasion of the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and on September 23 in New York, U.S.; the Japanese, U.S. and ROK foreign ministers also held a Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers' Telephone Meeting on October 31, in which they strongly condemned the ICBM-class ballistic missile launch. At the vice-ministerial level, Japan-U.S.-ROK vice foreign ministerial meetings were held near Washington, D.C., U.S., on May 31 and in Seoul, ROK, on October 17, and Joint Statements were released after each meeting. Furthermore, Japan, the U.S., and the ROK announced the establishment of the Trilateral Coordinating Secretariat at the Japan-U.S.-ROK Summit Meeting in November, and its first meeting was held on November 20, where the three countries reviewed the advancement of the trilateral cooperation in a wide range of fields, and concurred to work together to advance the trilateral coordination through the Trilateral Coordinating Secretariat to further accelerate the momentum. On December 9, a Japan-U.S.-ROK Trilateral Meeting on North Korea was held face to face in Tokyo, where the participants reaffirmed the importance of the close coordination among Japan, the U.S., and the ROK that

remains ensured even in the face of various complicating situations. Furthermore, in the joint statement released at the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting held between Prime Minister Ishiba and President Trump on February 7, 2025, both leaders affirmed the importance of the Japan-U.S.-ROK trilateral partnership in responding to North Korea and upholding regional peace and prosperity. A Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting was then held on February 15.

Furthermore, as part of the Self-Defense Forces' surveillance operations and the Japan Coast Guard's patrolling activities, 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⁽¹²⁾ 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, New Zealand 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. Monitoring and surveillance activities were also conducted in the waters surrounding Japan by naval vessels such as vessels of the U.S. Navy and the ROK Navy, the UK Royal Navy offshore patrol vessel HMS *Spey*; the Royal Australian Navy destroyers HMAS *Hobart* and HMAS *Sydney*; the Royal Netherlands Navy frigate HNLMS *Tromp*; the Royal Canadian Navy frigates HMCS *Montréal*, HMCS *Vancouver*, and HMCS *Ottawa*; the Italian Navy offshore patrol vessel ITS *Raimondo Montecuccoli*; the German Navy frigate FGS *Baden-Württemberg* and replenishment ship FGS *Frankfurt am Main*; the Royal New Zealand Navy sustainment replenishment ship HMNZS *Aotearoa*; and the French Navy French Navy frigate *Prairial*. 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

(12) 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.

Security Council resolutions are implemented fully and effectively.

In addition, to address North Korea's cyber activities and block its cyber-enabled sanctions evasion, Japan-U.S.-ROK Trilateral Diplomacy Working Groups for Foreign Ministry Cooperation on North Korea's Cyber Threats were held on December 7, 2023, March 29, 2024, and September 6, 2024. On March 26, 2024, together with Japan's National Police Agency, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, MOFA issued an "Alert for Private Companies on North Korean Information Technology (IT) Workers."

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 his January 2025 Policy

Speech, Prime Minister Ishiba stated, "The abductions issue involves more than kidnapping incidents; it is a matter of infringement of the sovereignty of Japan in nature. With the aging of the abductees and their families, the abductions issue is a top priority for my administration; it is a humanitarian and time sensitive issue with no time to spare. By returning to the starting point of the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, I am committed to making every effort, with firm determination, to realize the return of all abductees at the earliest possible date, as well as to resolve the outstanding issues of concern between Japan and North Korea."

(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 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

In January, President Kim Jong Un sent a message of condolence to Prime Minister Kishida following the Noto Peninsula earthquake. In his January 2025 Policy Speech, Prime Minister Ishiba stated, "By returning to the starting point of the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, I am committed to making every effort, with firm determination, to realize the return of all abductees at the earliest possible date, as well as to resolve the outstanding issues of concern between Japan and North Korea."

(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 Ninth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit in May, Prime Minister Kishida asked for the continued support of the leaders of the ROK and China for the immediate resolution of the abductions issue and gained their understanding. At the G7 Apulia Summit in June, the G7 leaders confirmed to continue working closely together in dealing with North Korea, including the abductions issue. During the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders' Meeting in September as well, Prime Minister Kishida took the opportunity to reconfirm the necessity of immediate resolution of the abductions issue. Furthermore, at the Japan-U.S.-ROK Summit Meeting in November, Prime Minister Ishiba once again expressed his appreciation for continued support from President Biden of the U.S. and President Yoon Suk Yeol of the ROK on the abductions issue, and the Japan-U.S.-ROK Joint Leaders' Statement released after the summit also called for the immediate resolution of the abductions issue.

Regarding the U.S., at the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting in April, Prime Minister Kishida asked for continued understanding and cooperation of the U.S. for the immediate resolution of the abductions issue, and once again gained full support from President Biden. At the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting in September, the two leaders also held a candid discussion on the latest situation related to North Korea, including the abductions issue. At the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting held in November between Prime Minister Ishiba and President Biden, they concurred on continuing working closely on issues regarding North Korea including the abductions issue. At the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting held between Prime Minister Ishiba and President Trump in February 2025, Prime Minister Ishiba asked for continued understanding and cooperation of the U.S. for the immediate resolution of the abductions issue, and gained full support from President Trump.

Regarding China, at the Japan-China Summit in November, the two leaders exchanged views on the situation regarding North Korea, including the abductions issue, and at the Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit in May, Prime Minister Kishida asked for continued support of the leaders of the ROK and China

for the immediate resolution of the abductions issue and gained their understanding.

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 September, President Yoon reiterated his support on the immediate resolution of the abductions issue, and at the Japan-ROK Summit Meetings in October and November, President Yoon reiterated the support to Japan regarding the abductions issue.

On June 12, a public meeting of the UN Security Council was held to discuss the human rights situation in North Korea, including the abductions issue, and after the meeting, the European Union (EU) and 57 like-minded countries referred to the abductions issue in the joint stakeout. Furthermore, the resolution on the Situation of human rights in North Korea that was submitted by the EU and co-sponsored by Japan was adopted without a vote at the UN Human Rights Council in April and the UN General Assembly in December. Japan will continue to closely coordinate and cooperate with relevant countries, including the U.S., toward the immediate resolution of the abductions issue.

C North Korea's External Relations, etc.

(A) U.S.-North Korea Relations

From 2018 to 2019, President Trump and President Kim Jong Un held two summit meetings and met in Panmunjom. In October 2019, U.S.-North Korea working-level talks were convened in Stockholm, Sweden. However, since then, no concrete progress has been made in dialogues between the U.S. and North Korea.

In October 2022, the Biden administration 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.

Meanwhile, in August, at a ceremony of transferring and receiving “New-type Tactical Ballistic Missile System,” it was reported that President Kim had said about U.S.-North Korea relations that “negotiations and confrontation are among our options, but we must be more thoroughly prepared to cope with the latter--this is the review and conclusion we have derived from the 30-odd years of dealing with the United States, and it is the keynote of our consistent policy toward the United States.”

In response to a series of provocative acts by North Korea, including ballistic missile launches, and to illicit arms transfers from North Korea to Russia, in 2024, the U.S. decided to additionally designate individuals and entities as subject of its own sanctions against North Korea in January, March, May, July, September, and December, respectively.

(B) Inter-Korean Relations

President Yoon Suk Yeol has demonstrated his intention to pursue unification through promoting dialogue while maintaining deterrence and pressure on North Korea, by for example announcing the “August 15 Unification Doctrine,” a unification plan based on freedom and human rights in August. Meanwhile, North Korea announced that President Kim stated in December 2023 at the 9th Enlarged Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) 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, not the consanguineous or homogeneous ones anymore,” and announced the abandonment of the goal of unification. In addition, at the Supreme People’s Assembly in January 2024, it was reported that President Kim had stated that “it is necessary to delete such expressions in the constitution as ‘northern half’ and ‘independence, peaceful reunification and great national unity,’” and that “the constitution of the Republic should be revised in consideration of such matters and the issue should be discussed at the next session of the Supreme People’s Assembly.”

In November 2023, 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

launch of a “military reconnaissance satellite” and other provocations. In response, North Korea issued a statement saying that it would no longer be bound by the agreement. Furthermore, in response to the arrival of leaflets from the ROK, from May 2024 North Korea intermittently released large balloons carrying rubbish and leaflets toward the ROK. In June, in response to those provocations by North Korea, the ROK suspended the agreement’s operation in full. Since late 2023, it was reported that North Korea was preparing to sever overland links with the ROK, and in October, North Korea announced that it had blown up and blocked sections of the inter-Korean railways and roads on its side. That same month, North Korea claimed that drones had infiltrated Pyongyang from the ROK and dispersed leaflets, denouncing the ROK military as the “chief culprit” of this “hostile infringement upon the DPRK sovereignty” and repeatedly warning that it would retaliate forcefully against any future provocation of the same kind.

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 March, April, May, July, and November, respectively.

(C) China-North Korea Relations

2024 marked the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and North Korea. Both sides designated it as a “Friendship Year,” and it was reported that Zhao Leji, Chairman of China’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee visited North Korea in April to attend the opening ceremony of the “Friendship Year.”

Trade between China and North Korea, which is estimated to account for more than 90% of North Korea’s entire external trade, was significantly reduced compared to pre-COVID-19 levels due to traffic restrictions following the global spread of COVID-19. While the China-North Korea trade volume in 2023 recovered to pre-COVID-19 levels, it then fell below this in 2024.

(D) Russia-North Korea Relations

Following the September 2023 Russia-North Korea Summit Meeting at which the two agreed on strategic

and tactical cooperation, President Putin visited North Korea in June 2024 for the first time in approximately 24 years, and held a summit meeting with President Kim, and they signed the “Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.” At their joint press statements afterward, President Kim stated that Russia-North Korea relations had entered into an alliance. In December, the instruments of ratification for this Treaty were exchanged in Moscow, and the Treaty entered into force.

During this period, in January 2024, following the confirmation of Russia's use of North Korean missiles against Ukraine, as well as North Korea's export of ballistic missiles and Russia's procurement of these missiles, Japan, together with the U.S. and other like-minded countries, released the “Joint Statement on DPRK-Russia Ballistic Missile Transfers,” condemning them in the strongest possible terms. On June 28 and December 18, at the request of Japan, the U.S., and the ROK, the UN Security Council convened open briefings on Russia-North Korea military cooperation and other issues, and, prior to the June 28 meeting, “the Joint Statement on the Unlawful Arms Transfer by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to Russia” was issued by 48 like-minded countries, including Japan, the U.S., and the ROK, as well as the EU. Furthermore, in a Japan-U.S.-ROK Foreign Ministers' Telephone Meeting on October 31, the foreign ministers condemned in the strongest terms, the deepening military cooperation between North Korea and Russia, including continued illegal arms transfers to Russia and the deployment of North Korean troops to Russia. Subsequently, on November 5 and December 16, the G7, as well as the ROK, New Zealand and Australia released “Joint Statement from Foreign Ministers Condemning DPRK-Russia Cooperation,” and the G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement released at the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting held on November 26 also expressed serious concerns over the deployment of the North Korean troops to Russia and their use on the battlefield against Ukraine. These moves to advance Russia-North Korea military cooperation are of grave concern not only because they lead to further deterioration of the situation in Ukraine, but also affect the security of the region surrounding Japan.

(E) Other Issues

In 2024 a total of 13 drifting or wrecked wooden vessels presumed to be from North Korea were discovered (22 in 2023) 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 exclusive economic zone (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

North Korea is strengthening its military capabilities, including nuclear and missile development, based on the “Five-Year Plan for the Development of National Defense Science and the Weapons System” and the “Five-Point Goals for Developing of National Defense Capability” that were reportedly presented at the 8th Congress of the WPK in January 2021. When inspecting military-related facilities in September, President Kim reportedly stated that they could confidently attain the goal of military hardware production within the five-year plan period, and at Military Hardware Exhibition held in November, with regard to the results for 2024, it was reported that he had stated, “[We have] made a decisive stride in attaining the goal of building up the defenses, advanced by the 8th Congress of the Party.” In addition, North Korean media reported at the end of July that flooding caused by record-breaking heavy rains had isolated over 5,000 residents in Sinuiju City and Uiju County, North Pyongan Province. In response to the announcement of the willingness to offer humanitarian assistance from China, Russia and other countries, during his visit to the flood-hit areas in August, President Kim expressed his gratitude for the willingness of the countries and international organizations to provide humanitarian assistance, while also stating that the Party and the Government would rely entirely on “the potentialities of our country” in the ongoing rehabilitation. After the floods occurred,

President Kim was reported to have inspected sites of reconstruction of flood-hit areas multiple times, and to have instructed the construction of modern housing and other recovery work in the affected areas. Although approximately 13,000 disaster-affected residents had been temporarily housed in Pyongyang, in December it was reported that new homes and other facilities had been built or repaired and that the disaster-affected residents had returned to their hometowns.

