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PM Takaichi wins landslide victory in Lower House elections

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, who was elevated to the office last October after intra-party elections, [received](#) a thumping vote of confidence on 8 February after the Japanese electorate awarded her a supermajority that even her political mentor, Shinzo Abe, had been unable to achieve in the House of Representatives. The snap general election was held after Takaichi decided to dissolve the House and seek a popular mandate, as is traditional among Japanese prime ministers selected by internal party politics.

From the outset, Takaichi and her cabinet had enjoyed strong popular support. Opinion polls conducted at varying scales across the country had expressed views of her as a strong, decisive leader who could cut through the ‘slow politics’ of the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The three months she spent as the 104th Prime Minister of Japan played a part, as her continued refusal to withdraw statements made in the Diet regarding Japan’s position on a Taiwan Strait contingency despite China’s aggressive international campaign to pressure her was viewed as ‘standing up to China’. Her promises to turn on the tap of government spending to boost the economy also won approbation, as the Bank of Japan’s decision to continually raise interest rates was perceived as a reason for inflation in key commodity prices. As such, it was understood that the Prime Minister would seek the earliest opportunity to seek the imprimatur of voters.

Despite an unprecedentedly short election campaign time, Takaichi’s campaign met with great success at the polls. Notwithstanding controversial decisions to field party members accused of involvement in major scandals, the LDP [rode](#) a wave of support to achieve on its own steam a total of 312 seats in the 465-member House of Representatives, well past the majority of

233 seats required. The LDP’s new coalition ally, the Japan Innovation Party (JIP, *Nippon Ishin no Kai*), also made good, securing 36 seats in the House. Meanwhile, the LDP’s former electoral ally, the *Soka Gakkai*-affiliated *Komeito*, which fought the elections in an alliance with the largest Opposition party, the Yoshihiko Noda-led Constitutional Democratic Party, suffered historic defeats. The two parties combined only garnered 49 seats, a steep fall from the 172 they had once held.

The elections threw up some evidence of a definitive conservative turn among Japanese voters. Progressive forces such as the Japanese Communist Party, Social Democratic Party and *Reiwa Shinsengumi* shrunk to irrelevance, with the JCP earning a mere 4 seats. Team Mirai, a new party founded by a tech entrepreneur (and current Upper House legislator) with a policy plank encouraging the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in politics, saw significant gains, earning 11 seats in total. More worryingly, the insurgent far-right Sanseito party won 15 seats in the elections, indicating a growing popularity among certain sections of voters of its populist message. At the same time, pockets of more centrist, mainstream support were also revealed by the handy victories won by Takaichi’s predecessor Shigeru Ishiba, his Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya and Defence Minister Gen Nakatani, as well as the sound defeat inflicted on Mio Sugita, a controversial LDP politician who had been found guilty of violating human rights laws by legal authorities in both Osaka and Sapporo after repeated discriminatory remarks against Japan’s ethnic and sexual minorities.

After the election results were announced, Prime Minister Takaichi praised her cabinet members to state broadcaster NHK and announced her intention to continue with the same team. She also laid stress on her

government's priority to cut the consumption tax. LDP chief strategist Takayuki Kobayashi told NHK that the "voters welcomed...Takaichi's agenda to build a strong economy through strategic investments under responsible, proactive fiscal policy." On 18 February, a special session of the Diet [confirmed](#) Takaichi's reappointment as the 105th Prime Minister of Japan.

Japan's chief tariff negotiator visits US

Japan's Minister for Economy, Trade and Industry Ryosei Akazawa [visited](#) the United States of America on 11 February for discussions with his American counterpart Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick on operationalising Japan's pledge to invest a total of \$550 billion US dollars in projects in the US. Akazawa represented Japan in its tariff negotiations with the United States under Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's predecessor, Shigeru Ishiba, last year, traveling to Washington a total of 10 times through September 2025, when the final trade agreement was signed between the two countries.

During an interview at Haneda airport before his trip, Akazawa [told](#) reporters that though talks on investment plans 'will not be straightforward', any agreement reached would be announced 'as soon as possible'. This was likely a reference to the clause contained in the memorandum of understanding signed between Japan and the US which stipulates that President Donald Trump would ultimately only select projects recommended by an investment committee chaired by the Commerce Secretary and composed solely of US officials.

Within days of the conclusion of his visit, Trump and Takaichi separately [announced](#) the first tranche of investments that Japan is slated to make in the US. Totalling \$36 billion US dollars, the projects include a facility that is expected to produce synthetic

diamonds for use in the semiconductor, automotive and aviation industries and two energy projects. The first of the latter is a natural gas plant in Ohio, which will provide 9.2 gigawatts of power for 'artificial intelligence datacentres', while the second is a deepwater crude oil export facility in Texas on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico that, according to the American side, is likely to generate '\$20 billion to \$30 billion in US crude oil exports annually'. Japan's commitment includes a mix of investments, loans and loan guarantees from Japanese financial institutions.

Ruling party panel proposes policy to overturn arms transfer rules

On 19 February, the Liberal Democratic Party's Research Committee on Security (*Anzen hoshō chōsa-kai*) in a closed door meeting [agreed](#) to generate policy measures that would withdraw the current Implementation Guidelines for the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology (2014) restricting the sale of defence equipment to five items, namely, rescue, transportation, vigilance, surveillance or minesweeping.

Under the proposed policy, Japan would now be able to export lethal weapons systems. In order to be able to do so, it would do away with the five-type classification and instead establish a new system in its place that would classify defence equipment as either a 'weapon system' (*buki*) or a 'non-weapon system' (*hibuki*). The transfer of weapons systems such as missiles and fighter aircraft would require the partner country to have already signed and ratified a bilateral agreement on defence equipment and technology cooperation, while countries classified as 'engaged in hostilities' would not be eligible 'in principle' (though national security exemptions would apply, as in the case of US forces in Japan). The new policy could be tabled in the Diet as soon as spring 2026.