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JAPAN

Digest

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Cyberattacks roil Japan's information security

A wave of cyberattacks roiled Japanese companies and government bodies over the month of October, with industry experts estimating that the country had already been attacked over 500 times by the beginning of the month, surpassing in ten months the number of attacks observed over the past two years. The attacks, which were primarily classified as cases of 'illegal access' (hacks, in other words), resulted in the leakage of data and information concerning over 260 million users and customers both within and outside Japan, as reported by Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara during a press conference on 30 October.

The attack wave first came into the public eye after a trio of victims, the mobile network operator KDDI, food manufacturer Nichirei and public power utility Chubu Electric Power Company, came forward with information in August and September. Subsequent revelations of mass data leakage from the servers of public transportation operator Tokyo Metro, car parking operator Times Car and logistics company Sagawa Kyubin caused further alarm, as did attacks on financial sector giants such as insurance provider Daiichi Life, newspaper Nikkei Shimbun and securities trading firm Daiwa Securities. Later in the month, IT giant GMO Group led a further wave of disclosures that included such familiar names as watchmaker Citizen Group, chemicals maker Asahi Kasei and carmaker Suzuki Motor Corporation. Transportation companies, such as Japan Airlines as well as Japan Railways' Kyushu, Tokai and East Japan branches, continued to be hit, as did the national postal service under Japan Post.

The most damaging news, however, came in the second half of the month, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that it had been the victim of a hack which had caused leakage of email correspondence from a public-facing server.

In all cases, user data and information had been deliberately targeted, with AI tools being used in the majority of attacks. Subsequent media reports pointed to the involvement of foreign actors, with Chinese, Russian or North Korean involvement speculated upon. Taking cognisance of the seriousness of the issue, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's administration announced that it would release a 'package of counter-measures' by the first week of November. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry announced on 22 October that it would set up a team of 'white hat' hackers to counter the attacks, in line with the country's new active cyber defence policy.

Japan-Bangladesh Summit Meeting

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi held a bilateral summit meeting with her Bangladeshi counterpart Tarique Rahman on 27 November, during the latter's visit to Tokyo. Congratulating Prime Minister Rahman's 'inauguration as a friend who shares the values of democracy', Takaichi expressed support for Bangladesh's 'capability to have freedom to decide for itself' as per the updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept adopted by her administration. Rahman praised Japan's 'special place in the heart of' Bangladeshis.

In the substantive portion of their discussions, both sides agreed to revive the stalled 'Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B)' initiative as an upgraded strategic cooperation project entitled 'BIG-

B for Shared Prosperity'. The revival of the project could potentially reopen the door to the speedy development of the Matarbari port, which is expected to be developed with the help of yen loans issued by Tokyo. Further, Takaichi promised private investment from Japanese businesses of 'up to one trillion yen [roughly 6 billion US dollars] over the next five years', a figure that represents a massive quantum jump from the 2021-22 investment figure of 122 million US dollars. For reference, India and Japan have agreed to commit over 10 trillion yen (approximately 63 billion US dollars) in private investment over the next ten years, a figure ten times that of the projected Bangladeshi outlay.

In the security domain, Japan committed to providing a patrol vessel to Dhaka (in addition to five vessels already transferred to the Bangladeshi Navy in July 2026) under the terms of the Official Security Assistance programme, while reaffirming that defence and security cooperation would continue. The Japanese Foreign Ministry announced on 26 October that it had inked a 2.12 billion yen (approximately 13 million US dollars) note on grant aid with the Bangladeshi government for the provision of patrol vessels. Both sides called on their governments to ensure the early adoption of the Japan-Bangladesh Economic Partnership Agreement.

Former PM Fukuda passes away

Yasuo Fukuda, Prime Minister of Japan for a year (2007-8) in the immediate aftermath of the resignation of Shinzo Abe, passed away in Tokyo of heart failure on 26 October. He was 90 years old. Son of another former premier (Takeo Fukuda, in office 1976-78), Fukuda had initially opted for a corporate career, before joining politics as his father's executive secretary during Fukuda senior's term in office. However, he was only elected to the House of Representatives, Japan's Lower House, in 1990, at the age of 53. In addition to his legislative experience, Fukuda served as Chief Cabinet Secretary to Prime Ministers Yoshiro Mori and Junichiro Koizumi at the turn of the twenty-first century, before eventually being elevated to the premiership after Abe resigned due to complications arising from ill health.

During his time in office, worsening relations with China occupied much of Fukuda's attention, as Beijing, angered over Koizumi's repeated visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, ramped up hostility towards Japan through coordinated anti-Japanese public demonstrations in Chinese cities. In September 2007, Fukuda's visit to China, along with his invitation to Chinese President Hu Jintao to visit Japan, broke the ice substantially. However, trouble within his party and the Diet led to his resignation in 2008, with the Liberal Democratic Party losing power for the second time in postwar Japanese history shortly afterwards.

Upon receiving news of Fukuda's death, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi reportedly expressed 'deep sorrow', praising his efforts to 'articulate Japan's position on various international issues and enhance its standing in the international community'. Meanwhile, China's President Xi Jinping sent a condolence message to Fukuda's family, hailing him as an 'old friend of the Chinese people' whose 'hard work and efforts' to stabilise Japan-China relations ought to be respected and upheld by the current generation of leaders, a veiled swipe at Prime Minister Takaichi's more aggressive position on cross-Strait issues.