(B) Economy

At the 10th Session of the 14th Supreme People's Assembly in January, President Kim reportedly designated 2024 as the year to “ensure the practical guarantee for the fulfillment” of the ‘Five-Year Plan for National Economic Development’ (2021-2025), which primarily focuses on self-reliance. He also pledged to vigorously advance the ‘regional development 20×10 policy,’ aiming to construct modern regional industry factories in 20 counties annually and complete the project nationwide within 10 years. In a September speech marking the 76th anniversary of the founding of North Korea, President Kim reportedly stated that despite numerous difficulties, North Korea had maintained the overall growth trend of its economy and was steadily progressing toward the goals set for 2024. He added that construction work under the “regional development 20×10 policy” had passed the line of 90% completion and must be finished by the end of the year.

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, which was formed in May 2022, announced four major reforms in pensions, healthcare, education, and labor, and sought to advance a variety of policies. As for healthcare reform, however, there was a fierce conflict with the medical community over plans to increase medical school admissions, which led to medical workers resisting by going on strikes or taking other actions.

In the general election held in April, the ruling People Power Party continued to be a minority party, and the largest opposition party, the Democratic Party of Korea, secured a majority on its own. In this situation, the opposition party, acting on its own, passed budget proposals, various bills, and impeachment motions against high-ranking government officials, and in response, the President repeatedly exercised his right to request reconsideration (veto).

On the night of December 3, President Yoon declared emergency martial law, citing administrative paralysis caused by the opposition party, for the first time in 44 years. However, before dawn on December 4, the National Assembly passed a “resolution calling for the lifting of emergency martial law,” and President Yoon lifted it. In the National Assembly, a motion was submitted to impeach President Yoon on the grounds that the declaration of emergency martial law violated the Constitution, and on December 14, this motion was passed. As a result, President Yoon's authority was suspended, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo became Acting President, and the Constitutional Court of Korea was set to consider the merits of President Yoon's impeachment.

The opposition party then submitted an impeachment motion against Prime Minister Han Duck-soo on the grounds including that his attendance at the Cabinet meeting when the declaration of the emergency martial law was decided constituted, among other things, complicity in the acts of rebellion, and this was passed on December 27. As a result, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo's authority to perform his duties was also suspended, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Finance Choi Sang-mok became Acting President.

Meanwhile, on December 9, a joint investigation unit consisting of police and other organizations requested an arrest warrant for President Yoon for failing to respond to repeated requests to appear, and President Yoon was arrested and detained on January 15, 2025, becoming the first sitting President to be arrested and detained. The prosecutors then indicted President Yoon under detention as a suspect for rebellion.

(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 August 2024, President Yoon held 197 summit meetings with 113 countries.

As for relations with the U.S., Minister of Foreign Affairs Cho Tae-yul visited the U.S. in February and held his first ROK-U.S. Foreign Minister’s Meeting with Secretary of State Blinken since assuming office, and also held another ROK-U.S. Foreign Minister’s Meeting in March when Secretary of State Blinken visited the ROK to attend the 3rd Summit for Democracy in Seoul. Furthermore, when President Yoon attended the NATO Summit held in Washington, D.C. in July, he held a ROK-U.S. Summit Meeting with President Biden, reaffirming the U.S.-ROK Washington Declaration announced by the ROK and U.S. leaders during President Yoon’s state visit in April 2023, and adopting the Joint Statement on U.S.-ROK Guidelines for Nuclear Deterrence and Nuclear Operations on the Korean Peninsula, which calls for a strong response to North Korea’s nuclear provocations.

In terms of relations with China, Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul visited China in May and held his first ROK-China Foreign Ministers’ Meeting with Foreign Minister Wang Yi since assuming office. Approximately two weeks later, President Yoon met with Premier Li Qiang when the Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit was held in Seoul with Premier Li’s attendance. Since then, Foreign Ministers’ Meetings between the ROK and China have been held on the occasion of multilateral conferences, and high-level exchanges have continued, including diplomacy and security dialogues and vice foreign ministerial strategic dialogues.

(C) Economy

In 2024, the GDP growth rate in the ROK increased from 1.4% to 2.0% in comparison to the previous year. Total value of exports increased 8.1% year-on-year to approximately 683.7 billion U.S. dollars, while total value of imports decreased 1.6% year-on-year to approximately 632.1 billion U.S. dollars, resulting in a trade surplus of approximately 51.6 billion U.S. dollars. With this, the ROK overcame the trade deficit that has continued since 2022 and achieved the biggest surplus since 2018 (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.” During the same year, the “New Government’s Energy Policy” and the “National Semiconductor Powerhouse Strategy” were released. In December 2024, after the declaration of emergency martial law, anxiety over the political situation increased, and the ROK’s Composite Consumer Sentiment Index (CCSI) of that December fell to 88.4, the largest drop since the COVID-19 pandemic (Bank of Korea Consumer Survey). In addition, the real GDP growth rate (preliminary figure) for the fourth quarter (October to December) remained at an increase of just 0.1% from the previous quarter, below the Bank of Korea’s forecast (0.5% increase), mainly due to sluggish consumption and construction investment following the declaration of emergency martial law.

In recent years, the ROK has had a rapidly declining birthrate and aging population. In 2024 the declining birthrate issue remained extremely serious, with a total fertility rate of 0.75 children per woman.

B Japan-ROK Relations

(A) Bilateral Relations

The ROK is an important neighboring country with which Japan should cooperate as partners in dealing with various issues of the international community. Following the significant progress in the Japan-ROK relations in 2023 by the leadership of the two leaders,

both countries continued close communication including between the two leaders and foreign ministers, and cooperation in various fields was further expanded in 2024.

On May 26, Prime Minister Kishida visited the ROK to attend the Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit. At the Japan-ROK Summit Meeting,⁽¹³⁾ the two leaders concurred to continue the “shuttle diplomacy” and close bilateral dialogue that had been ongoing since the previous year. They also shared the intention to accelerate progress in cooperation in hydrogen, ammonia, and quantum technologies, and to consider cooperation in the areas of industrial decarbonization and critical minerals. The two leaders also concurred to further strengthen cooperation among Japan, the U.S., and the ROK. At the Japan-ROK Summit Meeting held on the sidelines of the NATO Summit in Washington, D.C. in July, the two leaders shared the view that the security of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific is inseparable, and concurred to further deepen coordination between NATO and Indo-Pacific partners.

On September 6, Prime Minister Kishida visited the ROK again. In his twelfth summit meeting in person with President Yoon, the two leaders overviewed the progress in Japan-ROK relations and affirmed that they would continue to enhance bilateral cooperation and exchanges towards the year 2025, which marks the 60th anniversary of the normalization of Japan-ROK relations. The two leaders welcomed the signing of the Japan-ROK Memorandum through diplomatic channels on cooperation of protecting each other's nationals in third countries, as a symbol of the expanding scope of the bilateral relationship. They also affirmed that they would work with each other for the success of the EXPO 2025, Osaka, Kansai, Japan and the 2025 APEC Leaders' Meeting in the ROK.

On October 2, immediately after Prime Minister Ishiba assumed office, the Japan-ROK summit telephone call was held, in which the two leaders affirmed to continue close communication between the governments of Japan and the ROK, and concurred on working closely together bilaterally and trilaterally



Japan-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting (January 13, Seoul, ROK)

among Japan, the ROK and the U.S. regarding the current situation of serious concern, including issues regarding North Korea such as the nuclear and missile issues. President Yoon reiterated his support to Japan regarding the abductions issue. About a week later, on October 10, Prime Minister Ishiba and President Yoon held their first meeting in person on the occasion of the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings in Vientiane, Laos. At the Japan-ROK Summit Meeting held during the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Lima, Peru in November, the two leaders shared the intention to promote Japan-ROK relations comprehensively in the areas such as politics, security, economy, culture and social security.

After the domestic situation in the ROK became fluid following President Yoon's declaration of emergency martial law in December, Japan and the ROK confirmed that in light of the current strategic environment, the importance of Japan-ROK relations remains unchanged, and that they continue close communication between the two governments, through the two telephone calls between the foreign ministers of Japan and the ROK, as well as the telephone call between Prime Minister Ishiba and Acting President and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo. On January 13, 2025, Foreign Minister Iwaya visited the ROK and reaffirmed the importance of close cooperation, including on issues regarding North Korea, between Japan and the ROK, and among Japan, the ROK and the U.S., in light of the current strategic environment, through a series of

(13) https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/pageite_000001_00372.html



events including a meeting with Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul.

In addition to these high-level exchanges, there has also been active communication at the working level, including the Japan-ROK Vice-Ministerial Strategic Dialogue, the Japan-ROK Security Dialogue, and the Japan-ROK High-Level Economic Consultations over the past year.

(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 2018 final judgements by the ROK Supreme Court.

In response, on the same day, the Government of Japan made public its view, 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.⁽¹⁴⁾

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 Government of the ROK 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.

As of December 2024, payments have been made by the ROK foundation to 21 plaintiffs who are CWKs. The Government of the ROK has stated that it will continue to make efforts to gain the understanding of the plaintiffs, and the Government of Japan will continue to maintain close communication with the ROK side.

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

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 Cooperation between Japan and the Republic of Korea. However, from the perspective of facilitating 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

⁽¹⁴⁾ See References on the Issue of Former Civilian Workers from the Korean Peninsula (CWKs)

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⁽¹⁵⁾ 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.⁽¹⁶⁾ 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 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

⁽¹⁵⁾ 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.

⁽¹⁶⁾ See References on the Issue of Comfort Women

urge the ROK to steadily implement the Japan-ROK Agreement. (See page 35 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



(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.⁽¹⁷⁾ 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 2024, 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.⁽¹⁸⁾ 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) Exchanges and Travel

As for travel between Japan and the ROK, since early 2020, due to the strengthening of border measures related to the spread of COVID-19, the number of travelers between the two countries significantly decreased, and in 2021 approximately 30,000 people made trips between the two countries. However, in October 2022 after the border measures were eased and flights between Japan and the ROK including the Haneda-Gimpo route resumed operations, the number of travelers has gone up to about 1.31 million, with an increase in tourism. 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 2024, the number solidly increased, surpassing 10 million people for the first time since 2018 and reaching a record high of 12.04 million people.

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 2024, 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 105,000 people from both countries participating. The Government of Japan, through "Japan Friendship Ties Programs (JENESYS)," is fostering mutual understanding, primarily between youth from Japan and the ROK, and is promoting friendly and cooperative relationships for the future. In 2023, the Governments of Japan and the ROK decided to fully resume face-to-face exchange programs, which had been conducted online due to the spread of COVID-19, and to double the number of exchanges compared

⁽¹⁷⁾ 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>

⁽¹⁸⁾ In April Democratic Party of Korea lawmakers Kim Byung-wook, Min Byeong-deok, and Back Hye-ryun landed on the island, and in May Rebuilding Korea Party representative Cho Kuk landed on the island. ROK armed forces conducted military training related to Takeshima in August 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.

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to the previous year. In 2024, both governments have expressed their intention to further expand the number of exchanges to approximately 900, thereby invigorating exchanges among the next generation of youth in 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 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 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),⁽¹⁹⁾ 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.⁽²⁰⁾

A cultural property⁽²¹⁾ which had been stolen, and taken to the ROK and for which the Government of Japan had been urging the Government of the ROK to promptly return, was returned from the ROK government to its rightful owner, a Japanese temple on January 24, 2025. Upon receipt from the Daejeon District Prosecutors' Office, Kannon-ji Temple has temporarily lent it to the ROK-side temple in light of the ROK-side temple's request to borrow the property for a 100-day memorial service. Once the 100-day memorial service concludes, the property will be promptly transferred to Tsushima.

