

JAPAN

Digest

April 2025

- Japan's humanitarian response to Myanmar quake
- Japan's response to US tariffs
- PM Ishiba visits Vietnam, Philippines



Japan's humanitarian response to Myanmar quake

In the wake of the devastating magnitude 7.7 earthquake in Myanmar and Thailand on 28 March, Japan [assembled](#) a humanitarian response while using the crisis as an example to boost its own disaster resilience. Minister for Foreign Affairs Takeshi Iwaya in his press conference on 1 April said that Japan would dispatch the Japan Disaster Relief Team (Japan DRT) to the quake-stricken country to assist in humanitarian efforts. The 32-member team comprised of doctors and nurses as well as rescue workers left for Myanmar the next day, and played a supporting role in helping the respective authorities in Myanmar set up field hospitals and other facilities.

This move followed Japan's delivery of 240 waterproof tarpaulins and 450 tents immediately after the quake, and was followed in turn by the delivery of emergency relief supplies such as hygiene kits, water and water purifiers. During the press conference, Iwaya also [committed](#) the Government of Japan to providing approximately 6 million US Dollars in emergency assistance to the country via various international aid organisations. Iwaya stated that the decision to aid Myanmar, which is in the middle of a civil war, was taken in light of 'the massive humanitarian needs' of the country. Following Iwaya's statement, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi in his daily press conference also confirmed that the 'Japanese government will stand side by side with the people of Myanmar and deliver humanitarian aid that can directly benefit them'.

In the meantime, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's Cabinet [confirmed](#) its intention to invest over 20 trillion Japanese Yen for a five-year plan to boost disaster resilience domestically, particularly in light of widespread predictions that a massive quake under the Nankai Trough under Tokyo and

the broader Kanto region is imminent in the near future. The plan, which will kick off from fiscal 2026, will be aimed to 'expedite the improvement of aging infrastructure and prepare for floods and megaquakes', with final approval slated for June. Japan's aging public infrastructure will have top priority in the new plan, with bridges, underground sewers and water supply pipes.

Japan's response to US tariffs

In the wake of US president Donald J. Trump's announcement of his 'liberation day' tariffs on almost all of its trade partners on 2 April, the Government of Japan responded by committing itself to negotiating with the US on its tariff and non-tariff structure. Though Prime Minister Ishiba initially tried to secure a carve-out for Japan under the new tariffs, this gambit failed to pass muster with the US, despite Ishiba's telephonic [conversation](#) with Trump on 7 April. However, the two leaders agreed to continue discussing the matter through their respective negotiating teams. In remarks to the press after the call, Ishiba stated that he viewed Washington's moves as a 'national crisis', and that 'we should explore how we can cooperate broadly in a way that can benefit both nations, including via more investment rather than unilateral tariffs'.

Subsequently, the Government of Japan [designated](#) Economic Revitalisation Minister Ryosei Akazawa as Japan's official negotiator on the tariffs. Akazawa, a close aide of Ishiba, was widely [viewed](#) as not being the most suitable candidate for negotiating with Washington, though his closeness to the prime minister was viewed by some as a positive. In answer to a question posed at the Diet, Akazawa himself noted that the government was 'keep[ing] a close eye on the situation with a sense of urgency'.

On 16 April, Akazawa [departed](#) for Washington for talks with his American counterpart, Treasury Secretary Scott

Bessent. However, the Japanese side faced an unexpected development when the meeting was shifted to the Oval Office in the White House at the last moment, with President Trump joining in the talks. There, Trump is believed to have offered no specifics on which sectors of the Japanese economy he was seeking to see opened up to American investment, instead mentioning defence-related matters such as host country support for US forces stationed in Japan. As a result, the meeting ended inconclusively, with a mere commitment to meet again in the near future to discuss specifics.

The fallout of the meeting caused consternation in Tokyo. Ishiba on his part quickly [clarified](#) that he thought it was inappropriate for a negotiation on tariff relief to discuss defence-related matters, and that Akazawa's next [trip](#) to Washington on 30 April would see the Japanese delegation empowered to discuss only tariff-related matters. His stance was later confirmed by Defence Minister Gen Nakatani, who [clarified](#) that he had no intention of visiting Washington as part of the negotiating team as defence matters were 'completely separate' from the issues under discussion.

PM Ishiba visits Vietnam, Philippines

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba embarked on a four-day trip to Vietnam and the Philippines on 27 April with the objective of deepening ties with the two key Southeast Asian countries on security cooperation as well as responses to the US tariffs imposed on 2 April. In Hanoi on 27 April, Ishiba [met](#) Vietnamese President Luong Cuong, where the two sides committed to developing deeper ties under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed last year. The two sides confirmed that they would hold a 2+2 Dialogue at the vice-ministerial in the coming months.

On the same day, Ishiba [met](#) his counterpart, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, with

whom he visited the Ho Chi Minh monument to commemorate victims of the country's decade-long war against the US. At the summit meeting, the Vietnamese side welcomed the visit by Japanese naval vessels to Da Nang port, and agreed to establish the 2+2 mechanism as soon as possible. Vietnam's participation in Japan's Official Security Assistance (OSA) program was also discussed. In the economic sphere, the Japanese side expressed interest in partnering with Vietnam to achieve more holistic economic growth, following which there was substantial discussion of how tariffs imposed by the US could impact this. The Japanese announced at the meeting that Japan would implement a Japan-Vietnam Semiconductor Program at the Vietnam-Japan University in Hanoi, where 500 students from Vietnam would be trained in all semiconductor-related processes. Regional issues were also discussed at the meeting, as were people-to-people exchanges.

Ishiba arrived in Manila on 29 April, where he [held](#) a summit meeting with Filipino President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. At the meeting, the two sides reviewed the progress of the Reciprocal Access Agreement currently under negotiation, while committing to negotiating an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). The importance of the early negotiation of an agreement on the Security of Information (GSOMIA) was also broached. In the economic domain, Ishiba expressed support for the Philippines' goal of achieving upper-middle-income status, followed by a discussion on boosting the information technology and communications sector, resources and energy exploitation, disaster management and other sectors. The meeting concluded with a discussion of regional and international matters.

In both countries, Ishiba [attended meetings](#) with Japanese businesses operating in the area, where US tariffs and Japan's response to them was discussed.