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JAPAN

Digest

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Japan's response to ROK coup attempt

On the night of 3-4 December, Republic of Korea President Yoon Suk-Yeol, citing unfounded claims of 'Communist penetration', declared martial law and attempted to use elements of the military to forcefully prevent legislators from entering the National Assembly to vote on the abrogation of the same. The effort failed, and the Assembly voted unanimously to abrogate the martial law declaration before impeaching President Yoon. Prime Minister Han Duk-soo took over as interim President, but was in turn impeached after only a few days in office, leaving the administration in the hands of Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok.

Japan [reacted](#) to the events in Seoul by issuing a press release on the night of 4 December stating that it would continue to monitor developments closely. Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba was stated to be observing events with 'particular and grave concern'. The chaos also led to the postponements of high-level visits by Defence Minister Gen Nakatani as well as a parliamentary friendship group headed by former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. Later in the day, Ishiba, when asked about the response to the events in his daily press conference, restricted himself to stating that he was 'monitoring (developments) closely' and that the Japanese government would exert itself to the utmost to ensure the safety of Japanese citizens in Seoul. Senior government officials quoted by Kyodo News expressed hope that the 'political situation will remain stable', but revealed concern that the fallout may degrade bilateral ties.

On 12 December, the Japan-Korea Parliamentarians' Union, the parliamentary group scheduled to visit the ROK, [held](#) a meeting in the Diet Building, where they reaffirmed friendly relations with the ROK despite the upheaval. Suga, who chaired the meeting, characterised the situation in Seoul

as 'fluid', but noted that 'the role of parliamentary diplomacy is becoming more important' in the situation. He also underlined that the ROK remains an 'important partner' for Japan.

On the same day, Foreign Affairs Minister Takeshi Iwaya [held](#) a telephonic conversation with ROK Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul. The two sides confirmed the importance of maintaining bilateral ties, as well as preserving multilateral ties with the United States of America. Cho was reported as having explained the current situation to Iwaya, and having conveyed a firm resolution to maintain ties with Japan no matter the circumstances. Cho also told Iwaya that Seoul would continue preparations to celebrate 60 years of normalisation of ties in 2025.

On 19 December, Prime Minister Ishiba [spoke](#) via telephone to acting President Han Duk-soo. The two sides also agreed to maintain close communication with each other, and reaffirmed the importance of maintaining trilateral frameworks with the US. Han was reported to have told Ishiba that despite the interim nature of his appointment, the 'tone' of bilateral ties remained 'unchanged'. However, Han's subsequent impeachment has muddied the waters further.

Japan Cabinet approves record-breaking defence budget

The Japanese Cabinet in a decision on 27 December [approved](#) a record defence budget of 8.7 trillion yen (55 billion US dollars) with the aim of enhancing Japan's counterstrike capabilities across a range of domains. This marks the third such increase in outlay since 2022, when Japan revised its key security documents to adopt a more active stance vis-à-vis threats posed by China, Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The defence outlay was itself part of a record-breaking 115-trillion-yen general budget approved by the Cabinet for fiscal 2024-25.

The new defence budget envisages greater funding (940 billion yen) for the purchase of the US-made Tomahawk missile defence platform, which is expected to be deployed to Okinawa and beyond in late 2025. The funding item includes expenses for associated satellite targeting systems as well as the missiles themselves in the ground version, with an added 1.8 billion yen tacked on for mounting ship-based versions of Tomahawks on Aegis-class destroyers operated by the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF). Another key line item in the budget is the 533 billion yen allocated to boosting detection and interception capabilities in the southwestern sector (which includes Okinawa and the Senkaku Islands), notably through the purchase of a mobile reconnaissance radar as well as interceptor platforms.

On the maritime side, the budget allocates 314.8 billion yen to the construction of three new 4,800-ton multipurpose compact destroyers (FFMs) that will be upgraded from existing *Mogami*-class hulls. The new destroyers, once completed, are touted as having half the crew of a traditional destroyer and equipped with long-range sensors, reinforced anti-submarine warfare functionalities and high stealth performance. The three new hulls will be designed and built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which is currently listed as a bidder for Australia's ambitious fleet modernisation programme (the Sea 3000 frigate project).

On the aerial domain, the budget allocates 108.7 billion yen to invest in the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) project co-developed in partnership with the United Kingdom and Italy. The GCAP project, which was operationalised in early 2024, will develop a sixth-generation stealth fighter jet that is expected to be delivered in 2035. A sum of 111 billion yen was also allocated in the budget for the development

and deployment of unmanned weapons platforms and artificial intelligence-based systems in the battlefield.

Japan, India trade condolences over prominent deaths

On 26 December, Dr. Manmohan Singh, India's former Prime Minister, passed away in Delhi. Among the international tributes pouring in from around the world in the wake of his passing, several official tributes were paid to him from Japan as well. On 27 December, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and Foreign Affairs Minister Takeshi Iwaya [sent](#) separate letters of condolence to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, respectively. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated in its press release that both Japanese leaders had expressed their 'sincere condolences' to the people of India, and paid tribute to 'Dr. Singh for his endeavours which built the foundation for the development of Japan-India relations of today'. On 31 December, former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga [visited](#) the Indian Embassy in Tokyo and signed the condolence book opened in memory of Prime Minister Singh, followed by Fukushima Nukaga, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Japan, on 1 January 2025.

On 25 December, Osamu Suzuki, long-time Chairman of automotive giant Suzuki Motor Corporation, also passed away at the age of 94. Upon receiving the news, both Prime Minister Modi and External Affairs Minister Dr. Jaishankar took to X (formerly Twitter) to condole the loss. Prime Minister Modi [called](#) Suzuki a 'legendary figure in the automotive industry' and recalled his 'profound affection for India', which he stated 'revolutionised the Indian automobile market'. Dr. Jaishankar in his post [credited](#) Suzuki not only for his contributions to revolutionising the auto-market in India but also for 'transform[ing] India-Japan relations'.