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,⁽²²⁾ addressing the issue of atomic bomb survivors living in the ROK,⁽²³⁾ and helping Hansen's disease patients admitted to sanitariums in the ROK.⁽²⁴⁾

C Economy

The total value of trade between the two countries amounted to approximately 11.7863 trillion Japanese yen in 2024. Japan is the ROK's fourth largest trading partner, and the ROK is Japan's third largest trading

⁽¹⁹⁾ 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).

⁽²⁰⁾ Ministry of Foreign Affairs website with information on the issue of the name "Sea of Japan": <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/maritime/japan/index.html>

⁽²¹⁾ 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.

⁽²²⁾ 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.

⁽²³⁾ 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.

⁽²⁴⁾ 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.

(20)



partner. The ROK's trade deficit with Japan increased by approximately 2.2% from a year earlier, reaching approximately 2.2693 trillion Japanese yen (Trade Statistics of Japan, Ministry of Finance). Japanese direct investment in the ROK significantly increased, totaling approximately 6.12 billion U.S. dollars (up 375.6% from the previous year) (figures published by the ROK Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy).

Japan and the ROK also cooperate as parties to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, and work together in various economic frameworks, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Asia-Pacific Economic

Cooperation (APEC), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). In December, the 16th Japan-ROK High-Level Economic Consultations⁽²⁵⁾ were held to discuss a wide range of topics, including bilateral economic relations and the international economic situation, furthering discussions on expanding Japan-ROK economic cooperation.

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.

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 280 million people) and situated in a strategic location on sea lanes such as the Strait of Malacca, and plays a leading role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Moreover, as ASEAN's sole G20 member and as one of the leading countries in the Global South, its importance in addressing regional and international challenges has been increasing.

President Joko Widodo served two terms over a ten-year period beginning in October 2014 and concluding in October 2024. During his time in office, he primarily focused on economic sectors, most notably infrastructure development. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic growth, which had consistently remained around 5 percent, turned negative in 2020. However, it has recovered to positive growth in the mid-5 percent range since 2022. Japan has actively cooperated in various fields including infrastructure development, which was a priority area for President Joko.

In February, Indonesia held its presidential election, and Prabowo Subianto, who was then Minister

of Defense, was elected. Prior to his inauguration in October, President-elect Prabowo visited Japan in April, where he exchanged views with Prime Minister Kishida and other government officials, confirming that they would further advance cooperation between the two countries.

In July, Foreign Minister Kamikawa met with Foreign Minister Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi on the occasion of the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings, and in August, Foreign Minister Kamikawa and Minister of Trade Zulkifli Hasan signed a Protocol Amending the Agreement between Japan and the Republic of Indonesia for an Economic Partnership.

Former Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs KOMURA Masahiko attended the Indonesian Presidential inauguration ceremony in October as the Ambassador on Special Mission. In the inaugural speech, President Prabowo stated that he would focus on reducing poverty and on improving self-sufficiency in food and energy. After his inauguration, the cabinet list was announced, and a new administration was formed. Members of political parties that had won seats in the parliamentary election which was held alongside the presidential election joined the cabinet or expressed

⁽²⁵⁾ Ministry of Foreign Affairs website detailing the 16th Japan-ROK High-Level Economic Consultations on December 20: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_00864.html



their support for the administration, resulting in a de facto all-ruling party system in the national legislature.

In October, when Indonesia's new government was inaugurated, Foreign Minister Iwaya held a telephone call with Foreign Minister Sugiono, confirming their collaboration to further strengthen the relationship between the two countries as "Comprehensive Strategic Partners," and confirming their close cooperation on regional and international affairs. In November, Foreign Minister Iwaya and Foreign Minister Sugiono held informal talks on the sidelines of the APEC Ministerial Meeting in Peru, and Prime Minister Ishiba and President Prabowo also held informal talks on the sidelines of the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting. In these talks between the leaders and the foreign ministers, they concurred to further promote cooperation in the field of security in addition to the economy. Such interactive communications demonstrate that active exchanges have been taking place at a high level between the two countries.

(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, since 2022 it has returned to positive growth of around 5.0%.

In terms of domestic affairs, the general election held in July 2023 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 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. In 2023, the relationship between

the two countries was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. On the international stage, Japan and Cambodia have drawn on their collaboration in mine-clearance efforts in Cambodia to assist third countries, most notably Ukraine, with mine-clearance action.

In July, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Cambodia and, in a Japan-Cambodia Foreign Ministers' Meeting, concurred to promote "three new cooperation approaches" in social infrastructure development, maritime connectivity enhancement, and humanitarian mine action, aimed at strengthening Cambodia's sustainability and co-creating social value, and affirmed their commitment to cooperate in regional and international fora.

(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 May, Singapore saw a change in prime minister for the first time in 20 years, with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong becoming the fourth Prime Minister. Prime Minister Wong, who continues to serve as Finance Minister, is promoting economic policies, measures to address the low birthrate, and housing policies on the basis of the People's Action Party's stable domestic governance. In May, Prime Minister Kishida held a telephone call with Prime Minister Wong, shortly after his inauguration, and welcomed the progress in cooperation across a wide range of areas, concurring to coordinate on various issues to further strengthen bilateral relations.

At the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings in Laos in July, and again during a Japan-Singapore Foreign Ministers' Telephone Meeting in October, Foreign Minister Kamikawa exchanged views with Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, confirming that, with Singapore serving as ASEAN Country Coordinator for Japan from summer 2024 and looking ahead to the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2026, Japan and Singapore will work together closely. 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 7,600 participants from ASEAN countries and other regions (as of the end of July 2024).

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 a constitutional monarchy located at the heart of the Southeast Asian mainland (Mekong region). It is also one of the original member states of ASEAN, which was born from the “Bangkok Declaration” in 1967, and holds significant geopolitical importance. 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 key part of supply chains, with close to 6,000 Japanese companies operating and more than 70,000 Japanese nationals living in Thailand.

Continuing on from 2023, 2024 was also a year of significant domestic political changes. In August, the Constitutional Court ordered the dissolution of the Move Forward Party, the largest opposition party in the House of Representatives (legislature), as well as the suspension of eligibility for election for all executive members of the party for 10 years, ruling that its electoral pledge to amend the *lèse-majesté* law during the previous year's legislative election carried an intent to overthrow the constitutional monarchy. The Court also found that the appointment of a minister who had previously been convicted violated the ethical standards set forth in the Constitution and consequently removed Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin from office. As a result, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's second daughter and leader of the Pheu Thai Party, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, became Prime Minister, and a new government was formed in September.

Bilateral relations between Japan and Thailand have continued to advance steadily. In May, Foreign Minister Kamikawa met with Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa, who was visiting Japan, and confirmed their intention to strengthen cooperation in a variety of fields, including the economy. In October, on the sidelines of the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings, Prime Minister Ishiba had an informal talk with Prime Minister Paetongtarn, and in November, at the APEC

Ministerial Meeting in Peru, Foreign Minister Iwaya had an informal talk with Foreign Minister Maris, where they shared the intention to deepen cooperation both bilaterally and in international fora.

(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, which celebrated the 20th anniversary of its independence, has realized peace and stability with the support of the international community, and it has also been making nation building efforts based on the principle of democracy. As a result of the election for the National Parliament held in May 2023, 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 the highest national priority. On the diplomatic front, Timor-Leste still continues to work toward its accession to ASEAN in coordination with relevant countries. In May 2023, ASEAN adopted a roadmap for Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN.

In July, Foreign Minister Kamikawa attended the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings and held a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Bendito dos Santos Freitas, where they exchanged views on bilateral relations and various issues facing the region and the international community.



Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura paying a courtesy call on President Ramos-Horta (August 13, Timor-Leste)

In August, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura visited Timor-Leste and met with President Ramos-Horta, Prime Minister Gusmão, and Vice Prime Minister Francisco Kalbuadi Lay. They confirmed that upgrading the relationship between the two countries to a “Comprehensive Partnership” was a major achievement, and that they would use this visit as an opportunity to further develop bilateral relations, deepen cooperation in a wide range of areas such as security, economy, and people-to-people exchanges, and cooperate on regional and international situations. During the meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Bedito dos Santos Freitas, the two countries signed and exchanged notes for Grant Aid for “the Project for the Improvement of Guido Valadares National Hospital.” In October, a memorandum of cooperation on the technical intern training program was signed, and concrete cooperation is progressing between related organizations and private companies. As an example of accepting Timor Leste technical intern trainees, Kochi Prefecture has accepted 16 trainees in the agricultural sector and two in the accommodation sector.

(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, and in 2023 it maintained an economic growth rate of 5.5%, making it one of the ASEAN countries with the highest economic growth rates. Now in his third 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.

Between Japan and the Philippines, following mutual visits by the two countries' leaders in 2023, 2024 also

saw visits at various levels, thereby further advancing the deepening of their Strategic partnership. In July, Foreign Minister Kamikawa attended the Second Japan-Philippines Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting (“2+2”) that was held in Manila and signed the Japan-Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA). In August, State Minister for Foreign Affairs TSUGE Yoshifumi paid a courtesy call on Secretary for Foreign Affairs Enrique A. Manalo in the Philippines. In addition, at the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings in October, Prime Minister Ishiba held informal talks with President Marcos and confirmed that the two countries would further strengthen their cooperation. Moreover, during the Japan-Philippines Foreign Ministers' Telephone Meeting in October and at the Japan-Philippines Foreign Ministers' Meeting held during the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in November, Foreign Minister Iwaya confirmed collaboration on addressing regional and international issues, including the issue of the South China Sea, and on pursuing the peaceful resolution of disputes. In the security field, in December, continuing on from 2023, Japan and the Philippines signed and exchanged notes concerning the provision of support equipment, including the Air Surveillance Radar System that has already been transferred, under the Government of Japan's Official Security Assistance (OSA). In addition to the bilateral cooperation between Japan and the Philippines, there has also been steady progress in trilateral cooperation between Japan, the U.S., and the Philippines. Following the March Japan-U.S.-Philippines Vice Minister's Meeting, in April the inaugural Japan-U.S.-Philippines Summit was held, and in December the director-level Japan-U.S.-Philippines Maritime Dialogue took place, demonstrating that concrete initiatives in a wide range of areas, such as security and economic security, are continuing to advance Japan-U.S.-Philippines cooperation. (See the Special Feature on page 74.)

(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. March 2024 marked the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and Crown Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah and Crown Princess Sarah of Brunei made an Official Visit to Japan. Crown Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah met with Prime Minister Kishida, during which they exchanged views on bilateral cooperation and regional and global issues, and elevated their bilateral relationship to a "Strategic partnership." Japan and Brunei are also continuing to build a close relationship between the imperial and royal families. (See the Column on page 75.) Brunei is an important country for stable energy supply to Japan. Around 50% of Brunei's liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports are bound for Japan, and LNG from Brunei makes up around 4% 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, however growth rebounded to 8.02% in 2022 and 5.05% in 2023, and the 2024 economic growth rate is estimated at approximately 6.0%. In a short span of time, Viet Nam's top leadership underwent changes, including the successive resignations of the State President and the National Assembly Chairman and the death of General Secretary of the Communist Party of Viet Nam Nguyen Phu Trong (the state funeral was attended by former Japanese Prime Minister SUGA Yoshihide as a Special Envoy of Prime Minister Kishida), but as of October a new leadership team under General Secretary To Lam, President Luong Cuong, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, and National Assembly Chairman Tran Thanh Man has taken office.

Japan and Viet Nam established diplomatic relations on September 21, 1973. In 2023, on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the Japan-Viet Nam bilateral relationship was elevated to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia and the World," and over five hundred commemorative events were held in both countries.

Under the new bilateral partnership, 2024 continued to see active visits by dignitaries and high-level meetings. In August, Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son visited Japan, where he and Foreign Minister Kamikawa held the Viet Nam-Japan Cooperation Committee meeting and a Japan-Viet Nam Foreign Ministers' Meeting, at which they concurred to advance cooperation in a



Japan-Viet Nam Summit Meeting (October 11, Vientiane, Laos; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

variety of fields, including economic affairs, people-to-people exchanges, subnational exchanges, and security. In September, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura visited Viet Nam to participate in an international forum hosted in Ho Chi Minh City. Prime Minister Ishiba held a Japan-Viet Nam Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Chinh on the sidelines of the October ASEAN-related Summit Meetings and a Japan-Viet Nam Summit Meeting with President Cuong at the November APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, sharing the intention to deepen cooperation in all areas, including security. In December, National Assembly Chairman Man visited Japan and met with House of Representatives Speaker NUKAGA Fukushima and House of Councillors President SEKIGUCHI Masakazu, where they concurred on the importance of strengthening people-to-people exchanges. Furthermore, the number of Vietnamese nationals residing in Japan, primarily technical intern trainees, is continuing to increase, from approximately 40,000 in 2011 to over 600,000 by the end of June 2024, making Vietnamese nationals the second largest number of foreign residents in Japan by country after China.

