

# KIZUNA

Winter  
2023

Linking Japan and the World



Japan and ASEAN  
Golden Friendship, Golden Opportunities



JAPAN GOV  
THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN



Welcome to KIZUNA, the official magazine of the Government of Japan.

This bold work of calligraphy is 絆 (*kizuna*) written in Japanese. *Kizuna* means the enduring bonds between people—close relationships forged through mutual trust and support.

Originally describing the rope used to tether domestic animals such as horses and dogs, the meaning of *kizuna* has evolved over the years. A passage in *The Tale of the Heike*, compiled in the 13th century, uses the term to refer to the bonds of love between a father and his children. More recently, *kizuna* has gone beyond bonds tying together family and close acquaintances; it is now used in a broader sense of human ties and connections. Of particular note is the *kizuna* born among people during natural calamities, which fosters feelings of solidarity and serves as the underlying strength to overcome hardships.

Similarly, the *kizuna* cultivated among the countries of the world has the power to deepen cooperation for a better future. By reporting on a wide variety of topics concerning Japan, we hope that this magazine will provide opportunities for Japan and the rest of the world to connect and build strong *kizuna*.



**KANAZAWA SHOKO**  
*Calligraphy Artist*

Born in Tokyo in 1985, she started learning calligraphy from her mother when she was five years old. One of the notable young calligraphers of today, her solo exhibitions have been held throughout the world, in cities such as New York, Singapore, and Prague. She was selected as one of the official poster artists for Tokyo 2020.

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**KIZUNA**  
Winter 2023

### COVER

On September 6, Prime Minister Kishida delivered a speech at the ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum (top), before attending the 26th ASEAN-Japan Summit (bottom left). Bottom right is the official logo for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation.



Left: Prime Minister KISHIDA attended the 26th ASEAN-Japan Summit on September 6, 2023. The summit was held in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, which currently chairs ASEAN. Top Right: Securing a sustainable and stable power supply is vital for regional economic development. The photo shows the Nam Ngum 1 Hydropower Station in Laos, expanded with Japan's help. Bottom Right: Japan is helping to develop human resources in a wide range of fields, supporting those who will take the lead in nation-building in ASEAN countries. The photo shows participants in a program that invites people to Japan to learn how to combat marine plastic waste. GUJUN CO., LTD.

# A GOLDEN FRIENDSHIP, GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES: THE FUTURE OF JAPAN AND ASEAN

*The year 2023 is the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. During that past half century, the global situation has changed significantly, with Japan-ASEAN relations entering a new phase. This milestone year is an opportunity to reflect on the past 50 years and set out the vision for the new era.*



The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established in 1967 for the purpose of regional peace and economic growth. The number of member states has gradually risen from the original five—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore—to the 10-country system we see today.

In the meantime, ASEAN has strengthened its intra-regional integration in the fields of politics and security, the economy, and society and culture, including the signing of the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement and the ASEAN Charter.

Japan and ASEAN have built and strengthened friendly and

The official logo for the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. A logo by a Japanese creator and the catchphrase "Golden Friendship, Golden Opportunities" by a Filipino creator were selected for the contest, which was open to all nationals of ASEAN Member States and Japan.



Mrs. KISHIDA Yuko, the spouse of the prime minister, attending the official ASEAN Summit Spouse Program together with the other first ladies. They watched a skit performed by children, as well as traditional Indonesian dances and a workshop on the country's traditional arts and crafts, experiencing the diversity of each area of Indonesia.

cooperative relations in various fields since first engaging in a dialogue on synthetic rubber in 1973. Through people-to-people exchanges, Japan and ASEAN have established the “heart-to-heart” mutual trust and confidence advocated in the Fukuda Doctrine in 1977, working together as partners for peace and stability, as well as for development and prosperity in the region. In particular, Japan’s assistance to ASEAN, which emphasizes the development of human resources and the creation of organizations, has greatly contributed to the nation-building and growth of the group’s member states.

The year 2023 is the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. Prior to that, an expert panel from academic and business communities established in Japan presented three pillars for building a new Japan-ASEAN partnership in their report to the government, namely: (1) shaping a regional order which is free, open, rules-based, and fair; (2) building a society which fulfills economic prosperity, sustainability, and equity; and, (3) mutual understanding and trust as the platform for a renewed

ASEAN-Japan partnership.

Over the past half century, ASEAN countries have achieved remarkable economic growth, and Japan has newly proposed pillars that emphasize fairness.

“What Japan should emphasize in its work with ASEAN is the setting of rules and standards in line with fairness, while facing common challenges that reflect the regional realities especially in the areas of human development, energy and digital technology,” said Associate Professor AIZAWA Nobuhiro of Kyushu University, a researcher on Southeast Asia and member of the expert panel. “We need to understand that the relationship between Japan and ASEAN is precious. We have 50 years of friendship; we are blessed with a broad and dense network. But at the same time, we need to transform and renew this relationship very quickly as challenges are pressing. Japan will actively engage with new emerging social forces in ASEAN, especially with those from the younger generation. The trust we have is a major advantage for working together in times of unpredictable global changes.”

In March, Prime Minister Kishida announced a new plan

for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” and clearly identified Southeast Asia as an important region. He also announced a new contribution of 100 million dollars to the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF). In addition, at the ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum held in September, the prime minister announced the Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative, under which Japan indicated that it intends to expand the scope of cooperation to strengthen connectivity in a wide range of fields, including transport infrastructure development, digital connectivity, maritime cooperation, supply chain resilience, electricity connectivity, and human and knowledge connectivity.

