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JAPAN

Digest

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- PM Kishida visits France, Brazil and Paraguay
- Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit
- Japan passes economic security clearance law



PM Kishida visits France, Brazil and Paraguay

Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida embarked on a six-day visit to France, Brazil and Paraguay on 1 May. On the first leg of his trip, Kishida [met](#) French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal and [attended](#) a working lunch with President Emmanuel Macron, where the two sides [concurred](#) on improving bilateral security cooperation and announced the start of negotiations for a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA). Both sides also welcomed progress in ties and agreed to strengthen their cooperative effort to work towards a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Kishida also [attended](#) the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting in Paris on 2 May, where he [pledged](#) to take the lead in formulating global regulations governing the use of AI, while also calling for a rules-based international trading system that welcomed inclusivity and prioritised the voices of developing nations. He lent support to the expansion of the OECD grouping to include countries from the Global South which have emerged in recent years.

In Brazil, Kishida [attended](#) a summit meeting with his Brazilian counterpart President Luiz Inacio da Silva Lula on 3 May, before [meeting](#) Vice-President Geraldo Alckmin, [attending](#) the Japan-Brazil Business Forum and [interacting](#) with Brazilians of Japanese descent on 4 May. At the summit, both sides [agreed](#) to work together to combat deforestation in the Amazon rainforest and its impact on climate change and signed a comprehensive cooperation agreement on decarbonisation

and other environmental issues. Kishida also promised to work with Brazil in ensuring that the G20, whose presidency Brazil now holds, remains strong. The two sides discussed close cooperation in defence and cybersecurity, shared concerns about the global situation and underscored the importance of people-to-people ties.

On the sidelines of his Brazil visit, Kishida also [met](#) with Paraguay's President Santiago Pena in Asuncion on 3 May, where the two sides agreed that forceful alteration of the status quo was unacceptable. Kishida called Paraguay an important partner sharing fundamental concepts such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law with Japan, while President Pena called for deeper ties with Japan.

Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit

On 27 May, the premiers of Japan and China visited Seoul to [attend](#) the ninth iteration of the Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit. The day-long summit was preceded by Prime Minister Kishida meeting his Korean and Chinese counterparts in bilateral summit meetings. In his [meeting](#) with Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, Kishida [promised](#) to make further efforts to improve ties between the two neighbours as the 60th anniversary of normalisation of ties approaches. The two leaders also agreed to collaborate on addressing North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, reaffirmed the importance of improving ties with the US and agreed to expand people-to-people ties as well as clean energy promotion.

During his [meeting](#) with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, Kishida reportedly [conveyed](#) his 'serious concern' over China's increasing

militarisation of the South China Sea and Taiwan, while also pressing for a rescinding of the ban on Japanese seafood imposed by China after Japan decided to release treated wastewater from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in 2023. In ‘meaningful discussion’ on a host of issues, the two sides also shared their respective positions on Taiwan and exchanged views on how to manage North Korea’s threat.

At the summit, however, the three sides remained at odds over the framing of key language on several issues, with the joint statement [issued](#) at the conclusion of the summit refraining from openly citing North Korea as a security threat or Taiwan as a flashpoint, agreeing merely to boilerplate language about supporting the United Nations and safeguarding peace and prosperity in the region and in the world. However, the statement did call for all states to obey international law and the rule of law in a veiled reference to Russia, and the three nations agreed to accelerate negotiations toward a three-way free trade agreement which has been in abeyance since 2020. The three leaders also agreed to work together on strengthening supply chains.

Japan passes economic security clearance law

On 10 May, the upper house of the Japanese Diet [enacted](#) into law a new piece of legislation setting in place a ‘security clearance’ system to vet individuals before they access confidential government information in areas critical to national security. The new law, approved by the Diet’s lower house, the House of Representatives, in April, was passed in the

House of Councillors in a rare moment of bipartisan unity, as several opposition parties joined the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner Komeito in voting for the bill’s passage into law.

The new law will stipulate that the government can designate any information that if publicly disseminated could threaten national security as classified, and individuals who are expected to have access to such information will now be required to be vetted and granted a security clearance. The law does not specify a list of items to be classified, but it is expected that items such as cutting-edge technologies, infrastructure, defence, diplomacy, espionage and counterterrorism will be included. The law sets a time limit of five years as the shortest period for which information can be considered classified, with the maximum being 30 years. Penalties for leaking or disseminating classified material include five years in prison or up to 5 million yen in fines or both.

Supporters of the new law within the government, including Economic Security Minister Sanae Takaichi, have expressed the view that the law is essential to allow Japan to work on sensitive technologies with close partners and allies internationally, whether through the private or the public sector. To assuage criticisms, in the Diet deliberations before the vote, Takaichi assured lawmakers that the scope of classification would not be expanded ‘immoderately’, while Prime Minister Kishida stressed that the government would need to ensure that data from background checks is used only for clearance purposes.