(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.

In May, Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar made his second visit to Japan since December 2023 and held a Japan-Malaysia Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Kishida. During their talks, the two leaders concurred to cooperate in further developing Japan-Malaysia relations under the Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership. In February and April, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Royal Malaysian Navy conducted joint exercises. In the field of human resources development, under the Look East Policy,

which was begun by Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad in 1982, approximately 28,000 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. Moreover, in September 2024 the University of Tsukuba opened a branch campus in Malaysia in order to further contribute to the development of human resources who will bear the future of Malaysia, and there are active exchanges in the fields of education and the humanities. 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, clashes have erupted across the country between the military and both pro-democracy forces and various ethnic armed organizations, resulting in a deteriorating security situation and numerous civilian casualties. Moreover, a severe shortage of foreign currency, together with disruptions to fuel imports and rising inflation, has dealt a heavy blow to people's livelihoods and economic activity.

On the political front, the enactment in February of the People's Military Service Law introduced conscription, prompting many young people to flee abroad and perpetuating social unrest. Against this backdrop, the State Administration Council, chaired by the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, conducted a national census beginning in October in preparation for a general election, and released provisional results at the end of December. Notably, the National League for Democracy (NLD), which had won a landslide in the previous general election, was deregistered under the Political Parties Registration Law newly enacted in 2023.

On February 1, 2024, marking three years since the coup d'état, the Government of Japan issued a Foreign Minister's statement condemning the absence of any progress toward political reforms, including the immediate cessation of violence, the release of detainees, and the prompt restoration of a democratic political system,

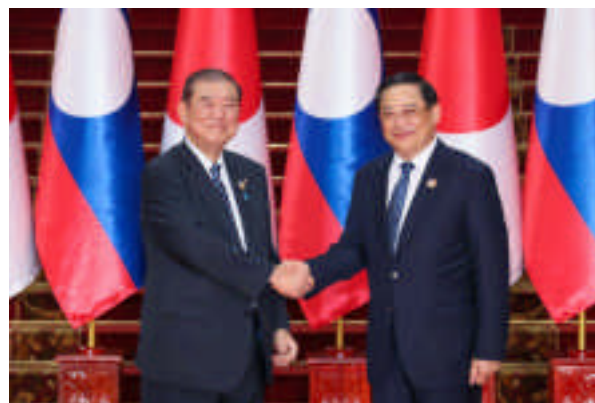
which Japan has consistently urged the Myanmar military to undertake. The statement called on the military to release NLD leaders, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, and to concretely engage in peaceful problem-solving through dialogue among all parties. In May, while visiting Japan, representatives of ethnic organizations paid a courtesy call on Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura, where they exchanged views on the situation in Myanmar.

Based on the belief that it is important for ASEAN to respond in a unified manner to resolve the situation, Japan is working with the international community to fully support ASEAN's efforts, including the implementation of the ASEAN "Five-Point Consensus."⁽²⁶⁾ In addition, as a member of the UN Security Council, Japan has actively contributed to various discussions on Myanmar and has responded in cooperation with the international community, including co-sponsoring the Human Rights Council resolution (April) and the UN General Assembly resolution (December) on the human rights situation in Myanmar.

Furthermore, in order to improve the worsening humanitarian situation in Myanmar, since the coup d'état on February 1, 2021, through international organizations and NGOs, Japan has been continuously providing humanitarian assistance in a way that directly benefits the people of Myanmar, totaling approximately 152.00 million U.S. dollars (as of the end of December 2024).

(11) Laos

Laos is a landlocked country bordering China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Viet Nam, and therefore is a key country for Mekong connectivity. Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone has continued to address economic and fiscal issues on the domestic front, and at the 7th Ordinary Session of the National Assembly's 9th Legislature in June, he stated that he was working to resolve challenges such as inflation, the depreciation of the kip (the currency of Laos), surging prices, and external debt.



Japan-Laos Summit Meeting (October 11, Vientiane, Laos; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

Meanwhile, Laos served as the ASEAN Chairmanship for 2024, and hosted the ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings in July and the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings in October.

Between Japan and Laos, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held Japan-Laos Foreign Ministers' Meetings with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith in May and July, and in August Prime Minister Sonexay held a Japan-Laos Summit telephone call with Prime Minister Kishida. In October, Prime Minister Ishiba made his first overseas visit since assuming office by travelling to Laos to attend the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings, where he held a Japan-Laos Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Sonexay. The two leaders shared the intention that they would aim to elevate bilateral relations to a "Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership" on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2025.

During Prime Minister Ishiba's official visit to Laos in October, Japan decided to provide grant assistance for the expansion and renovation of facilities at Vientiane International Airport, Laos's primary gateway, to enhance its convenience and safety. Additionally, through cooperation on road rehabilitation, clearance of unexploded ordnance, and disaster risk reduction, Japan and Laos are working to strengthen connectivity within the region's economy and to bolster Laos's resilience.

⁽²⁶⁾ 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 FEATURE

Japan-U.S.-Philippines Cooperation and Future Potential — Aiming for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific

Today, as attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion are evident around the world and as the international community faces complex crises, maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order based on the rule of law has become an urgent priority. Based on this recognition of the current situation, Japan believes that in addition to traditional cooperative frameworks such as bilateral and multilateral cooperation, it is essential to deepen cooperation across a wide range of fields with like-minded countries based on the Japan-U.S. Alliance in order to maintain peace and prosperity in the region. Accordingly, Japan is working to strengthen cooperative frameworks such as the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad), Japan-U.S.-ROK, and Japan-U.S.-Australia.

One of the newest frameworks for cooperation among like-minded countries in which Japan participates is the Japan-U.S.-Philippines trilateral partnership. As fellow maritime nations sharing vital sea lanes, Japan and the Philippines have a natural basis for collaboration, and Japan has long sought to strengthen its relationship with the Philippines, a like-minded country with which Japan shares fundamental values and principles. Since 2023 in particular, Japan has worked with both the U.S. and the Philippines to deepen trilateral cooperation under the Japan-U.S.-Philippines framework.

On April 11, during Prime Minister Kishida's official visit to the U.S., he held the first-ever Japan-U.S.-Philippines Summit with U.S. President Joseph Biden and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. The three leaders confirmed the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight for regional peace and security, and concurred to oppose and resolutely respond to any unilateral attempts by China to change the status quo by force in the South China Sea and the East China Sea.

Based on the Joint Vision Statement released at this inaugural summit, Japan, the U.S., and the Philippines are elaborating Japan-U.S.-Philippines cooperation across security and economic domains. For example, in the maritime security sphere, the three countries' navies have conducted multilateral joint exercises in the South China Sea. Additionally, the countries' coast guard authorities convened their first high-level meeting in June and are continuing to strengthen relations. In December, the first Japan-U.S.-Philippines Maritime Dialogue was held in Tokyo. In the Dialogue, given the current situation that the U.S.-Philippines and Japan-Philippines bilateral cooperation in the maritime domain has become even closer, the participants confirmed the practical cooperation promoted bilaterally and concurred to continue and enhance the momentum of trilateral cooperation beyond 2025.

In the economic sphere, based on the Joint Vision Statement's emphasis on the need for close coordination in dealing with economic coercion, Japan, the U.S. and the Philippines held a Trilateral Discussion on countering Economic Coercion and promoting Economic Resilience in October in Manila. In addition, recognizing the importance of promoting the development of strategically critical infrastructure, the Luzon Economic Corridor was launched to support connectivity on Luzon Island. Furthermore, efforts are also being made in a wide range of fields, including telecommunications and energy. In November, the Cabinet Decision approved that Japan would provide Japan-made Open RAN¹-related equipment to the Philippines in order to develop a secure communications environment in the Philippines. Moreover, cooperation is also deepening in the cyber domain, with the 1st Japan-U.S.-Philippines Cyber-Digital Dialogue being held in Singapore in October.

As the international community faces a turning point in history and as the security environment surrounding Japan grows increasingly severe, Japan, the U.S., and the Philippines, which share fundamental values and principles, are expected to play a major role in realizing a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)." Japan will continue to strengthen and further develop Japan-U.S.-Philippines cooperation for the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region and the international community.



Japan-U.S.-Philippines Summit (April 11, Washington, D.C., U.S.; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

¹ Refers to radio access networks (RAN) that can be built in an open way by a combination of multiple vendors. It offers the advantage of contributing to the mitigation of supply chain risks.

COLUMN

Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Brunei

— Looking Ahead to the Future for the Strategic Partnership

■ Relations between Japan and Brunei

Are you familiar with the country of Brunei? Located in northern Borneo, Brunei is a small nation of approximately 450,000 people and an area of about 5,800 square kilometers, roughly the same size as Mie Prefecture in Japan. Despite its small size, Brunei is a Muslim sultanate with a long history spanning more than 600 years. Backed by abundant energy resources, its per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) ranks second in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), after Singapore, reflecting the stable development it has achieved.

Although Brunei may not be widely known in Japan, it is in fact a country with deep ties to Japan. When Brunei gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1984, Japan was one of the first to establish diplomatic relations with it, and over the ensuing 40 years, the two countries have built an excellent relationship of friendship and cooperation. One of the key pillars of the Japan-Brunei relationship is economic relations, including the energy sector. Brunei's key industry is the production and export of liquefied natural gas (LNG), and 54.7% of Brunei's LNG exports are bound for Japan; about 20 Japanese companies have operations in the country.

Brunei is a constitutional monarchy, and there are active exchanges between the Imperial Family of Japan and the Royal Family of Brunei. His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, the current 29th Sultan, first visited Japan in 1970 to observe the Japan World Exposition 1970 (Expo '70) in Osaka, prior to Brunei's independence. Since then, he has visited Japan multiple times both officially and unofficially, and most recently, he attended the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation in 2023. From the Japanese side, Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Hitachi visited Brunei in 1996 at the invitation of the Sultanate for international goodwill, and in 2004 His Majesty the Emperor, His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince at the time, attended the wedding of Crown Prince Billah in Brunei.

■ The 40th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Brunei

In recent years, Japan-Brunei relations have expanded beyond economic cooperation and exchanges between the Imperial and Royal Families to also encompass security and defense collaboration, as well as people-to-people and cultural exchanges. Like Japan, Brunei is a maritime nation facing the South China Sea, an important sea lane for Japan. Recognizing Brunei's geopolitically important location, since 2020 the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Royal Brunei Navy have conducted a total of seven goodwill exercises. In the people-to-people and cultural domains, in order to deepen mutual understanding, particularly among the younger generations of both countries and foster future bonds across diverse fields, youth exchanges and inter-university student exchanges are flourishing, through Japan's Friendship Ties Program "JENESYS" program.¹ Against the backdrop of this grassroots engagement, Japanese food, anime, and games now gain high popularity in Brunei.

In 2024, Japan and Brunei celebrated the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. In March, His Royal Highness Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, Crown Prince and Senior Minister at the Prime Minister's Office, paid an Official Visit to Japan and held a meeting with Prime Minister Kishida, elevating bilateral relations to a strategic partnership. In order to further facilitate people-to-people exchange between the two countries, pursuant to the Notes Verbale exchanged on the occasion of the afore-mentioned



Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress met with Their Royal Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Brunei (March 8, Tokyo; Photo: Imperial Household Agency)



Reception commemorating the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Brunei was held, with attendance by His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino (March 8, Tokyo; Photo: Imperial Household Agency)

Official Visit to Japan, a new visa waiver measure was introduced in December, extending the period of stay without visa for nationals of both countries from 14 days to 30 days.

Looking ahead to the next 10 years, 20 years, and beyond, Japan will continue to place importance on and further develop its relationship with Brunei, a key partner sharing the vision of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” based on the rule of law.