Concluding the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit will be held for three days, from December 16 through 18, 2023. It is hoped that Japan and ASEAN will further strengthen their friendly and cooperative relationship. ●

Associate Professor AIZAWA Nobuhiro of Kyushu University’s Department of Cultural Studies, Graduate School of Integrated Sciences for Global Society. He specializes in Indonesian politics, Thai politics, urbanization and politics, and Chinese people living overseas in Southeast Asia. He is also a member of the expert panel for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation.



# COOPERATING TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THE STRAITS OF MALACCA AND SINGAPORE

*The Straits of Malacca and Singapore are a vital shipping lane linking Asia with Europe and the Middle East. The narrow straits with their predominantly shallow waters constitute a treacherous choke point for passing vessels. Japan has been cooperating with the three littoral States of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore since the 1960s to enhance the safety of navigation, including conducting joint hydrographic surveys.*

The Straits of Malacca and Singapore, most of which are within the territorial waters of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, comprise one of the world's most economically important seaways, with 35% of global shipping passing through. With the growing economic development of the countries belonging to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), the volume of traffic passing through the straits has increased year by year, with approximately 130,000 vessels using the route annually.

However, the straits have many

areas of shallow water less than 20 meters deep, and are affected by complex currents and seasonal winds, making them difficult to navigate. Should a major maritime accident cause disruption to their shipping lanes, there would be a significant impact on the local and global economy, and an oil spill could lead to disastrous environmental pollution.

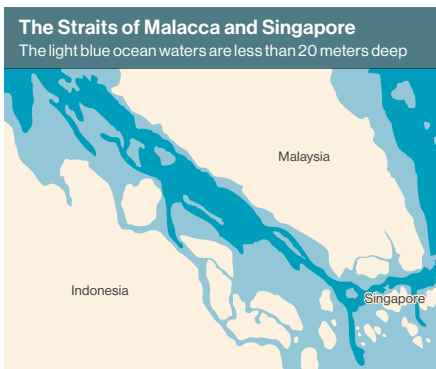
“Ensuring navigational safety in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore is a key area of maritime cooperation that will benefit the entire ASEAN region. Japan has been working together with the

three littoral States since the 1960s and has contributed to the safety of navigation in the straits in a number of areas, including the removal of shipwrecks, hydrographic surveys, and the production of electronic navigational charts,” said NAGAMATSU Kenji, executive director of the Malacca Strait Council (MSC) of Japan.

Japan has worked on the past three joint hydrographic surveys. The second of those—conducted from 1996 to 1998—established a 500-km traffic separation scheme (in which an area of water separates opposing shipping lanes)



The survey vessel traveled a total distance of 25,000 km. Some of the work was dangerous, as the vessels had to go back and forth along a one-way traffic separation zone. However, with the cooperation of the littoral States, the work was completed with no accidents.



and produced the first electronic navigational chart. However, the seabed's topography has gradually changed and the number of larger ships has increased, leading to an increased risk of marine accidents. There is thus a vital need for more accurate electronic navigational charts.

“As seabed surveying touches on some sensitive security issues, the littoral States were hoping for cooperation from Japan, with which they had established a relationship of trust. The territorial waters of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore are also complex, and Japan plays a coordinating role among the three littoral States,” said Nagamatsu.

In response to a request for the third joint hydrographic survey, the littoral States and Japan targeted five specific areas within the Straits of Malacca and Singapore that required particularly urgent action. In Phase I of the survey, which ran from 2015 to 2016, financial cooperation and the dispatch of engineers were provided through the Japanese Shipowners' Association, the Japan Hydrographic Association, and the MSC. In Phase II, which began conducting its survey in 2018 and covered a larger sea area, approximately 1 billion yen was

With Japan's support, and following updates to the electronic navigational chart of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, the ASEAN Hydrographic Survey Workshop was held in Indonesia in September, at which the results of the project were reported.

budgeted by the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund, established to support integration among ASEAN nations. The MSC oversaw coordination and managed the progress while the private firm Aero Asahi Corporation conducted the survey.

“As such a long country geographically, Japan has established its strength in surveying in diverse environments,” said OSHIMA Aoi of Aero Asahi who coordinated the joint survey. The technology used in the most recent survey was multi-beam sensors that can capture the 3D imagery of the whole section of ocean bed selected for the survey. Oshima continued, “For greater efficiency, the survey ship needs to travel back and forth across the traffic separation zone, but that is as dangerous as driving the wrong way down a busy road. Fortunately, we were able to conduct the survey safely without any accidents, thanks to the littoral States properly communicating information to vessels in the shipping lanes.”

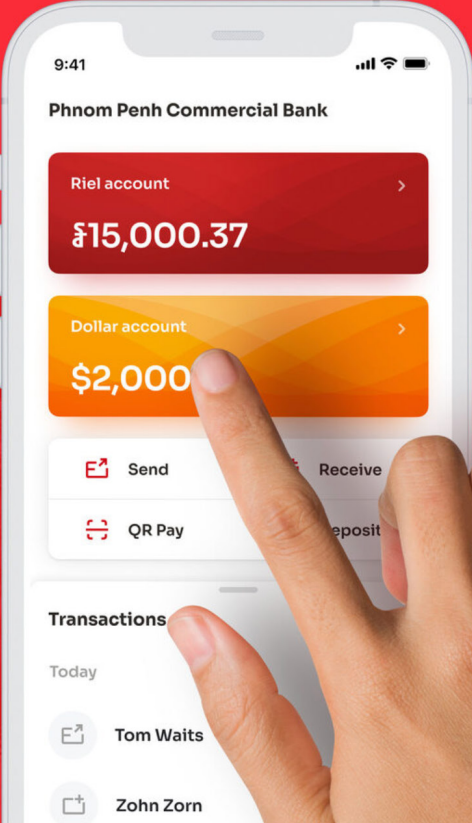
The most difficult part of the survey was the disruption to the project due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, those involved rallied together to collect

information and complete the extension procedures, and the survey resumed after a hiatus of two years and four months. With the survey of the whole area completed, the electronic chart was finally updated in July 2023. “The ASEAN Hydrographic Survey Workshop, held in Jakarta in September, was attended by maritime officials from ASEAN member states and received high praise,” noted Nagamatsu.

