



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

JAPAN

Digest

October 2023

- Japan-ASEAN ties
- Japan's outreach to Global South
- Landmark decision to dissolve Unification Church



Japan-ASEAN ties

On 5 October 2023, Japan and the representatives of eight of the ten members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) [met](#) in Tokyo to discuss the bolstering of private sector collaboration in the field of cybersecurity. Organised by the Japanese National Centre of Incident Readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity, the event brought together representatives from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam, excluding only Laos and Myanmar. The two day conference included expert panel discussions as well as private sector publicity booths. Minister for Digital Transformation Taro Kono stated his aim of creating a “free, fair and secure” cyberspace domain which would contribute to international peace and security as a joint project of Japan and ASEAN.

Newly-appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs Yoko Kamikawa [departed](#) for a weeklong trip to four key ASEAN countries from 8 October, covering Brunei, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. She kicked off her round of bilateral meetings with Brunei, where she met on 9 October with her counterpart Erywan Yusof, and confirmed the progress of their relationship in a host of sectors, especially liquefied natural gas and other resources. Next, she visited Vietnam on 9 October, where she and her Vietnamese counterpart Bui Thanh Son affirmed their partnership for realising a free and open Indo-Pacific and agreed to take the bilateral relationship to new highs. In Bangkok, Kamikawa [interacted](#) with her Thai counterpart, Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara, on 13 October, and agreed to deepen economic collaboration. In particular, the two sides agreed to promote Japanese investment in Thailand jointly, in

line with a five-year plan previously drawn up in 2022. Kamikawa also affirmed Japan’s cooperation in helping Thailand address the challenges produced by the Israel-Hamas conflict, and condoled the death of several Thai nationals in the attacks launched by Hamas on Israeli territory. In exchange, Bahiddha-Nukara expressed his intention to accompany Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin on a visit to Japan in 2024.

After the completion of Kamikawa’s visit, Japanese government sources [informed](#) the Yomiuri Shimbun on 16 October that Vietnam plans to upgrade its ties with Japan to that of a Comprehensive Security Partnership, which will be finalised when Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong visits Japan “as early as next month” (i.e. November). If agreement is achieved, Japan will become the sixth country to receive the highest symbolic partnership status, joining recent inductee the United States of America alongside Russia, China, India and South Korea. The agreement would be particularly significant as Hanoi and Tokyo mark 50 years of diplomatic ties this year, and enjoy strong economic ties. The Yomiuri reported that Japan intends to utilise the upgrade to draw closer to Hanoi on the economic and security realms in order to secure its assistance in developing the free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) further, as well as to strengthen security cooperation through the Official Security Assistance, of which Vietnam is one of the inaugural recipients.

Japan’s outreach to Global South

Japan made a strong push for collaboration between industrialised economies and the Global South at a G-7 meeting organised in Osaka on 28-29 October. Co-chairs Yasutoshi Nishimura, who heads the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry

(METI), and Yoko Kamikawa, [disclosed](#) during the G-7 Trade and Foreign Ministers' Meeting that the grouping had decided to work with countries of the Global South on the creation of resilient supply chains for critical materials necessary for technologies such as semiconductors. The grouping also [discussed](#) formulating a common response to "economic coercion", which several of its members indirectly accused China of engaging in, particularly in light of its recent decision to impose export controls on graphite and the unilateral actions it has taken against Japan over the latter's decision to release treated wastewater from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. The group also took issue with the non-functioning of the World Trade Organisation's dispute settlement body, which has been in limbo due to vacancies. India, as current chair of the G-20, was invited to attend the outreach sessions alongside key countries such as Chile, Australia, Indonesia and Kenya.

On 30 October, the Yomiuri Shimbun reported that the Japanese government is [undertaking](#) policy discussions to include within the FY2023-24 supplementary budget an item that would grant subsidies and other protections to companies wishing to expand operations in select countries within the Global South. Under this scheme, the government is expected to provide subsidies equivalent to half the project cost, totalling several billion yen, to companies that would like to shift or expand their activities to India, Southeast Asia and Africa. The amount of subsidies offered is expected to be affected by the size of the company (with medium and small-scale companies given preference) and the nature of the company's business (with advanced sectors such as artificial intelligence, healthcare, telecommunications, finance and financial technologies, as well as

carbon fibre and other advanced materials given priority). The total amount allocated to this scheme in the supplementary budget request is 140 billion yen, according to the Yomiuri report.

Landmark decision to dissolve Unification Church

On 12 October 2023, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Technology (MEXT) [filed](#) a case in the Tokyo Supreme Court praying for the dissolution of the religious corporation status of the Federation for World Peace and the Family, also known as the Unification Church, bringing to an end a chapter in the Japanese government's long struggle to come to terms with the controversial religious organisation and its influence on Japanese society. The petition came at the tail end of a two-year-long effort that commenced on 8 July 2022, when former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated by a man who believed that Abe had close ties to the cult-like organisation. Following the outcry that ensued, and after revelations emerged of the close links between the organisation and senior government officials and politicians, the Fumio Kishida administration decided to commence the process of stripping the organisation of its religious status, which entitles it to claim tax exemption for donations received from its followers. However, three concerns remain: that the organisation could repatriate its funds to its headquarters in South Korea before Japanese authorities can seize them; that the organisation's loss of religious corporation status would not prevent it from continuing to operate in Japan as a general status corporation; and that Japanese politicians' ties to the Church have not been adequately investigated. The Church, in a press conference held after the decision by MEXT, expressed its intention to fight the case in court.