- 1 JENESYS is a program intended to encourage understanding of Japan's politics, economy, society, culture, history, and foreign policy, and to cultivate people with great affinity toward or knowledge of Japan by inviting, dispatching, and facilitating online exchanges with emerging future leaders who have influence in public relations between Japan and the Asia-Pacific region.

5 South Asia

(1) India

India is now the world's most populous country, with the fifth largest economy, and is strengthening its presence in the international community. In domestic affairs, the third Modi administration was inaugurated in June following the 18th general election for the lower house. In terms of its economy, India has been achieving steady economic growth through various economic initiatives, including “Make in India, Make for the World.” 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, India hosted the Voice of Global South Summit, 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 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 multilateral 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 one of the greatest potentials 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 2024, Japan and India had frequent high-level exchanges of views, including summit meetings. In March, the 16th Japan-India Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue was held in Japan. Immediately following India's general election for the lower house in June, a Japan-India Summit Meeting was held on the sidelines of the G7 Apulia Summit in Italy. In August, the Third Japan-India “2+2” Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting was convened in India, during which both sides discussed on cooperation to realize FOIP, on bilateral security and defense collaboration,



Japan-India Summit Meeting (October 10, Vientiane, Laos; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

and on regional and international issues, and concurred to continue working closely. In September, Prime Minister Kishida held a Japan-India Summit Meeting on the occasion of the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders' Meeting in the U.S. In October, on the margins of the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings in Laos, Prime Minister Ishiba and Prime Minister Modi held a Japan-India Summit Meeting at which they confirmed their intention to further promote cooperation in the fields of the economy, security, and people-to-people exchanges. Moreover, various meetings at the working level were convened between the two countries. A Japan-India Bilateral Consultations on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation was held in April, and in November the inaugural Japan-India Dialogue on Economic Security, including Strategic Trade and Technology, was convened.

(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. Regarding domestic affairs, a general election was held in February, with major political parties including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) agreeing to form a coalition, and PML-N leader Shahbaz Sharif becoming Prime Minister. 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.

In relations with Japan, In October, the 8th Japan-Pakistan High-Level Economic Policy Dialogue was held, during which both sides exchanged views on the Government of Pakistan's reform initiatives and key priorities, measures to promote Pakistan's export and investment, and economic cooperation. In recent

years, Japan has provided grant aid to Pakistan, mainly in the fields of health, water and sanitation, education, and disaster prevention. Most recently, Japan has concentrated its support on social sectors closely linked to people's livelihoods, namely disaster prevention and climate change, health, education, and water and sewerage, where Japan's strengths are most applicable. In the field of disaster prevention, following the 2022 floods in Pakistan, Japan provided an additional 77 million U.S. dollars in assistance, and in November the two countries signed and exchanged Notes concerning a Flood Management Enhancement Project in the Indus River Basin. In the health sector, in December the two countries signed and exchanged Notes regarding a Project for the Recovery of Maternal and Child Health Equipment in Flood-Affected and Surrounding Areas.

(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 5.78% in 2023). 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. In domestic affairs, following the political upheaval in August, former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who had led the government for over fifteen years, stepped down, and the Interim Government was formed under Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus. Chief Adviser Yunus has pledged that, after implementing necessary reforms to state systems, a free, fair, and participatory election will be held at the earliest possible opportunity. Additionally, with the deterioration in peace and order in Rakhine State of Myanmar in August 2017, more than 750,000 displaced persons have flooded into Bangladesh, 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.

As for relations with Japan, under the "Strategic Partnership," in March the two countries have decided to launch negotiations for the Japan-Bangladesh Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), holding the



Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs HOSAKA Yasushi delivering remarks at the opening ceremony for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD30) Global Dialogue (May 15, Dhaka, Bangladesh)

first round of negotiations in May, the second round in November, and the third round in December. The number of Japanese affiliated companies operating in the country has increased from 61 in 2005 to 315 in 2023. 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, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, HOSAKA Yasushi visited Bangladesh to attend the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD30) Global Dialogue in May, and the 5th Japan-Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Level Consultation was held in June.

(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. On the domestic front, the presidential election in September, Sri Lanka's first national election since the economic and political crisis of 2022, resulted in the victory of Anura Kumara Disanayake, leader of the opposition coalition National People's Power (NPP) and chairman of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), on a platform that included anti-corruption measures. In the subsequent parliamentary election in November, the NPP won 159 seats out of 225, more than two-thirds of the total, and secured a decisive victory. In the economic sphere, in July, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on debt restructuring was completed between Sri Lanka and the members

of the creditor committee co-chaired by Japan, France, and India, and the Government of Sri Lanka's intention to swiftly conclude a bilateral agreement with Japan was confirmed in writing. In response, Japan resumed disbursements under existing yen-loan projects in Sri Lanka. In June, the International Monetary Fund provided a third tranche of approximately 330 million U.S. dollars under its Extended Fund Facility (EFF) for Sri Lanka. The Government of Sri Lanka continues to implement the various reforms required under the EFF programme. In its foreign policy, Sri Lanka fundamentally adheres to non-alignment and neutrality while placing importance on balanced diplomacy.

In relations with Japan, following on from 2023, 2024 also saw active visits by dignitaries: in May, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Sri Lanka, and in July, Foreign Minister M.U.M. Ali Sabry visited Japan, with a Japan-Sri Lanka Foreign Minister's Meeting being held on each occasion. In economic cooperation, development assistance with attention to inclusivity and vulnerability reduction have been prioritized, with improving livelihoods in conflict-affected areas and addressing climate change and disaster prevention presenting ongoing challenges. In this context, in March, Japan and Sri Lanka signed and exchanged Notes on the Japanese Grant Aid for the "Economic and Social Development Plan," including the provision of equipment to support women in the Northern Province and oil-spill response equipment.

(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, who assumed his post in December 2022, maintained his government through coalition reshuffles, but in July the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (UML) withdrew from the administration and announced plans to work with the largest opposition, the Nepali Congress Party (NC), to form a new government. Consequently, Prime Minister Dahal's third coalition collapsed, and party chair KP Sharma Oli (UML), backed by the UML, the NC, and other parties holding a majority in the House of Representatives, was appointed as Prime Minister.

Economically, Nepal's growth rate from 2023 to 2024 remained at 2%, and escaping from low growth has remained a challenge. In foreign affairs, Nepal traditionally adheres to non-alignment and neutrality, maintains strong economic and cultural ties with India, and also sustains good relations with China.

As for Nepal's relationship with Japan, the two countries have traditionally built friendly relations over many years through people-to-people exchanges such as mountaineering, and recently the number of Nepalese people studying Japanese has been increasing. As of 2024, over 200,000 Nepalese people reside in Japan and are active in various fields. In May, Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited Nepal for the first time in five years as Foreign Minister. 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 April, excavation was completed on the 2,688-meter Nagdhunga main Tunnel, the first mountain transportation tunnel in Nepal. Upon its opening in 2026, the tunnel is expected to streamline the region's transport network, accommodate rapidly growing traffic demand, shorten travel times, and enhance safety, thereby contributing to the social and economic development of the surrounding area.

(6) Bhutan

Bhutan is a landlocked country located between China and India. Guided by its Gross National Happiness (GNH)⁽²⁷⁾ framework, Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan (2024-2029) adopts a ten-year strategic roadmap aimed at transforming the economy into a high-income GNH model by 2034 and achieving a target GDP of 5 billion U.S. dollars by 2029. Under this plan, the Government of Bhutan is working to strengthen equitable, high-quality healthcare and education, safeguard sovereignty and territorial integrity, establish a trusted governance ecosystem, and accelerate economic growth. In domestic affairs, a general

election for the lower house of Parliament was held in January, 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 56 countries, including Japan, the EU, and neighboring countries, and has close ties with India in areas such as national defense. Relations with Japan are marked by a rich history of exchanges between the Japanese Imperial Family and the Bhutanese Royal Family.

(7) The Maldives

Situated in a strategically important location on sea lanes, the Maldives is an important partner to Japan in realizing FOIP. On the domestic front, following the presidential election held in September 2023, President Mohamed Muizzu's administration took office in November 2023. In the parliamentary election conducted in April, the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) secured two-thirds of the seats, thereby consolidating President Muizzu's governing mandate. Economically, 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. In foreign affairs, President Muizzu has pursued a policy of balanced diplomacy since taking office.

In terms of relations with Japan, 2023 saw reciprocal visits between the two countries' foreign ministers, and, at the Japan-Maldives Foreign Ministers' Meeting in July 2023, both sides concurred to advance bilateral cooperation across a wide range of fields. Given the Maldives' strategic location in the Indian Ocean, it provides a vital staging point for Japanese Self-Defense Force ships and aircraft operating overseas; in March, the destroyer JS *Akebono* made a port call in Malé. Additionally, in economic cooperation, in March Japan and the Maldives signed and exchanged notes for grant assistance aimed at strengthening maritime security, including the grant of one customs patrol craft.

⁽²⁷⁾ Gross National Happiness (GNH): A unique concept proposed by the Royal Government of Bhutan in contrast to Gross National Product (GNP). It reexamines an excessive focus on economic growth and development and emphasizes the importance of development that contributes to the happiness of the people, based on four pillars: (a) Economic growth and development, (b) Preservation of cultural heritage and promotion of traditional culture, (c) Conservation and sustainable use of a rich natural environment, (d) Good governance.

6 Oceania

(1) Australia

A Brief Summary and Overview

With the region facing a variety of issues, 10 years have passed since Japan and Australia confirmed their “Special Strategic Partnership,” built upon shared fundamental values and strategic interests, and cooperation between the two countries 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 multilayered cooperation and collaboration in all areas toward the stability and prosperity of the international community. Moreover, Japan-Australia collaboration has also been steadily reinforced in multilateral formats, including the Japan-U.S.-Australia and Japan-Australia-India-U.S. frameworks.

Additionally, Japan and Australia are further developing mutually complementary economic relations through the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), which marks the tenth anniversary of its effectuation, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) that entered into force in December 2018, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement that entered into force in January 2022. Australia is Japan’s third-largest trading partner, and Japan is Australia’s second-largest trading partner.

At the leaders’ level, in September Prime Minister Kishida held a Japan-Australia Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, where the two leaders had a candid exchange of views on bilateral cooperation, including security cooperation, as well as on regional and international affairs, and reaffirmed the broadly aligned strategic recognition between Japan and Australia. Prime Minister Kishida welcomed Australia’s participation in the Friends of Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, and the two leaders confirmed that they would continue to work closely together to realize a world without nuclear weapons. In a Japan-Australia Summit

Telephone Call in October, soon after Prime Minister Ishiba took office, the two leaders concurred that Japan and Australia would strengthen cooperation with like-minded countries such as the United States (U.S.), the ROK, and India, as well as multilateral cooperation such as Japan-Australia-India-U.S. and also shared the intention to work together on issues in the fields of resources and energy, as well as economic security. During the October Japan-Australia Summit Meeting, the two leaders had an exchange of views on the situation in East Asia, such as the response to North Korea, including the nuclear and missile issues and the abductions issue, and concurred to further strengthen consultations and cooperation between Japan and Australia in responding to such issues.

In February, Foreign Minister Kamikawa and Foreign Minister Penny Wong held a Japan-Australia Foreign Ministers’ Telephone Call where the two ministers concurred to continue to work together to further strengthen the relations with the Pacific Island countries. At their July Japan-Australia Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, Foreign Minister Kamikawa stated that she would like to further enhance cooperation under the “Special Strategic Partnership” between Japan and Australia toward the realization of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).” In September, the two foreign ministers convened a Japan-Australia Foreign Ministers’ Working Dinner, during which they had a candid exchange of views on regional and international affairs, including on strengthening ties with the Global South. In October, shortly after Foreign Minister Iwaya assumed his appointment, a Japan-Australia Foreign Ministers’ Telephone Meeting was held in which the two foreign ministers concurred to cooperate across a wide range of areas, including security, and to enhance the vibrant and multilayered people-to-people exchanges between Japan and Australia, which underpin the strong bilateral relationship, including in areas such as tourism, business, and overseas education programs.

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

Australia, as a partner working alongside Japan to realize FOIP, occupies an indispensable role in Japan's security, and bilateral defense cooperation has been elevated to a new dimension. Under the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement, which entered into force in 2023, force interoperability has been strengthened, and the two countries have reinforced their joint engagement in maintaining peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific.