Not only will the completion of highly accurate electronic charts promote maritime cooperation among ASEAN member states, but it will also greatly improve connectivity. Japan will continue its efforts to collaborate with relevant authorities in order to improve the safety of maritime navigation. ●

OSHIMA Aoi (left), of Aero Asahi, with NAGAMATSU Kenji, executive director of the Malacca Strait Council. The shield they are holding was sent by the littoral States as a token of their appreciation for Japan's cooperation over the years.





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In collaboration with:



**NATIONAL BANK  
OF CAMBODIA**

Bakong is Cambodia's mobile payment system using blockchain technology. The name comes from Cambodia's first temple mountain of sandstone, which is also the prototype for the design of the Independence Monument. Therefore, Bakong suggests a sense of freedom and self-determination for Cambodians.

# THE DIGITAL FINANCE PLATFORM

## PIONEERING CONNECTIVITY ACROSS ASIA

*Several years ago, a Japanese blockchain startup was launched out of the desire to create a new payment service. The company has since helped launch Bakong, a mobile payment system using blockchain technology, for the National Bank of Cambodia (NBC).*

In October 2020, Cambodia introduced a mobile payment system using blockchain technology for its central bank. Via a smartphone app, this system, known as Bakong, can be used for all kinds of remittances and payments for individual or corporate customers. Transactions are instantaneous and require no fee.

Previously, few people in Cambodia had bank accounts while many owned smartphones, creating a competitive market in which private payment services with limited interoperability coexisted chaotically. At the same time, Cambodia's national currency, the

riel, had low rates of adoption, and foreign currencies consequently enjoyed widespread use in the country. The launch of Bakong was touted as a means to solve such problems, establishing an inclusive and stable financial system for Cambodia.

That major project was supported by **SORAMITSU Co., Ltd.**, a Japanese startup company established in 2016 that develops and introduces the blockchain technology essential for digital financial services. **TAKEMIYA Makoto**, an engineer who co-founded the company, said, "Many years ago, when I had to send a membership fee for an





Members of SORAMITSU and the National Bank of Cambodia (NBC). Second from right is TAKEMIYA Makoto, the CEO of the company, and third from left is MIYAZAWA Kazumasa, its president.

international conference from my bank, the process made me realize just how long everything took and how high the fees were. That experience inspired me to create a new kind of money that was usable worldwide online, eliminating needless time-wasting and fees. From that point on, I decided to learn about blockchain technology, and founded SORAMITSU. Since then, we've made great progress in realizing our vision through projects such as Hyperledger Iroha, SORA, and Fearless Wallet, which all provide tools that central banks can use for digitally transforming their economies.”

Hyperledger Iroha is the open-source and free-to-use blockchain platform developed by the firm for business use. It has already been utilized in various systems both in Japan and overseas, and, along with those developed by IBM and Intel, is one of the blockchain platforms managed by the Hyperledger Foundation—a global ecosystem fostering blockchain technologies. With an uncomplicated design and being easy to install, the platform is renowned for its high processing speed, reliability, and security. The National Bank of Cambodia (NBC) saw value in Hyperledger Iroha's performance and low cost, as well as the flexibility and drive that come from a small startup firm. That resulted in the bank choosing SORAMITSU to lead the joint development of Bakong in April 2017.

Bakong, which supports both the Cambodian riel and the US dollar, has steadily grown in popularity in the three years since its launch. As of this year, the system has 8.5 million registered accounts, more than half of Cambodia's population. Bakong is used in about 1.5 million stores, at which payments grossed 15.5 billion dollars by the end of 2022. Project Manager Zilya Yagafarova said, “Working closely

with the NBC team, I noticed that they were very proud of their work. They were very happy to help the people of their nation, and I was happy to help them.”

In February 2023, SORAMITSU launched the demonstration experiment of a central bank digital currency (CBDC) in Laos based on a system similar to that of Cambodia's Bakong, and the results will be used to build an optimal system to address the challenges of that country's financial situation. With the support of the Cabinet Secretariat and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, as well as the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the firm is also currently conducting basic research on the potential CBDC needs of such countries as Fiji, Vanuatu, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand, as well as conducting a proof-of-concept demonstration with the Solomon Islands. Going forward, the company plans to roll out similar demonstration experiments throughout the Pacific region and Southeast Asia. SORAMITSU President MIYAZAWA Kazumasa said, “Bakong can now be used in many stores in Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand, where you can scan a 2D code and automatically exchange money and pay using the Bakong app. Many European countries share the euro as a common currency, but in the future, perhaps the financial systems of various Asian countries will be connected in a transparent and accessible fashion without the need for such a currency union.”

