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Digest

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India-Japan Chandrayaan-5 mission gets Cabinet nod

India-Japan space cooperation got a fillip on 14 March, when the Indian Cabinet [approved](#) the Chandrayaan-5 mission (formerly known as LuPEX) for expected launch in 2028-29. The mission will see the first substantial cooperation between India and Japan's space agencies, and is expected to significantly improve India's scientific capabilities. The cooperation between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) will consist mainly in the joint design and construction of a 250-kg lunar lander, with India constructing the lander and Japan constructing the rover. India will deliver the lander to the South Pole of the Moon as well, using its expertise gained post-Chandrayaan-3.

Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers Meeting

Japan [hosted](#) the eleventh edition of the Japan-China-Republic of Korea (ROK) Foreign Ministers' Summit on 22 March. The meeting was kicked off by Minister for Foreign Affairs Takeshi Iwaya delivering his opening remarks, wherein he [called](#) for future-oriented cooperation between the three neighbours, a point echoed by his counterparts. The three Ministers also declared 2025-26 as a Year for Cultural Exchange, and welcomed the signing of a Protocol that is expected to set up a permanent Secretariat for institutionalising trilateral cooperation. Regional and global issues such as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Ukraine also came up for discussion. The meeting concluded with the three sides agreeing to facilitate a Leaders' Summit as soon as possible.

Following the Summit, Iwaya interacted with his counterparts bilaterally. In a nearly two-hour-long meeting with his Korean interlocutor Cho Tae-yul, Iwaya [conveyed](#) highlighted the continued urgency of

maintaining and progressing the positive direction of Japan-ROK ties. The two ministers also agreed on continuing to uphold trilateral cooperation with the United States of America on strategic issues. Sharing concerns about the DPRK's activities, the two sides were reported to have had 'a candid exchange of views' on matters of regional and global significance. They parted with an assurance that communications would continue.

In the afternoon of 22 March, Iwaya [met](#) with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi for a short hour-long meeting. Iwaya is [reported](#) to have conveyed to Wang a litany of Japanese concerns starting from the situation in the East China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, Hong Kong and Xinjiang. He also raised questions regarding the safety of Japanese citizens residing in China, calling on the latter to release immediately Japanese nationals detained under its 'anti-espionage law'. Raising concerns about the unilateral seafood ban imposed by Beijing on seafood exports from Japan, Iwaya called on restrictions to be lifted. Noting the lack of platforms for face-to-face consultation, he called for a resumption of the High-Level Dialogue between the two countries on security issues. The two ministers also discussed ways to cooperate on the green economy as well as tackling demographic decline.

The sixth edition of the Japan-China High-Level Economic Dialogue was [held](#) after the bilateral. Here, Iwaya re-emphasized the importance of physical security in trade relations and reiterated Japan's call for a lifting of the seafood ban. Practical discussions on macroeconomic issues, energy cooperation, private sector collaboration in third countries and improvement of bilateral business environment ensued. The meeting concluded with declarations of mutual support for China's upcoming presidency of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) grouping and Japan's bid for presidency in 2031.

On 31 March, trade ministers from the three countries [convened](#) in Seoul to conduct the thirteenth edition of talks on deeper economic integration. At the meeting, the three sides agreed to establish ‘comprehensive and high-level’ discussion mechanisms in order to deliver a trilateral free trade agreement. They also agreed on working together to strengthen the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). It is believed that US President Trump’s declaration of universal tariffs also came up for discussion, though there was no resolution reached. The meeting concluded with a promise to reconvene in Tokyo for the fourteenth edition.

Japan ends controversial TITP scheme

On 11 March, Japan’s Cabinet [green-lighted](#) an ambitious new labour-importation policy that explicitly aims to replace the country’s declining workforce with foreign workers, effectively ending the controversial Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) scheme which at one point was designated by the US Department of State as a point of concern with regard to human trafficking. The new system, expected to come into force in fiscal 2027, marks a quantum shift in Japan’s immigration policy, as it opens up paths to permanent residency (or even citizenship) to semi-skilled workers across a broad range of sectors.

Under the new policy, workers would be accepted into Japan under the recent Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) category of visas (created in 2019 under then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s policy reforms). Contrary to the TITP, workers under the new system would be able to change their workplaces in principle after one year of work, though their re-employment would be restricted to the same industry. Japanese language skills and other soft skills will be a consideration in granting permission. The new system will also require workers to enrol in the income tax register, as well as all applicable social security payments. Female workers who leave the workforce temporarily due to pregnancy or childbirth will

be entitled to claim exemption for the same from the five-year residency period stipulated by the SSW Stage 1 visa. Finally, workers with a high degree of proficiency in their profession would be eligible to shift to the SSW’s second stage, where they would be eligible for permanent residency given certain conditions are met.

Sixteen sectors, such as healthcare, construction and healthcare, are included in the programme. In the press conference announcing the policy change, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba pointed to the rapid rise in foreign residents in Japan (3.8 million as of March 2025) and ‘the global race of talent’ as causative factors necessitating a policy that ‘(makes Japan an) attractive environment’ for foreign workers.

Japan, US defence chiefs meet

The defence chiefs of the US and Japan [met](#) on 30 March to discuss strategic matters in Tokyo, with US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth [reassuring](#) his Japanese counterpart Gen Nakatani of the US’ continued commitment to the Indo-Pacific. Hegseth, who is on a multi-country tour, called Japan the US’ ‘indispensable partner’ in maintaining deterrence throughout the region and conveyed its intention to upgrade the US Forces in Japan, which are currently subordinate to the Indo-Pacific Command, into a joint warfighting command that can liaise with Japanese counterparts. The two sides agreed on accelerating the development and manufacture of new-generation missiles such as the SM-6, agreeing also to improve maintenance capabilities in Japan for US warships and other surface vessels. The need to improve Japan’s defence posture in the *Nansei Shotō* (Southwestern Islands) came up for discussion, as did the situation in the Taiwan Strait and East China Sea. The two ministers also visited the island of Iwoto (also known as Iwo Jima) where they commemorated the 80th anniversary of the World War Two battle there in 1945.