In September, the Eleventh Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations ("2+2") were held, and Japan and Australia concurred on working unwaveringly to deepen Australia-Japan strategic and security cooperation in line with the Australia-Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (JDSC),⁽²⁸⁾ issued in 2022. Japan and Australia concurred on strengthening collective deterrence, enhancing interoperability and coordinating their national security policies more closely, including in cooperation with the U.S.. Security cooperation has also expanded into emerging domains, with both countries concurring on countering disinformation, collaboration in the field of strategic communication, and strengthening cooperation in the field of economic security, including through leveraging the Australia-Japan Economic Security Dialogue. In October at the Japan-Australia Summit Meeting, the two leaders affirmed that they would improve interoperability between Japan and Australia in the field of security and strengthen their collective deterrence, based on the direction set out in



Eleventh Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations ("2+2") (September 5, Melbourne outskirts, Australia)

the 2022 "Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation." They also concurred to strengthen dialogue and cooperation in the fields of cyber and economic security.

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, as well as in building a free and fair economic order based on the rule of law. At the Japan-Australia Summit Meeting in October, the two leaders affirmed that they would further strengthen cooperation in the field of the economy, including the CPTPP.

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 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in July, Foreign Minister Kamikawa expressed her willingness to cooperate with Australia in addressing common challenges, including economic growth, energy security, and decarbonization through the Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) platform.

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 state and 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 Japan-Australia Political Exchange Program. Both Japan and Australia will continue to work on the

⁽²⁸⁾ 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.

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 destroyer HMAS *Hobart* from early to mid-May and the destroyer HMAS *Sydney* from early to mid-September to undertake surveillance operations in the adjacent ocean areas around Japan. By doing so, for the 11th and 12th times since 2018, Australia has engaged in surveillance operations against illicit maritime activities, including ship-to-ship transfers⁽²⁹⁾ with North Korean flagged vessels, which are prohibited by UN Security Council resolutions. Furthermore, from early to mid-February and from early to mid-November, Australia engaged in surveillance operations for the 13th and 14th times since 2018 by aircraft, using U.S. Forces Japan's 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 on issues facing the region and the international community. Following the results of the general election that was held in 2023, 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 June, Prime Minister Kishida held his first Japan-New Zealand Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, who was visiting Japan for the first time since assuming his office, and the two leaders concurred to further strengthen bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas, including security and economics, to realize FOIP amid the increasingly challenging strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific region. They also welcomed the agreement in principle in the negotiations of a Japan-New Zealand Information Security Agreement to enhance information sharing between the two countries. Additionally, the two leaders exchanged their views on the situation in East Asia, including China and North Korea, as well as on the situation in Russia and Ukraine, and confirmed that they would work closely together to resolve these challenges. Furthermore, the two leaders also affirmed the importance of cooperation between the two countries in the Pacific Islands region and concurred to promote cooperation based on the needs of Pacific Island countries. In July, the Japan-Australia-New Zealand-ROK Leaders' Meeting (IP4) was held, and, under the recognition that the security of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific is inseparable, the four leaders affirmed that they would deepen communication and cooperation with European countries on issues in the Indo-Pacific region. In November, Foreign



Japan-New Zealand Summit Meeting (June 19, Tokyo; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

⁽²⁹⁾ 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.

Minister Iwaya held informal discussions with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Winston Peters of New Zealand, during which they shared the intention to reinforce their “Strategic Cooperation Partnership” and to deepen multilateral cooperation, including through the IP4 and the Five Eyes⁽³⁰⁾ countries.

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 June at the Japan-New Zealand Summit Meeting, the two leaders had a candid discussion on the CPTPP from a strategic perspective and concurred on the importance of working toward the development of the agreement, and shared the intention to strengthen cooperation in economic security, including addressing economic coercion and enhancing supply chain resilience.

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 2024. By 2024, more than 3,500 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, 44 sister-city relationships have been established between municipalities in the two countries.

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 and initiatives under the IP4 framework. In support of surveillance for illicit maritime activity, New Zealand deployed the Royal New Zealand Navy sustainment vessel HMNZS *Aotearoa* to the waters around Japan from mid-August to mid-September for its first naval surveillance operation targeting illicit maritime activities including prohibited ship-to-ship transfers involving North Korea-flagged vessels under UN Security Council resolutions. Furthermore, from mid-April to mid-May New Zealand engaged in surveillance operations for the sixth time since 2018 by aircraft, using Kadena Air Base.

(3) Pacific Island Countries⁽³¹⁾

A Brief Summary and Overview

The Pacific Island countries, surrounded by the vast and beautiful ocean, are rich in marine resources and nature. This region is divided into three subregions, Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia, each with its own distinct characteristics. Many of these relatively young nations gained independence from colonial or trusteeship status following World War II, chiefly since the 1970s. At the same time, they face severe geographic and economic challenges: “insularity,” with territory scattered across small islands; “smallness,” with limited populations that preclude economies of scale; and “remoteness,” lying far from major international markets. Among these vulnerabilities, climate change poses “the single greatest existential threat” to the Pacific Island countries. In response to these shared challenges, since 1971 the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF; formerly the South Pacific Forum until 1999) has been developed as a forum for dialogue between the leaders of the Pacific Island countries and regions to advance regional cooperation across political, economic, security, and other domains.

The Pacific Island countries and Japan, bound by the Pacific Ocean, have deep historical ties, and are

⁽³⁰⁾ Refers to the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

⁽³¹⁾ 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

important partners in such areas of cooperation in the international arena, 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. In addition to bilateral cooperation, Japan is also promoting cooperation with the PIF. At its Leaders Meeting in 2022, the PIF announced the “2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent” (2050 Strategy), which outlines the ideal political, economic, and other conditions and strategic measures for Pacific Island countries and regions in 2050. Japan has consistently expressed strong support for the 2050 Strategy.

As the geopolitical importance of the Pacific Island region increases, cooperation among related countries both within and outside of the region is being strengthened, most notably through the Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP) framework established in 2022. At the May 2023 Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders' Meeting, a “Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience” was announced. Then in April 2024, during the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting, new cooperation on subsea cable systems for Tuvalu and the Federated States of Micronesia was unveiled.

B Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM)

In addition to bilateral cooperation, one of Japan's principal diplomatic initiatives with Pacific Island countries is the Pacific Islands Leaders' Meeting (PALM). Since 1997, PALM has been held every three years to deepen ties with Pacific Island countries. In July 2024, Tokyo hosted the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders' Meeting (PALM10), where participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation with Pacific



Foreign Minister Kamikawa attending the 5th Ministerial Interim Meeting of the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) (February 12, Suva, Fiji)

Island countries and regions. (See the Opening Special Feature on page 4.)

Prior to PALM10, in February the 5th Ministerial Interim Meeting of the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting was held in Suva, Fiji, with Foreign Minister Kamikawa as co-chair. This was the first PALM Ministerial Interim Meeting held in a Pacific Island country. The meeting followed up on PALM9, which was held in 2021. PIF member countries and regions highly valued the progress where Japan steadily implemented its commitment in every priority area to promote cooperation with Pacific Island countries, and expressed their appreciation to the Government and people of Japan. A Chairs' Summary was adopted. Foreign Minister Kamikawa also took the opportunity to meet with participants from each country, working to strengthen bilateral relations.

At PALM10 in Tokyo in July, Prime Minister Kishida and Prime Minister Mark Brown of the Cook Islands served as co-chairs, expressing strong support for the 2050 Strategy and discussing regional and international developments. They reaffirmed the deep *kizuna* (bonds) built over time and confirmed a relationship in which they would “stride forward together” toward the future, addressing shared challenges alongside Pacific Island countries and regions. The leaders adopted the “10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM 10) Leaders' Declaration” and the “10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM 10) Joint Action Plan,” and Japan announced its “Pacific Climate Resilience Initiative.” Regarding the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea, Prime Minister Kishida explained that, in close coordination with the IAEA, Japan would continue to share information to build confidence, a commitment that was welcomed by Pacific Island partners. In addition, Prime Minister Kishida held 17 bilateral summit meetings with Pacific Island leaders during the summit.

C Country-Specific Developments

(A) Kiribati

In August, Kiribati held presidential and parliamentary elections. On October 25, President Taneti Maamau was re-elected, and his inauguration took place on November 1.

(B) Cook Islands

The Cook Islands served as Chair of the PIF from November 2023 to August 2024. Japan has endeavored to strengthen its relationship with the Cook Islands, including by inviting them to the 2023 Hiroshima G7 Summit Outreach Session. At PALM10 in July, Prime Minister Brown served as co-chair, and a Japan-Cook Islands Summit Meeting was held, where Prime Minister Kishida expressed his intention to cooperate in line with important issues for the Cook Islands, such as infrastructural resilience and climate change adaptation, while building on the achievements made so far.



Japan-Cook Islands Summit Meeting (July 17, Tokyo; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

(C) Samoa

In February, Foreign Minister Kamikawa became the first Japanese foreign minister to visit Samoa, where she paid courtesy calls on Head of State Tuimaleali'ifano Va'aletoa Sualauvi II and met with Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Samoa Summit Meeting was held, during which the two leaders discussed collaboration in the areas of climate change and disaster prevention, beginning with collaboration for the Pacific Climate Change Centre.

(D) Solomon Islands

In April, a general election was held following the expiration of Prime Minister Manasseh Damukana Sogavare's term, and Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele took office. In June, ISHIIHARA Hirotaka, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister, visited Solomon Islands as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, and met with Prime Minister Manele and others. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Solomon Islands Summit Meeting was held, and Prime Minister Kishida stated

that Japan would cooperate with Solomon Islands based on a relationship of trust.

(E) Tuvalu

In April, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura visited Tuvalu as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, and paid a courtesy call on and held talks with Prime Minister Feleti Penitala Teo and others. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Tuvalu Summit Meeting was held, and Prime Minister Kishida expressed his respect for Tuvalu's efforts to raise awareness of the climate change crisis and mobilize the international community. In December, a ceremony was held to commemorate the landing of Tuvalu's first sub-sea cable, a donor-funded project involving Japan, the U.S., Australia, and other like-minded partners.

(F) Tonga

In March, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Tupouto'a 'Ulukalala visited Japan to attend the 2nd Japan Pacific Islands Defense Dialogue, where he held informal discussions with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Tsuge. In May, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Tsuge visited Tonga as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan and met with the Crown Prince. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Tonga Summit Meeting took place, during which Prime Minister Kishida welcomed progress on Tonga's recovery from the 2022 volcanic eruption and advancements in defense cooperation. In August, as Chair of the PIF, Tonga hosted the Forum Leaders Meeting in Nuku'alofa. Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura attended as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, highlighting PALM10's achievements and reaffirming Japan's commitment to listen to and address the needs of Pacific Island countries.

(G) Nauru

In May, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister Ishihara visited Nauru as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, where he paid a courtesy call on President David Adeang and held meetings. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Nauru Summit Meeting was held, during which Prime Minister Kishida conveyed the decision to provide a patrol vessel to improve Nauru's capacity of controlling illegal fishing.

(H) Niue

In October, Niue marked the 50th anniversary of its constitution and achievement of self-governance. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Niue Summit Meeting took place, where Prime Minister Kishida affirmed Japan's strong support for Niue as it addresses multiple challenges. Niue's first honorary consulate in Japan was opened in Tokyo in the same month.

(I) Vanuatu

In June, Member of the House of Councillors MATSUYAMA Masaji visited Vanuatu as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, where he paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Charlot Salwai Tabimasmas and held meetings. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Vanuatu Summit Meeting took place, during which Prime Minister Kishida expressed Japan's intent to contribute promoting fishing industry as well as addressing priority issues in Vanuatu.

(J) Papua New Guinea

Between April and May, landslides occurred in the Province of Enga, and Prime Minister Kishida and Foreign Minister Kamikawa expressed their condolences. Through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan provided emergency relief supplies and decided to extend grant aid via UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration. In May, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister Ishihara visited Papua New Guinea as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, where he paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister James Marape and held meetings. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Papua New Guinea Summit Meeting was held, at which Prime Minister Kishida expressed Japan's intention to strengthen bilateral relations ahead of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties in 2025.