*Soramitsu* is an ancient Japanese word that, in one theory, means “to fill the sky.” Apparently, the company name was chosen because of the founders' idea of building a blockchain encompassing the entire world. Before long, SORAMITSU's blockchain technology may be spreading its wings across Asia, strengthening ties throughout the region. ●



Zilya Yagafarova of SORAMITSU in front of Bakong Temple. She began her career as an IT technician and systems business analyst at a bank before joining the company as a project manager for Bakong.

# LOCATION INTELLIGENCE: USING GPS DATA AND AI TO TACKLE POVERTY AND DISASTERS

*As people in developing nations increasingly flock to live in urban areas, the informal settlements in those cities have also expanded, resulting in a proliferation of the number of residents who live not only in poverty but also alongside the perils of natural disasters and infectious disease. A Japanese university startup is endeavoring to change that reality through the utilization of innovative, AI-based location-analysis technology.*

In recent years, the world's population has become increasingly concentrated in urban areas, as they are the main centers of economic activity. United Nations (UN) statistics indicate that these areas occupy approximately only 3% of the total land area globally yet produce more than 80% of the world's total GDP. Meanwhile, more and more city dwellers in Asia and Africa are living in poor conditions, with insufficient access to public

services and education linked to the cycle of poverty. It is difficult to assess where and how these people live when their number increases in a chaotic fashion, and that in turn constitutes a great barrier to the adoption of measures by governments and NPOs for improving their welfare.

A Japanese startup, LocationMind Inc., has taken an innovative approach to solving that problem by utilizing cutting-edge technologies to analyze and predict

human movement, or “people flow.” “People flow data” are created by collecting and analyzing location data from smartphones and other devices and visualizing them in an easy-to-understand form. Such data are useful not only for businesses, but also for the tackling of a wide range of social problems, from traffic congestion to disaster control.

LocationMind was established in 2019 by researchers of a laboratory team headed by Professor SHIBASAKI Ryosuke, a renowned authority in this field, who was at the time a professor at the Center for Spatial Information Sciences of the University of Tokyo. Among other initiatives, the company is presently undertaking a joint research project in the metropolitan area of Manila, the capital of the Philippines, together with the Asian Development Bank, to develop what they call the “PIVE (Poverty Impact and Vulnerability Evaluation) tool.” This tool analyzes GPS data, satellite images, census data, and other data by using proprietary AI technology to capture and visualize

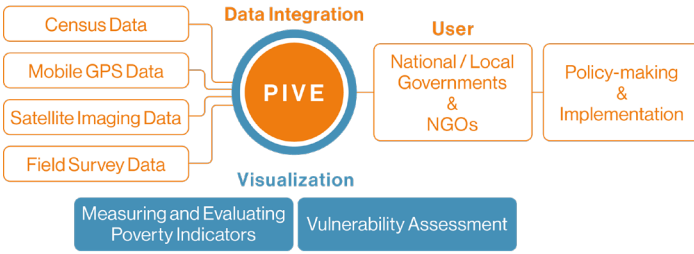
the state of people living in poverty—which had heretofore not been so well understood. The subjects range from these people's general living conditions to their access to healthcare and education, as well as the disaster risks to which they are exposed.

Since Metro Manila was developed on low-

Members of the LocationMind team who are developing the PIVE (Poverty Impact and Vulnerability Evaluation) tool in the Philippines, including SHIBASAKI Mariko (center) and MIYAZAWA Satoshi (second from the right).



## FLOWCHART OF THE PIVE PROCESS



lying plains along several river estuaries, it frequently suffers water damage owing to typhoons and other disasters. The analysis of data from past flood damage and subsequent changes in the flow of people has made it possible to pinpoint high-risk areas and predict the movement of people and traffic when disasters strike. “By providing this information speedily and in an easily accessible form, we aim to support policymakers and NPOs in their decision-making,” said SHIBASAKI Mariko, a consultant working on the development of PIVE.

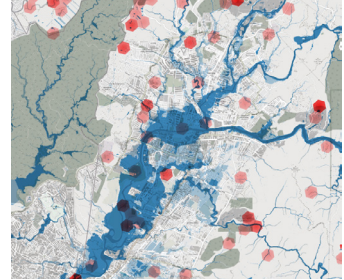
How to combine and analyze diverse types of data can be a trial-and-error affair, but the company



In such fast-growing cities as Indonesia’s capital of Jakarta (photo), public transport plays a key role in relieving traffic congestion and rectifying transport inequalities. In order to establish an efficient public transport system, it is important to assess residents’ locations and their transportation needs at various times of the day. While supporting the development of railways in ASEAN countries, Japan has also cooperated in research and analysis to promote development in line with potential needs. API/APFO

has built up substantial experience in addressing manifold social problems. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the firm contributed greatly to governmental decision-making in Japan through high-quality analyses that predicted infection risks by examining the flow of people in the unprecedented situations that arose—such as the nationwide restriction on unnecessary movement—which is significantly different from that in normal times.

Another instance of such analyses can be found in Indonesia, where a project has been organized to develop a model visualizing residents’ locations and their transportation needs at various times of the day for the purpose of improving public transport in the Jakarta metropolitan area. The project has succeeded in achieving a highly precise system of analysis and prediction—more economically and quickly than conventional means—by applying a distinctive method of utilizing already available GPS data and previous traffic surveys. “Even in situations in which others might give up, experience has convinced us that there must be a solution, so we continue setting up alternate hypotheses and moving on to the next analysis,” explained



Top: An impoverished settlement in Metro Manila that was selected as the test site for the PIVE tool project. People-flow analysis not only assesses the distribution and concentration of people in such areas, but also helps to better understand their movement in times of disaster, their access to education, and other aspects of how they live.

