



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

JAPAN

Digest

June 2024

- Defence Minister Kihara at Shangri-la Dialogue 2024
- Imperial couple's state visit to Britain
- Japan's fertility rate drops to new low



Defence Minister Kihara at Shangri-la Dialogue 2024

Japan's Minister of Defence Minoru Kihara visited Singapore in the first week of June to attend the annual Asia Security Summit (also known as the Shangri-la Dialogue) there. On the sidelines of the summit, Kihara met with his American, Chinese and South Korean counterparts, starting with China's newly-appointed Defence Minister, Dong Jun, on 1 June. At the meeting, Kihara [expressed](#) his country's 'serious concern' about China's maritime activity in the East China Sea, and raised the repeated violation of Japan's maritime and airspace by Chinese and Russian vessels. On the South China Sea, Kihara conveyed Japan's stance on the issue and called for China and the Philippines to engage in 'frank discussions' on issues of dispute. The two ministers also agreed to continue to maintain their exclusive hotline set up in 2023 and to continue dialogue on defence matters.

Kihara subsequently [met](#) his counterpart from South Korea on the same day, and the two sides discussed ways to enhance mutual understanding so as to prevent the reoccurrence of a 2018 incident at sea where a Korean destroyer reportedly locked its fire-control radar on a Japanese aircraft. The two sides also resolved to continue military-to-military exchanges and agreed to improve early-warning capabilities against North Korea's repeated ballistic missile launches.

On 2 June, Kihara met his US counterpart Lloyd Austin and discussed the Japanese Self-Defence Forces' recent efforts to better coordinate joint command and control structures. After this the defence chiefs of the US, Japan and South Korea [held](#) a trilateral discussion where they agreed to formalise a trilateral security cooperation framework by the end of the year. The proposed framework will encompass policy discussions between high-level officials, information exchange and joint exercises.

Imperial couple's state visit to Britain

Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako of Japan [visited](#) the United Kingdom on an eight-day state visit between 22 June and 30 June, their second international visit after their trip to Indonesia in 2023. The imperial couple, both of whom have had deep personal connections to the UK in the past, spent their tour attending formal dinners and banquets hosted by the British royal family, met with dignitaries and Japanese citizens resident in the UK and visited prominent landmarks associated with their youth.

Prior to their departure, the Emperor in a press conference [stated](#) that he intended the visit to be a "reflect[ion] on the history of exchanges between our country and Britain" and expressed a desire to reconnect with his youth by revisiting Oxford University, where he studied for two years between 1983 and 1985. The Empress, also an alumna of Oxford

between 1988 and 1990, did not issue a separate statement.

After their arrival, the Emperor [visited](#) the Japan House in London, [the](#) Thames Barrier (a floodgate designed to prevent the Thames from breaching its banks) and [met](#) a series of prominent Japanese and non-Japanese citizens including noted Japan scholar Professor Arthur Stockwin. On 26 June, the Empress joined the Emperor at Buckingham Palace for the official banquet hosted by King Charles III and Queen Camilla, where he [delivered](#) a speech in English to the assembled audience of 170 people. Outlining that ‘mutual understanding of the importance of international rules and global institutions forged from the lessons of history’ lay at the core of their ties, the Emperor expressed the hope that Japan and the UK would continue to build a relationship based on ‘friendship, goodwill and cooperation’ as ‘friends like no other’.

After the completion of their state visit, the Imperial couple [made](#) their way to Oxford, where they visited Merton College (the Emperor’s alma mater) and Balliol College (the Empress’ alma mater). Prior to their departure, the Imperial couple [thanked](#) their hosts for the warm reception and hoped that the visit would ‘further deepen cooperation and friendship between Japan and Britain’.

Japan’s fertility rate drops to new low

Statistics [released](#) by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare on 5 June

showed Japan’s total fertility rate (TFR) declining to a new all-time low of 1.2 births per woman. This year’s decline marks the eighth such year of decrease, with the 2022 TFR standing at 1.26 births per woman. In absolute terms, the number of babies born in the country declined by 43,482 to a record 727,277, the lowest so far. The natural population decline, which subtracts the number of deaths from the number of births in a year, stood at negative 848,659.

Complicating the situation are other key statistics released by the ministry which indicate that population decline is likely to be persistent. Tokyo, hitherto the only region in the country with a positive growth rate of population, has now fallen below 1 birth per woman, with the latest TFR recorded as 0.99. Another set of key metrics is women’s average age at marriage and at childbirth, which according to the current statistics stand at 29.7 and 31.0 respectively. The third key metric indicating the continuation of population decline is the number of marriages, which fell by 30,213 to 474,717 registered unions, while the number of divorces grew slightly by 4,709 to 183,308. At present, the three prefectures with the highest TFR are the southern prefectures of Okinawa (1.60), Miyazaki and Nagasaki (1.49 each), while the northern prefectures of Tokyo (0.99), Hokkaido (1.06) and Miyagi (1.07) represent the lowest TFR.