(K) Palau

In 2024, marking the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Palau, bilateral ties were further strengthened through a variety of exchanges. In 2024, Japan-Palau Summit Meetings were held on three occasions: in June when President Surangel S. Whipps, Jr. visited Japan, in July when President Whipps came to Japan to attend

PALM10, and in September during the UN General Assembly, for a total of five summit meetings with Prime Minister Kishida during the first four years of President Whipps' term. In January, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held her first Japan-Palau Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Minister of State Gustav Aitaro during his visit to Japan, where both ministers confirmed that they would cooperate for regional peace and stability on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Palau (See the Column on page 87.), and in February they also met again for another Japan-Palau Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Fiji. In May, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura visited Palau as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, where he paid a courtesy call on President Whipps and held meetings. In October, TAKATA Toshihisa, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan and formerly Japan's Ambassador for Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting, represented Japan at the 30th anniversary of Palau's independence ceremony. In November, presidential elections were held, and President Whipps was re-elected to a second term.

(L) Fiji

In February, the 5th Ministerial Interim Meeting of the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) was held in Fiji, where Foreign Minister Kamikawa visited and served as co-chair. In April, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura visited Fiji as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Fiji Summit Meeting took place. Prime Minister Kishida emphasized the importance of cooperation with Fiji, a key player in the region, and discussed support for building disaster prevention systems, sports exchanges such as in rugby, and expressed his deep appreciation for Fiji's confidence in the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea.

(M) Marshall Islands

In January, following the results of the general election held at the end of 2023, President Hilda Heine was elected by the Nitijela (legislature) and inaugurated. Member of the House of Representatives TANAKA Kazunori visited the Marshall Islands as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan to attend the inauguration ceremony. In February, Foreign Minister

COLUMN

The 30th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Palau

2024 marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Palau. Since Palau gained independence from the United States in October 1994 and formal diplomatic relations with Japan were established in November of the same year, the two countries' *"kizuna"* (bonds) and *"tokubetsu"* (special) relationship have grown ever stronger.

The historical relationship between Japan and Palau dates back to before the two countries established diplomatic relations. After World War I, Japan administered Micronesia (the South Sea Islands), including Palau, under a mandate for about 30 years. In 1922, the South Seas Agency was established in Koror, marking the start of full-scale governance. At its peak, it is said that more than 25,000 Japanese people lived in Palau. Due to this historical relationship, about 25% of Palau's population is of Japanese descendants, including Palau's first President Nakamura. Thanks to the prominent performance of Japanese descendants in Palau, the people of Palau have a great affinity for Japan, and in terms of language, many Japanese terms, such as *"tokubetsu"* and *"daijoubu"* (all right / okay / fine) have been adopted into the local language. The deep historical and cultural ties between the two countries support the current good relationship.

Japan is also an essential donor country for Palau, and has cooperated for many years to promote Palau's economic development, mainly in the areas of the environment and climate change. The Japan-Palau Friendship Bridge, which opened in 2002 and connects Koror Island and Babeldaob Island, is a symbol of the friendly relationship between the two countries.



Japan-Palau Summit Meeting (September 23, New York, U.S.; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

The year 2024 marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Palau, and there were numerous opportunities for high-level visits between the two countries. Prime Minister Kishida and President Surangel S. Whippis held three summit meetings: during President Whippis' visit to Japan in June, during the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10) in July, and during the 79th United Nations General Assembly in September, and at these meetings the two leaders had candid exchanges grounded in their personal relationship of trust. TAKATA Toshihisa, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan (former advisor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and formerly Japan's Ambassador for PALM), attended the opening ceremony

celebrating the 30th anniversary of Palau's independence on October 1, paid a courtesy call on President Whippis, and delivered a congratulatory speech on the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Palau.

People-to-people exchanges between the two countries are taking place at the grassroots level, and visits by local governments and student exchanges are also actively being conducted. It is expected that people-to-people exchanges between the two countries will further expand through measures such as the planned chartered flights operating from March 2025 that were announced at the Japan-Palau Summit Meeting in July.

The relationship between Japan and Palau has been strengthened by these historical and cultural ties, as well as people-to-people exchanges at various levels. 2024 was a year to reaffirm the *"kizuna"* and *"tokubetsu"* relationship between the two countries, with the aim of further developing the relationship in the future.



The Logo for the "30th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Palau"

Kamikawa had a Japan-Marshall Islands Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Foreign Minister Kalani Kaneko in Fiji; in March, Prime Minister Kishida held a Japan-Marshall Islands Summit Meeting with President Heine during her visit to Japan. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Marshall Islands Summit Meeting was held, where Prime Minister Kishida conveyed the decision to conduct the detailed design for the reconstruction of the passenger terminal of the Amata Kabua International Airport and expressed the hope that these efforts will contribute to the Marshall Islands' sustainable development.

(N) Federated States of Micronesia

In February, Foreign Minister Kamikawa held a Japan-Federated States of Micronesia Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Foreign Minister Lorin S. Robert in Fiji. In May, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Komura visited the Federated States of Micronesia as a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, where he paid a courtesy call on President Wesley W. Simina and held meetings. At PALM10 in July, a Japan-Federate States of Micronesia Summit Meeting was held, during which Prime Minister Kishida announced Japan's decision to assist in strengthening connectivity by constructing a new wharf at Pohnpei Port.

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, while maintaining the Japan-U.S. Alliance as the cornerstone of its foreign policy, Japan strategically advances initiatives toward realizing a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" through various regional cooperative frameworks such as Japan-ASEAN, Japan-Mekong cooperation, ASEAN Plus Three (Japan, China and the ROK), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and through cooperation with like-minded countries such as Australia, India, ASEAN Member States, and Europe.

In particular, Japan has consistently supported the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP),"⁽³²⁾ which ASEAN formulated in 2019. AOIP shares fundamental principles with FOIP, including openness, transparency, inclusivity, and respect for international law, and Japan has been assisting its mainstreaming. Japan intends to continue respecting ASEAN centrality and unity and contribute to the stability and prosperity of the entire Indo-Pacific region by implementing

concrete cooperation that contributes to the principles espoused by FOIP and AOIP.

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

Located at a geopolitical strategic point in the center of the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN is key to the realization of FOIP. While Southeast Asia has been an important production base for Japanese companies, particularly in the manufacturing industry, and recently, has been attracting attention as a vibrant growth center for the global economy and as a growing consumer market. ASEAN also plays an important role in regional cooperation, and, through multilayered frameworks such as ASEAN+3 (Japan, China, and the ROK), EAS, and ARF, cooperation is progressing in a wide range of fields, including politics, security, economy, and society and culture.

In 2015, the establishment of the ASEAN Community was declared, and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 was adopted, outlining the direction of the ASEAN Community for the 10 years from 2016. In 2019, the AOIP, which is a guideline for ASEAN's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, was adopted.

⁽³²⁾ AOIP: ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific

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.

On the economic front, ASEAN established the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and has concluded EPAs and FTAs with countries such as Japan, China, the ROK, and India. Moreover, an ASEAN centered free trade area is expanding, with ASEAN member states signing the RCEP Agreement with Japan, China, the ROK, Australia and New Zealand.

(2) Issue of the South China Sea

In the South China Sea, amidst disputes over territorial sovereignty, China has been continuing and intensifying its unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and its actions that increase regional tensions, such as further militarization of disputed features (See Chapter 3, Section 1, 3 (4) d) and coercive and threatening actions against coastal countries and other countries, which is against the rule of law and openness. Moreover, China has been refusing to accept the Arbitral Tribunal's award⁽³³⁾ 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 2024, the Government of the Philippines issued multiple statements condemning the actions of Chinese vessels against Philippine-flagged ships as in 2023, following the collisions between Chinese and Filipino vessels and other incidents. The Government of Viet Nam also released a statement condemning the actions of Chinese vessels against crewmembers of a Vietnamese fishing boat were injured in the Paracel Islands.

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 imports most of its resources and energy through marine transport. The international community, including Japan, have expressed serious concern against China's unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and other actions that increase regional tensions.

Japan strongly opposes unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and any actions that increase

tensions, and, 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) on page 253.), Japan has also consistently emphasized the importance of all the concerned parties related to the South China Sea to work toward peaceful resolution of disputes based on international law, in particular UNCLOS. Moreover, Japan has also repeatedly pointed out that China's assertions in the South China Sea are not based on relevant provisions of UNCLOS; that it is important to protect the freedom of navigation and overflight in all maritime and airspace in the South China Sea; that the Arbitral Tribunal's award, which determined that China's claim of "historical rights" based on the "nine-dash line," which has no clear basis in international law, violates UNCLOS, is final and legally binding on the parties to the dispute; and that it expects that the parties comply with the award and resolve the dispute peacefully. Since 2021, which marked the fifth anniversary of the Arbitral Tribunal's award as to the disputes between the Philippines and China, Japan has been issuing statements by the Foreign Minister every year, and has been repeatedly expressing Japan's position, including the importance of the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law and the importance of the rule of law.

Cooperation among allies and like-minded countries is also important to maintain and strengthen a free and open international order based on the rule of law. In April, Prime Minister Kishida attended the Japan-U.S.-Philippines Summit in the U.S., held for the first time, with U.S. President Biden and Philippine President Marcos. The three leaders concurred on further strengthening cooperation among Japan, the U.S. and the Philippines, and to advance embodying the cooperation among the three countries, with the severe strategic environment, including the situation in the South China Sea in mind. Following the announcement of the establishment at the Japan-U.S.-Philippines Summit, the Japan-U.S.-Philippines Maritime Dialogue was held in December, where the

⁽³³⁾ 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."

participants exchanged views on the situation in the South China Sea, and reaffirmed their opposition to unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force.

Furthermore, with regard to the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC), which has been under discussion for many years between China and ASEAN, Japan has stated its position that it should be effective, substantive, consistent with international laws including UNCLOS, and respect the legitimate rights and interests of all stakeholders who use 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 based on "ASEAN Community Vision 2025" for further integration even after the 2015 establishment of the ASEAN Community.

Currently, cooperation is progressing in a wide range of areas under the three pillars based on the "Joint Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation" and its concrete "Implementation Plan," which were adopted at the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation held in December 2023: (a) connecting to the next generation and strengthening the long-standing relationship of trust as "Heart-to-Heart Partners across Generations," (b) finding solutions to common challenges as "Partners for Co-Creation of Economy and Society of the Future," and (c) promoting FOIP as "Partners for Peace and Stability."

Moreover, regarding AOIP, Japan has been building up concrete cooperation in line with four priority areas of cooperation of AOIP, namely maritime cooperation, connectivity, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economy, based on the "Joint Statement of the 23rd ASEAN-Japan Summit on Cooperation on ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" adopted in 2020.

At the ASEAN-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting in July, Foreign Minister Kamikawa pointed out that broad cooperation is steadily progressing in line with the three pillars of the Joint Vision Statement announced at the Commemorative Summit, referring

to the (a) dispatch of "NIHONGO Partners" under the "Partnership to Co-create a Future with the Next Generation: WA Project 2.0," (b) support for enhancing ASEAN connectivity under the "Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative," and (c) security cooperation and maritime cooperation. The Foreign Ministers of ASEAN Member States expressed high appreciation for the Commemorative Summit and welcomed the steady progress of concrete cooperation in line with the Implementation Plan of the Joint Vision Statement. Moreover, Foreign Minister Kamikawa explained Japan's position regarding regional and international situations, that any unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force is unacceptable anywhere in the world from the perspective of emphasizing the importance of the international order based on the rule of law, and that Japan will continue to support ASEAN's centrality and unity.

At the ASEAN Japan Summit in October, Prime Minister Ishiba expressed his strong determination to further strengthen the relationship as "Trusted Partners" with "heart to heart" connections, which Japan and ASEAN have built over half a century. He also explained that cooperation on the three pillars is progressing steadily, and stated that Japan will promote cooperation to address emerging issues such as Green Transformation (GX) and Digital Transformation (DX) in order to jointly shape a vibrant future of the region. ASEAN countries expressed high expectations for deepening cooperation with Japan, including in new areas such as DX and GX. Regarding regional and international situations, Prime Minister Ishiba stated that Japan will work with ASEAN to maintain and strengthen a free and open international order based on the rule of law, and explained Japan's position on the East China Sea, South China Sea, Taiwan, North Korea, the situation in Myanmar, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the situation in the Middle East. ASEAN countries mentioned that unilateral actions in the East and South China Seas are undermining the stability in the region, and mentioned the importance of peaceful settlements of disputes based on UNCLOS. The ASEAN countries also mentioned the importance of implementation of UN Security Council resolutions by North Korea, the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and the resolution of humanitarian issues

including the abductions issue. They also expressed appreciation for Japan's support for the "Five Point Consensus" on Myanmar and mentioned the importance of a peaceful resolution to the situation in the Middle East.