Bottom: A PIVE map of an area adjacent to Metro Manila that visualizes how people living in poverty tend to settle in places vulnerable to flooding and other disasters. The darker the red, the greater the area occupied by new buildings, including illegal settlements.

OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS | LIP NOAA | PLANET LABS PBC, NORWAY'S INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE AND FORESTS INITIATIVE SATELLITE DATA PROGRAM

MIYAZAWA Satoshi, who developed the model, and also serves as a member of the PIVE development team.

The team is currently working on a PIVE prototype that will be further refined by input from policymakers and others. “We aim to eventually build a commercial product that can be used in other nations,” Shibasaki said. The UN predicts that the world’s cities will continue to balloon in population, increasing by an additional 2.5 billion people by the year 2050. If that is to be our future, then PIVE will contribute greatly to realizing the promise of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) agenda, which is to “Leave No One Behind.”

# TRANSFORMING AGRICULTURE FROM SPACE TO EMPOWER SMALLHOLDER FARMERS

*Smart farming—the application of leading-edge technologies such as robotics and IoT to agriculture—is spreading around the world, not least in Asia. An example of this is an innovative Japanese technology that leverages satellite imagery and AI to enable even smallholder farmers to adopt data-driven agriculture at affordable costs.*

Recent years have seen an acceleration in digital transformation (DX) in various sectors, including agriculture. While data-driven agriculture management is progressing in the United States and Europe—which mainly practice large-scale farming—innovative initiatives are also emerging in Japan and other Asian countries, where small-scale farms are the mainstream. One company driving the trend in Asia is Sagri Co., Ltd., a Japanese startup. Founded in 2018 with

the goal of finding solutions to the world's agricultural challenges, the company's strength lies in its technology that uses satellite data and AI to automatically conduct sophisticated analyses and forecasts on farmland.

By having AI learn from massive amounts of “teaching data” combining satellite data and actual on-the-ground information on farmland, it will become able to arrive at the right answers on its own. Not only can the system make predictions about each

parcel of farmland in terms of crop conditions and harvest yield, etc., but it can also analyze the soil, assessing the amount of nitrogen and carbon, pH values, and other conditions. As soil samples are normally required to make such analyses, the use of Sagri's system can significantly reduce both cost and labor.

In addition to its domestic business, Sagri is working to introduce the system among ordinary farmers in India and Thailand following pilot projects to tackle the agricultural challenges in those countries. In India, more than 12,000 farmers are making use of Sagri's soil analysis services, with some now able to reduce their chemical fertilizer consumption by nearly 20%. As this reduction helps to also reduce emissions of nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas, it can result in qualification for carbon credits. To turn these credits into a new source of revenue for farmers, Sagri is now undertaking procedures to obtain the qualification to receive them. The company also plans to launch the same system in Vietnam, Cambodia, and elsewhere. “Carbon



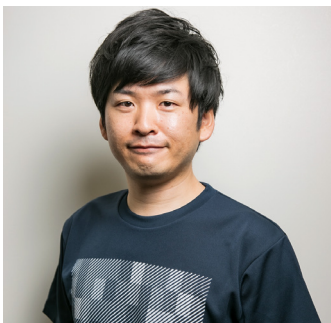
A farmland in Vietnam included in Sagri's project. Surveys were conducted on such information as the amount of fertilizer used.



With Sagri's service, crop conditions and soil analyses for each individual farm can be confirmed by digital devices such as smartphones (left). "Up to now, such technologies were rarely available to smallholder farmers, so our service has had a huge impact on optimizing seed and fertilizer amounts," said Chevdomoi Ravanth Mohanaram (on the right of the right photo), the COO of Sagri's Indian affiliate.

credits will be a great incentive for farmers, leading also to the decarbonization of the agriculture sector in emerging countries," said SAKAMOTO Kazuki, who heads the company's Asia business.

The foundation for such pioneering efforts is the farmland parcel in question. In agriculture, the size and shape of a particular plot of land, along with its unique conditions such as irrigation and sunlight, are the major factors in all decision-making, from what would make for the most suitable crops to how much fertilizer should be used. While that underscores the importance of delineating land parcels, in emerging countries, plots of land are not often delineated accurately. According to Sakamoto, "A land parcel represents, so to speak, the farmland's ID, serving as the foundation of its link to important information and analysis."



"If smallholder farmers can stabilize their income through data-driven agriculture, their children will have the means to receive an education and the chance to pursue their aspirations. It is our dream to create such a future," said SAKAMOTO Kazuki, who heads the company's Asia business.

Farm parcels in Suphan Buri Province in central Thailand that have been automatically delineated using satellite imagery (indicated by the red lines in the right-hand image). That proves that even the boundaries of small-scale farms whose shapes are unique and irregular can be accurately mapped.



Sagri has developed technology for the accurate and automatic mapping of diverse types of farmland based on satellite data. First, it provided AI with the vast amounts of information on farmland available in Japan, which includes many small-scale farms. The accuracy of the technology was then further enhanced by providing the AI with information about farmland in India, the company's first overseas business destination. "India's farmland is truly diverse in size and shape. Thanks to these inputs, our AI can now identify various kinds of farmland," said Chevdomoi Ravanth Mohanaram, the COO of the company's Indian affiliate. Also, when used in a pilot project in Thailand that was selected in 2020 to promote a project under the Japan-ASEAN Asia Digital Transformation Promotion Program, the system was highly acclaimed for being able to accurately delineate Thai farmland, which can be narrow and rolling.

