

JAPAN

Digest

June 2025

- Japan's reaction to election of new South Korean president
- Japan's reaction to Israel-Iran tensions
- Tokyo gubernatorial election spells trouble for LDP
- Japan conducts 1st domestic missile trial



Japan's reaction to election of new South Korean president

The Republic of Korea (South Korea) headed to the polls on 3 June 2025 to elect a new President, the results of which were declared the next day. With 49.42 percent of the votes, Lee Jae Myung of the Democratic Party won the election and was sworn in as the country's 21st head of state. During the campaign, Japan maintained a cautious eye on Lee, as the latter has had a long history of making statements against Japan.

On the eve of President Lee's inauguration, Minister for Foreign Affairs Takeshi Iwaya [stated](#) in a press conference that South Korea was 'an important partner we should work with', while keeping the door open to work with the new administration. Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba for his part told reporters that with President Lee's election to the highest office in South Korea amidst the celebration of the 60th anniversary of normalisation of ties, he would like to promote deeper ties between the two countries and that 'a meeting should be held as soon as possible'. In a congratulatory phone call between the two leaders on 9 June, Ishiba [conveyed](#) to Lee that the foundation on which improved Japan-South Korea ties had been built must be continued. The two sides also agreed on the importance of the 'stable development' of bilateral relations, the importance of US-Japan-South Korea collaboration and Seoul's assistance in the resolution of the abduction issue by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea).

On 17 June, the Japanese and South Korean leaders [met](#) face-to-face on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Kananaskis, Canada. The official readout of the meeting noted their exchange of 'candid' views on Japan-South Korea relations, while agreeing to maintain

bilateral and trilateral cooperation mechanisms through 'shuttle diplomacy' between the two sides. On 19 June, Ishiba, attending the 60th anniversary celebrations in Tokyo, [committed](#) to developing 'close communication' with Seoul, as befits 'the closest neighbours to each other'. He proposed that both countries could work to address common challenges such as demographic crash and regional revitalisation. On 23 June, it was reported by some outlets that Japan had [halted](#) the imminent lapse of a joint agreement between Tokyo and Seoul from 1978 that demarcates areas for joint development of oil and natural gas resources in the East China Sea southwest of Japan's southernmost main island Kyushu. The agreement was scheduled to lapse on Sunday, 22 June, but was held in abeyance upon the Lee administration's request.

Japan's reaction to Israel-Iran tensions

In light of the escalation in tensions between Iran and Israel, Japan's Defence Minister Gen Nakatani [stated](#) on 19 June that it would despatch two military aircraft to Djibouti in order to mount an evacuation of Japanese nationals in relevant parts of West Asia. Calling the situation 'strained' as a result of 'continue[d] tit-for-tat attacks', Nakatani informed reporters that a 10-man team of Self-Defence Forces personnel had been despatched to Tehran and Tel Aviv to ascertain how many nationals wished to evacuate. The next day, Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya [informed](#) press outlets that 87 Japanese nationals and their family members had been evacuated by bus from Iran and Israel, while expressing to Israel's Foreign Minister Japan's 'deep concern' over 'exchanges of retaliations and subsequent serious damage'. Japan also [issued](#) travel advisories for both countries,

raising a Level 4 ('evacuate and avoid all travel') warning for Iran and a Level 3 ('avoid all travel') for Israel.

As it became clear that the United States of America had deployed B2 stealth bombers to strike suspected nuclear enrichment sites in Iran, Japan appeared to show some support for the US' decision even as it called for de-escalation. Iwaya [told](#) reporters on 23 June that Japan 'understands' that the US action was intended to de-escalate the rising tensions and to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. He also praised the US for continuing to keep dialogue channels with Iran open, while calling for 'peace and stability in the Middle East' via 'diplomatic efforts in cooperation with the international community. US President Donald Trump's subsequent declaration of a ceasefire in the region on 23 June was also [welcomed](#) by Japan, with Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi expressing a 'strong hope' that the agreement would be maintained.

Tokyo gubernatorial election spells trouble for LDP

Residents of Tokyo [went](#) to the polls on 23 June to elect a new Governor. The results, announced the next day, saw incumbent Yuriko Koike, leading her regional party Tomin First no Kai (Association for Tokyo Residents First) to victory once again with 32 out of 127 seats in the metropolitan assembly. On the other hand, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's leadership did nothing for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which fell to its lowest tally ever in Tokyo's history when it acquired 22 seats. This represented a further loss of one seat since its previous record-low tally of 23 in 2017. The principal opposition party, the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan

(CDPJ) secured 17 seats, while the LDP's coalition partner at the national level, the Komeito, won 19. Most interestingly, however, the far-right Sanseito won three seats through the first-past-the-post, single-member district system, marking a significant advance for the xenophobic organisation since the national elections in October 2024, where it secured three seats through the multi-member, proportional representation system.

In light of the results, Prime Minister Ishiba on 24 June told reporters he was aware that a 'harsh verdict' had been delivered and promised self-reflection as a party. However, as elections to the House of Councillors (the upper house of the Japanese Diet) looms on the horizon, speculation was rife that the persistent deep anger at the LDP's middle-of-the-road policies on food security, taxation and social security could possibly require deep-seated reform within the LDP, including a change of leadership.

Japan conducts first domestic missile test

On 24 June, Japan [conducted](#) its first domestic drill involving the domestically-developed short-range surface-to-ship Type 88 missile at the Shizunai Anti-Aircraft Firing Range on the southern coast of Japan's northernmost island Hokkaido. The truck-mounted missile was launched at a target at sea, and marks a significant step forward in Japan's pledge to reshore its testing abilities after prolonged reliance on sites in the United States and Australia.

The Shizunai test was criticised by Russia, which called it 'categorically unacceptable'. Japan plans to conduct further tests at the same base using the longer-range Type 12 missile, which is a modern replacement of the Cold War-era Type 88.