(4) Japan-Mekong Cooperation

The Mekong region (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam) is Japan's strategic partner with promising future 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.

In July, the first Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting in three years was held in Laos, and the Japan-Mekong Cooperation Strategy 2024 was adopted, which is based on three pillars: (a) Resilient and connected society in the post-COVID-19 world, (b) Digitalization, and (c) Proactive response to non-traditional security issues. Foreign Minister Kamikawa, who served as co-chair of the meeting, stated that Japan will continue to work on enhancing connectivity in various fields, both hard and soft, and will cooperate in various fields with the promising Mekong countries as "Partners for Co-creation of Economy and Society of the Future." Going forward, Japan will continue to contribute to the prosperity and development of the region through the implementation of Japan-Mekong cooperation projects based on the strategy.

(5) ASEAN Plus Three

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)."



Prime Minister Ishiba attending the 27th ASEAN Plus Three (Japan-China-ROK) Summit (October 10, Vientiane, Laos; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

At the ASEAN Plus Three Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in July, Foreign Minister Kamikawa stressed the importance of maintaining and reinforcing the free and open international order based on the rule of law in order for the region to remain the center of stable economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region and the world. Moreover, Minister Kamikawa welcomed the agreement on the establishment of a "Rapid Financing Facility" to further strengthen the functions of the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation (CMIM)⁽³⁴⁾ as a concrete example of cooperation within ASEAN+3, regarding economic and financial cooperation. On cooperation toward a sustainable society, Minister Kamikawa spoke on Japan's continued support through the ASEAN+3 Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) and full support for the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED). On cooperation regarding peace and security, Minister Kamikawa showed her willingness to press forward with cooperation on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), underlining the importance of women's participation and leadership in disaster response, disaster prevention and mitigation. With regard to regional and international situations, Minister Kamikawa explained Japan's position on North Korea, including its nuclear and missile issues and the abductions issue, as well as the situation in Myanmar.

At the ASEAN Plus Three Summit in October, Prime Minister Ishiba pointed out that the total GDP of Japan, China, the ROK and ASEAN accounts for

⁽³⁴⁾ The Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation (CMIM) is a framework agreed upon at the 2nd ASEAN+3 Finance Ministers' Meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in May 2000, in response to the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis with the aim of preventing a recurrence of currency crises within East Asia. To forestall regional financial contagion and escalation, the CMIM enables member countries facing difficulties in meeting foreign-currency payments to obtain short-term U.S. dollar liquidity through currency swaps in exchange for local currency.

more than 25% of the world's total GDP, indicating that there is great potential for ASEAN+3 cooperation; stated that Japan has led the establishment of the rapid Financing Facility under the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization that had been concurred on; noted that Japan has been playing a leading role in the ASEAN+3 Emergency Rice Reserve; remarked that Japan will dispatch Japanese experts to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management; and stated Japan's commitment to further promote ASEAN+3 cooperation and to work together with the ASEAN+3 countries to shape and safeguard the future. Furthermore, with regard to the regional and international issues, Prime Minister Ishiba emphasized that maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order based on the rule of law is essential for the stability and prosperity of the region, and explained Japan's position on North Korea, including the nuclear and missile issues as well as the abductions issue.

(6) East Asia Summit (EAS)

EAS was established in 2005 with the aim of implementing strategic dialogue and cooperation on common concern to the region, regarding political, security, and economic issues. As the Leaders-led premier forum in the region, EAS is expected to 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 Kamikawa stated that it is important to comply with basic principles of the UN Charter such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to strive for the world where a free and open international order based on the rule of law is maintained and strengthened, and human dignity is protected. Minister Kamikawa also emphasized that any unilateral attempts to change the status quo cannot be tolerated, whether in the seas surrounding Japan, such as the East China Sea, or anywhere else in the world, that fundamental human rights, freedoms and democracy in the region must be protected and promoted, and that economic coercion must be opposed. Moreover, Minister Kamikawa explained Japan's positions on the situation in the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, North Korea including the nuclear and missile issues



Foreign Minister Kamikawa attending the 14th East Asia Summit (EAS) Foreign Ministers' Meeting (July 27, Vientiane, Laos)

and the abductions issue, Myanmar, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East, and ALPS treated water.

At the 19th East Asia Summit held in October, Prime Minister Ishiba pointed out the principles of the UN Charter, such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes based on international law, and prohibition of the use of force, are becoming increasingly important in today's turbulent international situation. Prime Minister Ishiba stated that any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion anywhere in the world must not be tolerated, that it is essential to maintain and strengthen a free and open international order based on the rule of law, and that Japan supports ASEAN centrality and unity, advocates AOIP, and will continue to actively support promotion and mainstreaming of the initiative. Regarding the regional and international situation, Prime Minister Ishiba expressed serious concerns about the advancement of North Korea's nuclear and missile activities as well as military cooperation with Russia, and pointed out that peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula are in the common interest of all and that a robust response of the international community toward the complete denuclearization of North Korea is critical. Prime Minister Ishiba called for the continued understanding and cooperation from EAS participating countries toward the immediate resolution of the abductions issue. Moreover, Prime Minister Ishiba stated that Japan strongly opposes continuing and intensifying activities that infringe upon Japan's sovereignty in the East China Sea, expressed serious concerns about militarization and coercive activities

that are continuing and intensifying in the South China Sea, and stated that any claims of maritime interests and activities must be based on the relevant provisions of UNCLOS. Prime Minister Ishiba also stated the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. Regarding the relationship between Japan and China, Prime Minister Ishiba stated that both countries bear great responsibilities for the peace and prosperity of the international community, including the Southeast Asian region, and that Japan will continue to maintain close communication with China at all levels. While expressing serious concerns regarding the situation in Myanmar and calling for improvement of the situation, Prime Minister Ishiba stated that Japan will continue to offer maximum support to ASEAN's efforts including the implementation of the "Five-Point Consensus" and provide humanitarian assistance. Regarding Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Prime Minister Ishiba pointed out that it is a blatant breach of international law, and emphasized that it is necessary to realize a just and lasting peace as soon as possible. As for the situation in the Middle East, Prime Minister Ishiba called on all parties concerned to exercise the utmost restraint, and stated that Japan would like to work together to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza as an urgent issue.

(7) Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Cooperation

Japan, China and the ROK share geographical proximity and deep historical ties, play a major role in the global economy, and are a driving force of the prosperity of the East Asian region. There is great potential for the three countries, which share a significant responsibility for peace and prosperity of the region, to promote exchanges and mutual understanding and cooperate to address various challenges in the international community.

On May 27, the Japan-China-ROK Summit was held in Seoul, ROK, for the first time in about four and a half years. At this summit, the three leaders commemorated the 25th anniversary of the trilateral cooperation, welcomed the trilateral process being revitalized, and concurred on promoting future-oriented practical cooperation.

The three leaders also exchanged views on regional and international situations, including the situation in



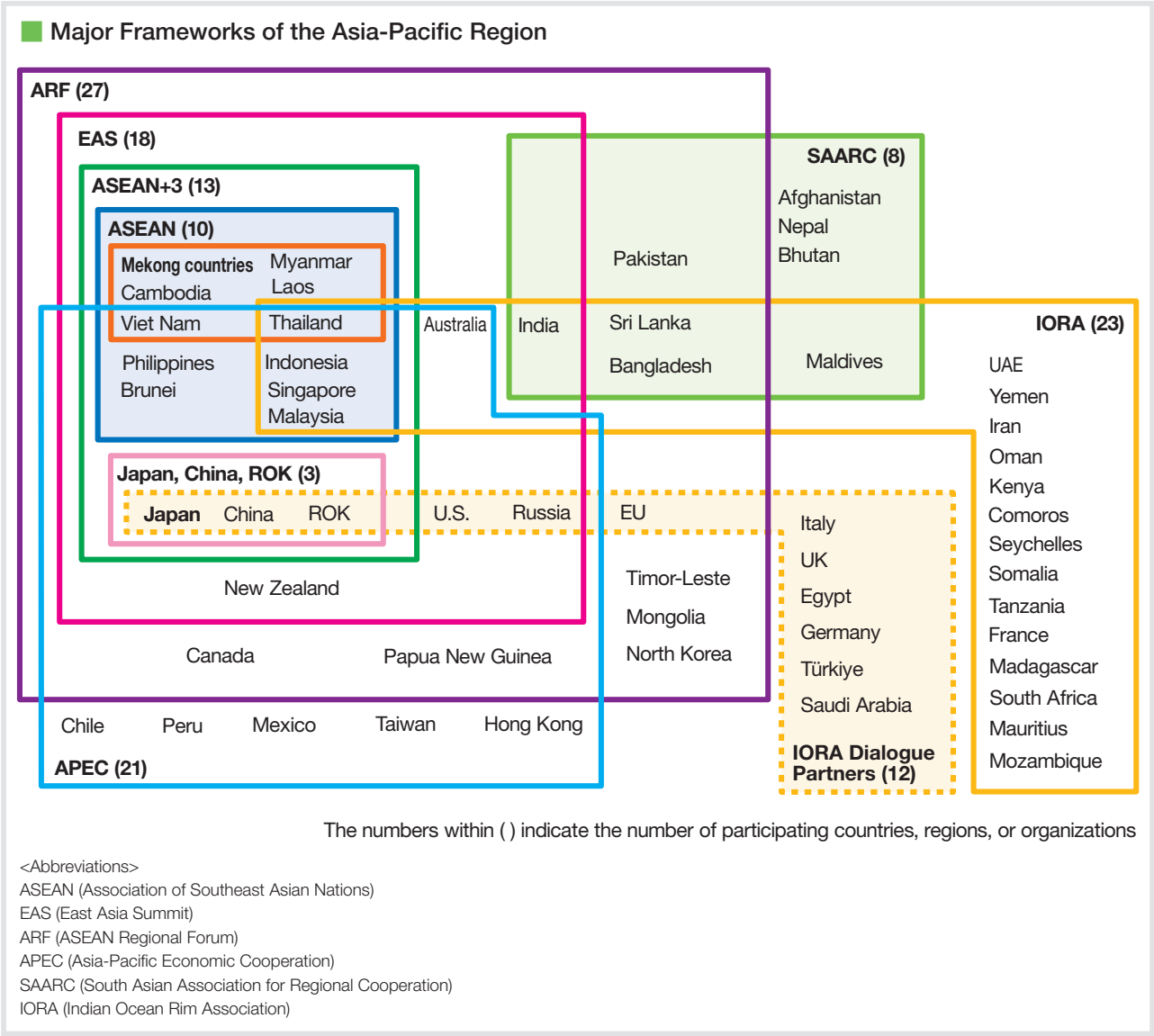
Prime Minister Kishida attending the Ninth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit (May 27, Seoul, ROK; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

North Korea, Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East. Regarding the situation in North Korea, Prime Minister Kishida expressed serious concerns over North Korea's nuclear and missile activities and development of military cooperation between Russia and North Korea, and reconfirmed that the denuclearization of North Korea and stability on the Korean Peninsula are the common interest of the three countries. He also stated that the three countries should urge North Korea to completely dismantle its nuclear and ballistic missile programs in accordance with relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. Moreover, Prime Minister Kishida asked for continued support of the leaders of the ROK and China for the immediate resolution of the abductions issue, and gained their understanding.

(8) Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (See Chapter 3, Section 3, 3 (3) on page 300)

Consisting of 21 economies (countries and regions) in the Asia-Pacific region, APEC is an economic cooperation framework in achieving sustainable growth and prosperity in the region. Promoting economic cooperation and strengthening trust in the Asia-Pacific region, which is positioned as the "world's growth center," is extremely important for Japan's further economic development.

At the APEC Leaders' Meeting held in Lima, Peru in November, the "2024 APEC Leaders' Machu Picchu Declaration" was adopted, and a Chair's Statement on the situation in Ukraine and the Middle East was released. Prime Minister Ishiba, who attended the



meeting, stressed the importance of maintaining and strengthening a free and open trade and investment environment, as well as the multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core.

(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 2024, 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 8,921 people as of the end of 2024.

(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.