In its business overseas, nothing is more important to Sagri than working with partners who are well-versed in local circumstances and culture. In Thailand, the firm has been developing a soil analysis model together with researchers at the Faculty of Agriculture, Kasetsart University, and a soil analysis project is now being prepared for launch with Bangkok Produce Merchandising, a subsidiary of the Charoen Pokphand Group, Thailand's largest conglomerate, aiming for social implementation. "We would like to work together with local people, rather than impose our technology or values on them. And the day will eventually come when we pass the baton to them, and they will manage the system's operations on their own," stated Sakamoto.

This novel approach to agriculture, developed jointly with local partners, should bring about further growth and an inclusive, mutually rewarding future. ●

An international U-18 friendship match dubbed JapaFunCup was held at Fukushima's J-Village Stadium. Victory went to the Southeast Asian team coached by Koga. JFA



## SOUTHEAST ASIA AND JAPAN: LINKED BY TIES OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE

*Japan has long conducted people-to-people exchange programs in a wide range of fields, including culture and sport, and has been strengthening its close cooperation with member states of ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) for the development and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region. Promoting mutual understanding will pave the way to a new level of partnership between these countries.*

Over the 50 years since ASEAN-Japan relations started in 1973, the two parties have deepened their ties of friendship not only in the political and economic spheres, but also in the fields of culture, arts and sports through people-to-people exchanges.

The “WA Project”: Toward Interactive Asia through “Fusion and Harmony,” announced at the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit Meeting in Tokyo in 2013, is part of that endeavor. The Japan Foundation Asia Center, set up for this project, has been implementing two main programs. One is Nihongo Partners, which dispatches Japanese language assistants throughout Asia to support local Japanese-language teachers, and the other is Arts and Cultural Exchange, which conducts artistic and cultural exchanges. One initiative of the latter is Asian Eleven, a sports exchange carried out in coordination with the Japan Football Association (JFA) and the Japan Professional Football League, which dispatches coaches and players to ASEAN nations to share their knowledge and experience of football in Japan. The goal of the program is for the people of Japan and



KOGA Takuma (center) was head coach for two and a half years at an academy for young athletes in Myanmar. The photo was taken at the JapaFunCup. JFA/AFL0



Top: Abdul Walid bin Haji Misli today works at the EdTech Centre in Brunei. He said that he is grateful that people he interacted with in Japan became interested in his country. Right: Students from Brunei who participated in the JENESYS program. The group stayed in private homes in Hakuba, Nagano Prefecture, where they learned how to make the local cuisine, and experienced the ski slopes. After returning home, they shared their experiences, and some have kept in touch with the Japanese students they befriended.



the countries of ASEAN to foster relationships as friendly rivals through football, and to take Asian football overall to a higher level.

Starting from October 2017, former Japanese pro football player KOGA Takuma spent roughly two and a half years as a head coach at the Myanmar Football Academy in Mandalay, where he trained young players of the next generation. “Myanmar has some very highly skilled individual players, and I see potential there for a big leap forward. They responded to my coaching by playing more and more proactively, which I found very gratifying,” Koga recalls.

The event that impressed Koga the most took place in 2019, when he served as head coach for a select team of players under 18, chosen from 11 Southeast Asian countries, who were brought to Japan to play a friendly match with a team selected from the prefectures of Japan’s Tohoku region. “It’s great if we succeeded in passing along some of our energy to the people of Tohoku, who were working really hard to reconstruct after the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011,” Koga said. The game was a close battle that ended with a penalty shootout victory for the Asian Eleven team.

The Japanese government also conducts a program called JENESYS (Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths) as one of Japan’s Friendship Ties Programs. The program, which started in 2007, invites young people of merit in the Asia-Pacific region to Japan and likewise sends young Japanese people to this area, the goal being to nurture future generations with a better understanding of

each other. By March 2023, 36,000 young people from ASEAN nations had come to Japan and 3,000 Japanese youths had visited the countries of ASEAN, each expanding their mutual understanding.

In March 2019, Abdul Walid bin Haji Misli came to Japan as a leader of 22 university students participating in JENESYS. “Every step and moment of being in Japan was electrifying and inspiring. Every visit and activity in which we participated was fun and amazing,” he recalls. The group visited a museum in Tokyo, interacted with Japanese college students, and stayed in Japanese homes. “The participants from Brunei really appreciated the discussions with Japanese students. This is a great program that allows our students to develop a mutual friendship and understanding through people-to-people exchanges, where we can continue to mature our bilateral relationship and strengthen our solidarity even at an early age,” he said.

Abdul Walid currently works at the EdTech Centre of Brunei’s Ministry of Education. “I really admire Japanese people’s work ethic and dedication. I determined myself to be as dedicated to my work after visiting Japan, so that I could contribute to my job more efficiently. Personally, I would love to go back to Japan and engage in a professional exchange to improve my work skills, especially in the areas of teaching and educational technology,” he adds.

Friendships, forged through interactions between the young people who hold the future in their hands, will be the foundation of a stronger partnership between Japan and the ASEAN nations. ●

# ASEAN-JAPAN COOPERATION AND THE NEW CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVE FOR FURTHER GROWTH

SEPTEMBER 6, 2023

Full Text: [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101\\_kishida/statement/202309/06speech.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202309/06speech.html)

In early September, Prime Minister Kishida visited the Republic of Indonesia and the Republic of India to attend ASEAN-related summit meetings and the G20 New Delhi Summit. On September 6, he delivered a speech at the ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum held in Jakarta, Indonesia, and announced the “Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative.”

## 1. Introduction

Distinguished guests and participants. Selamat pagi.

