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Digest

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- Prime Minister Kishida's trips to ASEAN, G-20, UNGA
- Japan's cabinet reshuffle



PM Kishida's trips to ASEAN, G-20, UNGA

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida had an eventful set of diplomatic engagements in September, beginning with his visit to Jakarta, Indonesia, to attend the annual ASEAN-Japan summit and the East Asia Summit held there. Marking the fiftieth year of resumption of ties between the Southeast Asian grouping and Japan, Kishida [delivered](#) an ambitious new cooperation programme on 6 September that would see Japan expand its areas of cooperation with ASEAN under a new Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative, which would include under its rubric maritime security cooperation, supply chain resilience, transportation infrastructure, digital and cyber technologies, power supply and human resource development. Under the maritime security heading, Japan has committed to providing patrol vessels and training under its new Official Security Assistance program to regional maritime security agencies, focusing on the agencies of Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

Subsequently, Kishida attended the G-20 leaders' summit held in New Delhi between 8-10 September, and held bilateral interactions with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In [remarks](#) made after the summit, Kishida praised India as an “indispensable” partner in the Indo-Pacific region, and expressed his keenness to expand defence ties with New Delhi. He also reiterated his opposition to “unilateral changes to the status quo in the East and

South China Seas”, and promoted the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept propounded by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and expanded upon by him during his visit to New Delhi in March. Kishida also defended the New Delhi Declaration joint statement that emerged from the summit as a “meaningful achievement”, but also warned of possible erosion of the foundations of the G-20 given geopolitical rivalries. Kishida also participated in the meeting which announced the formation of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMECC), and declared his support to the new infrastructure initiative.

On 19 September, Kishida [addressed](#) the United Nations General Assembly, where he announced that Japan would contribute 3 billion Japanese yen (20 million US dollars) to the cause of nuclear disarmament, which he described as his “life’s work”. He held a multifaceted approach to be essential to solving the crisis of nuclear arms, and announced that the funds provided by his country would be distributed to global research organisations in order to create a network for global denuclearisation. Kishida also used the platform to reiterate his commitment to UN reform, and stressed the need to create a world of collaboration in place of conflict. He reiterated his willingness to hold talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un without preconditions, and conveyed his willingness to normalise relations with the reclusive country on the basis of the 2002 joint declaration between former Prime Minister Jun’ichiro Koizumi and Kim Jong-un’s father and predecessor, Kim Jong-il. On social issues, Kishida expressed his desire to centre “human-

centred cooperation” as the key plank of his domestic and international efforts, especially in the fields of income disparity and women’s economic empowerment.

Japan’s cabinet expansion

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on 13 September [announced](#) the reorganisation of his cabinet, in a move any pundits framed as an attempt to shore up his sagging popularity score. Out of 19 ministers, 11 were overhauled, with new faces in charge of key posts such as foreign affairs, defence and justice. Key rivals within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, such as economy and trade minister Yasutoshi Nishimura and digital policy minister Taro Kono were retained, as were key members of Kishida’s own faction within the party. Minoru Kishara, a member of the faction of the party led by former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has been appointed as defence minister.

A key selling-point touted by Kishida in announcing the reorganisation was the introduction of five female lawmakers into senior positions within the cabinet and party structures; the senior-most of these is undoubtedly veteran lawmaker Yoko Kamikawa, who has served as Minister of Justice under the Abe administration, and has been appointed the chief diplomat of the new cabinet. Aside from Kamikawa and Abe faction co-leader Sanae Takaichi, who has retained her berth as economic security minister, other female inductees include Ayuko Kato (child policies), Shinako Tsuchiya (economic reconstruction), Hanako Jimi (regional revitalisation).

In the wake of the announcement, Kishida announced that his new cabinet will “make change a strength”, and that it would primarily focus on the economy, social policy, diplomacy and security in its two-year term before regular Diet elections come due in October 2025. Minister of Foreign Affairs Kamikawa, upon assuming office, held a press conference on 14 September where she [declared](#) her foreign policy priorities as being righting Japan’s strained relationship with China through dialogue and consultation, “showing Japan’s presence” at international fora, and contribute to world peace by utilising Japan’s role to the utmost. Kamikawa accompanied Kishida to the United Nations General Assembly, where she interacted with her American counterpart Antony Blinken, and participated in her first meeting of Quad Foreign Ministers, alongside her Indian, Australian and American counterparts.

Defence Minister Kihara also commented on his new role upon assuming office, telling reporters that he would carry out his duties “with a sense of trepidation” in light of North Korea’s missile provocations and China’s increasing militarisation of the maritime environment surrounding Japan. He subsequently held interactions with key US defence officials, including the commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command.

The anticipated effect of the reshuffle was contrary to expectations of an improvement in popularity ratings, however, as Kishida’s popularity remained below 20 percent, due in large part to hitherto unexamined scandals involving certain members of the new cabinet and party leadership.