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JAPAN

Digest

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Japan marks WW2 related anniversaries

Japan marked a series of anniversaries related to events during the Second World War in August, starting with the 79th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 2024. At the official proceedings held at the famous Hiroshima Peace Park, Mayor Kazumi Matsui and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida [read out](#) their respective messages. In the annual Hiroshima Peace Declaration read out by Mayor Matsui, the city of Hiroshima criticised the return of the ‘public assumption that, to solve international problems, we have to rely on military force, which we should be rejecting’. Matsui called on world leaders to recommit to dialogue as a means of solving world crises, and called on civil society to ‘foster a circle of trust’ so this dialogue can be conducted. Prime Minister Kishida for his part cautioned the world that the momentum towards achieving a nuclear-weapons-free world was on the verge of reversal for the first time since the peak of the Cold War, and promised to work towards total nuclear disarmament. The events were attended by 50,000 people involving diplomatic representatives from 109 nations, but was shadowed by diplomatic controversies surrounding the presence of the Israeli ambassador at the proceedings even as Russia and Belarus were not extended official invitations for three years running. The Palestinian embassy in Tokyo criticised the city’s decision as displaying a lack of equivalency, as did the ambassadors of Russia and Belarus.

The 79th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki three days later on 9 August 2024 was also mired in controversy, this

time from the Western side. At the official memorial ceremony [held](#) at the Nagasaki Peace Park, Mayor Shiro Suzuki read out the official Nagasaki Peace Declaration, where he articulated growing concerns about the rising nuclear stockpiles of countries like China and expressed fears that conflicts such as the ongoing Ukraine conflict and Israel’s war in Gaza could lead to nuclear options being explored seriously. He deplored ‘the increased likelihood of the disappearance of the important norm [of non-proliferation] that we have conformed to thus far’. He also asked leaders of nuclear weapons states as well as those under the nuclear umbrella to make ‘a brave shift’ towards nuclear disarmament and demanded that the Government of Japan sign immediately the Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) which entered into force in 2022. Prime Minister Kishida on the other hand called on world leaders to continue to ‘let Nagasaki be the last’ city to be attacked with nuclear weapons. The events saw a mass boycott by leaders of several leading Western nations such as the United States of America, Britain and the European Union over the city’s decision to not invite the Israeli ambassador to the official proceedings attended by 100 countries and regions as an attempt to create a false equivalency between Gaza and Ukraine.

Finally, on 15 August, the country [marked](#) the 78th anniversary of the surrender of its wartime government that heralded the end of the Second World War. In the presence of the Imperial couple and Prime Minister Kishida along with his Cabinet, 1,900 invitees, including bereaved family members, marked a moment of silent mourning for the 2.3 million armed

personnel and 800,000 civilians who perished in the war. The scale of the event was reduced due to the approach of a typhoon over central and western Japan. In his remarks at the event, Kishida continued the precedent initiated by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to refrain from direct reference to Japan's actions during the war or issue a new apology for them, but Emperor Naruhito during his remarks expressed 'deep remorse' for Japan's aggression during that conflict, followed by a prayer that another world war would never be fought.

Kishida announces he will step down as PM

At a surprise press conference held in Tokyo on 14 August, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida [announced](#) that he would not be seeking re-election as leader of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in September, essentially declaring his resignation as prime minister after a new party head is appointed. The new head of the LDP, who will become the next prime minister, is sure to call national elections perhaps as early as the end of this year.

The announcement sent ripples throughout the political world, especially as Prime Minister Kishida refused to elaborate on his reasons for the sudden announcement. In pre-prepared remarks read out during the press conference, Kishida limited himself to noting that the LDP, hit by high-profile campaign finance scandals and internal revolts from several key lawmakers, needed to change and requested that his decision to step down be understood as the first step toward change. Kishida used the rest of his statement reminding the audience of his

achievements, including his review of defence policy and handling of the economy.

The LDP's popularity remained low after Kishida's announcement, however, even as contenders from within the party emerged to seek a chance to lead the country. Several leading politicians, such as Minister for Chief Cabinet Secretary (essentially Deputy Prime Minister) Yoshimasa Hayashi, Foreign Affairs Yoko Kamikawa, Economic Security Minister Sanae Takaichi and Digital Transformation Minister Taro Kono have all either explicitly or implicitly announced their intention to run, as have outsiders such as Shinjiro Koizumi (son of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi). This ensures that the leadership election, scheduled for 27 September, will be hotly contested.

Japan elected head of the ISA

At a General Meeting held in Jamaica between 28 July and 2 August, Japan was unanimously [elected](#) the chair of the International Seabed Authority (ISA), a body set up as part of the enforcement structure of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1994. This marks the second time in the body's history that Japan has been elected to its highest office, the first being 1996. Japan's term is to commence in 2025 and last till 2028.

In a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the country promised to continue valuing the rule of law on the high seas and expressed its intention to protect and enhance the international maritime order based on UNCLOS through its chairship of the ISA.