I am very much honored to have a chance to visit to Indonesia and to speak to you at this ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum as the Prime Minister of Japan, especially in this commemorative 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation and the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Indonesia.

Supported by the dramatic economic development of Indonesia and other ASEAN countries, the Indo-Pacific

Region is now a powerful driver of the global economy.

I think it is very timely that Indonesia has set the theme “Epicentrum of Growth” as this year’s ASEAN Chair.

I am proud that many cooperation projects from Japan will be introduced at this forum.

## 2. New Plan for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” and ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) shares fundamental principles such as openness, transparency, inclusiveness, and respect for international law with a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” which Japan has been promoting.

As a consistent supporter of ASEAN Centrality and unity, Japan was among the first countries to express its full support for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific in 2019.

And today, I hereby announce the “Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative” and declare that Japan will promote cooperation to strengthen connectivity in six areas.

## 3. Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative Overview

The six areas and concrete ideas are as follows.

The first is transportation infrastructure development. Japan facilitates the flow of people and goods among ASEAN countries by developing ports, roads, railroads, and airports. The projects implemented by Japan have expanded to worth 2.8 trillion yen. In addition to

At the Summit, Prime Minister Kishida stated that the following day (September 7) would mark exactly 100 days to go until the Commemorative Summit in Tokyo in December, and expressed his intention to accelerate preparations for the meeting in close cooperation with the ASEAN counterparts.







Leaders gathered at the 26th ASEAN-Japan Summit on September 6. At this meeting, a joint statement to establish the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was adopted.

hard infrastructure cooperation, we are promoting soft infrastructure cooperation through technical cooperation, continuously providing Japanese technology and knowledge.

The second area is “Digital Connectivity.” Japan will cooperate with ASEAN countries in promoting digitization and strengthening regional connectivity utilizing digital technology, as well as contributing to the security of cyberspace.

The third is “Maritime Cooperation.” This is an important element in strengthening connectivity between Japan and ASEAN countries, which are linked by the sea. Japan will assist ASEAN countries in enhancing their maritime law enforcement capacity, through training programs and grant of patrol vessels for the coast guard agencies and maritime police.

The fourth area is “Supply Chain Resilience.” Facing the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, ensuring a stable distribution of goods and food security have become important issues. Japan will contribute to supply chain resilience in the ASEAN region, and will build economies that can withstand a crisis together.

The fifth is “Electricity Connectivity.” The ASEAN region is experiencing rapid economic development, and demand for electric power is also growing. In order to ensure a stable electric power supply, Japan will support the improvement of electricity connectivity through the formulation of master plans and training programs.

Lastly, “Human and Knowledge Connectivity.” The foundation for the development of society is “people” and their “knowledge.” We will foster human resources in ASEAN countries through conducting personnel exchanges and training programs in a wide range of fields, as well as strengthen the network of people in Japan and ASEAN countries.

In these areas, Japan will provide capacity building

projects for 5,000 individuals over the next three years. By promoting technical cooperation with ASEAN countries and strengthening our network, Japan will grow together with ASEAN. We hope to build a future in which Japan and ASEAN can co-create new social values.

4. The Commemorative Summit

In concluding this 50th Year for ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, Japan will welcome the ASEAN Leaders to Tokyo and host the Commemorative Summit in Tokyo in December.

Together with the ASEAN Leaders, we would like to jointly launch a new vision for the general direction of ASEAN-Japan relations and cooperation in the coming years.

We will launch a wide range of cooperation initiatives in the political and security, economic, cultural and social fields, and further promote attractive cultural, people-to-people and intellectual exchanges and support for Japanese language education.

Through these initiatives, let us work together to pass on long-standing ASEAN-Japan “Golden Friendship” to the next generation and to make the new era our “Golden Opportunity.”

Thank you very much. Terima kasih. ●



As one of six areas of the Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative, Japan is promoting the development of land, sea, and air transport infrastructure, including railroads, ports, and airports. Various projects are moving forward, including construction of the Jakarta Mass Rapid Transit System in Indonesia (left) and development of Sihanoukville Port in Cambodia (right). AFP/AFLO (left), JICA (right)

The above text was republished from the website of the Prime Minister’s Office of Japan: [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101\\_kishida/statement/202309/06speech.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202309/06speech.html)

On November 4, 2023, Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio delivered a policy speech at the joint session of the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives.



## POLICY SPEECH AT THE JOINT SESSION OF THE PHILIPPINE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES: HEART-TO-HEART TIES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

NOVEMBER 4, 2023

Full Text: [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101\\_kishida/statement/202311/04policyspeech.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202311/04policyspeech.html)

From November 3 to 5, Prime Minister Kishida visited the Philippines and Malaysia and held meetings with the leaders of these countries. In the Philippines, the prime minister delivered a policy speech at the Joint Session of the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives.

### 1. Introduction

Honorable Juan Miguel F. Zubiri, President of the Senate of the Republic of the Philippines,

Honorable Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of the Philippines,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat.

The Philippines, with the second largest population among ASEAN countries and more than 300,000 citizens living in Japan, is an irreplaceable partner for Japan. I am honored to have the opportunity to be the first Japanese Prime Minister to speak here at the Congress of the Philippines, which has a long tradition.

In 1977, former Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda delivered a speech in Manila in the presence of President Ferdinand Edralin Marcos, Sr. I am reminded that in the

speech, he expressed his desire to build a heart-to-heart relationship of trust with Southeast Asia including the Philippines, as equal partners.

A half century has passed since then. Exchanges between our two countries have deepened, and today, the relationship between Japan and the Philippines is stronger than ever.

