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Digest

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Japan PM, Emperor deliver New Year messages

On 1 January, both Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and Emperor Naruhito delivered their annual New Year's Day remarks from their respective residences. Prime Minister Ishiba, who heads a minority government, [sought](#) to outline his administration's key policy priorities while underlining his intention of cooperating with opposition parties to enact legislation. He noted that national security would have top priority under his leadership, as the international situation remains "severe and complex". Particular concerns in this domain included Russia's continuing invasion of Ukraine and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) repeated missile launches. Next, he highlighted the urgency of halting – and if possible reversing – demographic decline in Japan, terming it a 'silent emergency' which his government would attempt to tackle through policy measures to revitalise regions and distribute populations over-concentrated in the Tokyo metropolitan area. He also promised that he would positively consider wage hikes and increases in investment in order to bring about economic growth. Finally, with regard to domestic politics, he promised to 'carefully listen to the views of other parties and build consensus as much as possible'.

On the same day, Emperor Naruhito of Japan [delivered](#) his remarks on the central theme of unity, expressing an expectation that the people of Japan would come together to overcome challenges posed by natural disasters. The Emperor, accompanied by Empress Masako and Princess Aiko, voiced concern over the loss of life during natural disasters in Japan and abroad, and prayed that humanity would

'move forward with hope'. He also remarked on the upcoming 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, praising the 'tireless efforts of those who have built the peace and prosperity we enjoy' in Japan. He ended by condoling the loss of lives to war and conflict throughout the world, stressing instead the need for diplomatic engagement as the only means to manage differences.

PM Ishiba visits Indonesia, Malaysia

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba of Japan [embarked](#) on his first major foreign trip after his appointment to the position when he visited Indonesia and Malaysia between 9 and 12 January 2025. At the outset, Ishiba proclaimed his intention to 'take time to discuss the future of [the Southeast Asian] region, security issues and how the realisation of a free and open Indo-Pacific will contribute to the peace and security of the international community' to reporters at Haneda airport.

In Kuala Lumpur on 10 January Ishiba [met](#) his Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim for a bilateral summit, where the two leaders proclaimed their mutual desire to bolster their comprehensive strategic partnership. Both leaders affirmed their desire to collaborate to bring peace and security to Southeast Asia as well as West Asia, with Japan confirming the expansion of security cooperation in fields like cybersecurity. The two sides also agreed to communicate with each other regarding issues relating to the East and South China Seas, Myanmar and West Asia, as well as to bolster supply chains relating to the flow of critical fuels such as crude oil and liquefied natural gas. Calling Malaysia a 'bridge' to West Asia, Ishiba conveyed his desire to work closely with Kuala Lumpur to resolve the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and beyond.

Ishiba spent the next two days in Jakarta, where he and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto [held](#) a bilateral summit. Both countries confirmed bilateral cooperation in the domains of energy security, human resource development and disaster prevention. In the security domain, the two leaders agreed to continue the third round of 2+2 talks between their foreign and defence ministers, while Japan announced that it would provide two patrol boats to Indonesia under the Official Security Assistance (OSA) program to bolster maritime security. At a joint press conference held after talks, Prime Minister Ishiba informed the audience that the Indonesian leader had been invited to visit Tokyo, which the latter had graciously accepted. President Prabowo in turn hailed Ishiba's visit as marking Japan's 'strong commitment' to strengthening ties with Southeast Asian states. He also informed the press that discussions between the two leaders had covered a variety of issues including energy, health and infrastructure.

Japanese lawmakers visit Beijing

On 13 January 2025, a group of Japanese lawmakers under the leadership of secretaries-general of its two ruling parties [departed](#) for Beijing to resume an inter-parliamentary dialogue held in abeyance since 2018. The three-day trip saw the delegation led by Hiroshi Moriyama of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Makoto Nishida of the Komeito (its coalition partner) meet a host of leading lights of the Communist Party of China (CPC), including Li Shulei, head of the CPC's Publicity Department; Liu Jianchao, head of its International Department; Wang Huning, chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

(CPPCC) and no.4 in the CPC hierarchy; Foreign Minister Wang Yi; and finally, Premier Li Qiang.

During the talks, Li was reported to have told the Japanese parliamentarians that Sino-Japanese relations are currently at a 'crucial timing', and placed the onus of improvement of ties between the two countries on the Japanese side, stating that the ruling combine in Tokyo needed to 'exert leadership' in order to achieve sound and stable ties. Moriyama for his part called for regular dialogue and improvement of the atmosphere to allow frank discussions. At the party-level dialogue, the Japanese brought up irritants relating to bilateral ties, such as the seafood ban imposed on Japanese exports and the safety of Japanese citizens after a rash of stabbing attacks. At the same time, they apparently stressed the need to work together to build mutual trust.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi in his meeting with the lawmakers on 14 January [conveyed](#) his eagerness to visit Japan in March, which is expected to see the resumption of bilateral economic dialogue after a six-year hiatus, with the added possibility of discussions being undertaken on the feasibility of expanding the dialogue to involve South Korea.

On 15 January, Moriyama stated that during talks with Premier Li at the Great Hall of the People, he had handed the latter a personal missive from Prime Minister Ishiba to be conveyed to President Xi Jinping. Li was reported to have told the visitors that China would welcome Ishiba to Beijing 'at an appropriate time', while expressing willingness to travel to Japan for the next iteration of the Japan-China-South Korea trilateral leaders' summit (Japan holds the rotating chairship for 2025).