Looking back over the long history of our bilateral relationship, it has not always been smooth sailing. We cannot forget the endeavor of our predecessors based on the spirit of tolerance, including the pardon of Japanese war criminals by President Quirino in 1953, which paved the way for our two countries to overcome difficult times and build the friendly relationship we enjoy today.

Today, Japan-Philippines relations have reached the point of being called a “golden age.” This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the friendship and cooperation

between Japan and ASEAN, and in December, we will host a commemorative summit meeting in Tokyo.

Against this backdrop, I am very delighted to have the opportunity to visit Manila for the first time as Prime Minister and to express my views on Japan's foreign policy, including strengthening relations with the Philippines and ASEAN.

## 2. Japan's Efforts to Address Challenges of the International Community: the Importance of the Philippines and ASEAN

Ladies and gentlemen,

The international community is currently at a historic turning point, and the international order based on the rule of law that we have taken for granted is under serious threat. The international community is also facing complex and interrelated challenges such as climate change and infectious diseases. Under these circumstances, we cannot afford to have the world be divided based on ideologies and values.

At the G7 Summit in Hiroshima in May this year, which I had the honor to chair, I listened to the diverse voices of the international community, including those of the countries referred to as the "Global South." What I strongly felt there was the need to return to the very basic foundation that everyone can share. What I emphasize as such a foundation is the idea of "human dignity."

There is no better place to stress the significance of "human dignity" than here in the Philippine Congress. The Constitution of the Philippines stipulates that the Congress shall give highest priority to protecting and enhancing the rights of all people to "human dignity."

In order for everyone to live with dignity, it is essential to build a peaceful and stable world. From this standpoint, I confirmed with President Marcos during his visit to Japan in February that we would work together to maintain and strengthen the free and open international order based on the rule of law.

Furthermore, during my visit to the U.S. in January, I expressed my strong determination to defend a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)." Also in March, I announced a new plan to realize the FOIP. Underlying this plan is our determination to lead the international community toward cooperation rather than division and confrontation, and to defend "freedom" and "the rule of law" at all costs.

Today, I stand here to share with you my renewed

commitment to further advance these efforts and to share with you my thoughts on how to do so.

There are "four pillars" in the new FOIP plan. The first of these pillars is to uphold "principles for peace and rules for prosperity." This is the idea of building "peace" by confirming and promoting the basic principles that the international community should uphold.

For example, stability in the Mindanao region is linked to peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. From this perspective, Japan has supported the peace process and economic development over the past two decades. We just announced yesterday in our meeting with President Marcos, the provision of heavy equipment for disaster management in Mindanao. This cooperation is based on the vision of the FOIP.

## 3. The 50th Anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

Ladies and gentlemen,

Fifty years ago, Japan has initiated dialogue with ASEAN ahead of the rest of the world. Since then, Japan and ASEAN have helped each other in times of difficulty and nurtured a relationship of trust with a heart-to-heart connection through exchanges among peoples in a wide range of fields and at various levels.

One of the lessons learned from this experience is the second pillar of the new FOIP plan, "addressing challenges in an Indo-Pacific way." This is the idea of addressing global challenges in a realistic and practical manner, and enhancing the resilience and sustainability of each country as an equal partner.

For example, COVID-19 expanded divisions and disparities in the international community. It is evident that the world as a whole must respond to international health challenges. Japan will support the ASEAN Centre for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies to develop as a regional center of excellence.

Prime Minister Kishida held a Japan-Philippines Summit meeting with H.E. Mr. Ferdinand R. Marcos, President of the Republic of the Philippines, and attended a banquet hosted by the president with Mrs. KISHIDA Yuko.



Japan will also promote the third pillar of the new FOIP plan, which is to strengthen “multi-layered connectivity.” Needless to say, ASEAN is one of the priority regions in overcoming vulnerabilities by strengthening the linkages among countries.

Japan will promote cooperation in line with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which resonates with the FOIP. We will work with ASEAN to ensure that many countries support and cooperate for the principles and activities set forth in the AOIP, such as openness, transparency, inclusiveness, and a rules-based framework.

In the G7 Hiroshima Leaders’ Communiqué, Japan led the way in strongly articulating our commitment to strengthen coordination with ASEAN, to support ASEAN centrality and unity, and to promote cooperation in line with the AOIP.

In March, Japan announced a new contribution of US\$100 million to the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF). In addition, in September, Japan launched the “Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative” to strengthen connectivity in both tangible and intangible fronts. We will also mobilize private-sector funds to support ASEAN’s resilience and sustainability.

In the commemorative summit meeting in December, we will jointly formulate a vision to create a new era of sustainable and prosperous development together, while building “trust” for the next generation.

#### 4. Progress in Japan-Philippines Relations

##### (1) From a “Golden Age” to New Heights

Ladies and gentlemen,

Japan and the Philippines have strengthened their relationship at all levels in recent years. In 2016, which marked the 60th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations, then Their Majesties Emperor and Empress of Japan visited the Philippines. In February this

year, President Marcos, together with President of the Senate Zubiri and Speaker of the House of Representatives Romualdez, visited Japan.

In addition, various exchanges and cooperation between the two countries are underway, such as visit of members of the Japan-Philippines Parliamentarians’ Friendship League to the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines this summer. Now I would like to introduce some specific examples of our cooperation.

##### (2) Security and Defense Cooperation

First, security and defense cooperation.

The last pillar of the new FOIP plan is “extending efforts for security and safe use of the sea to the air.” Japan has hitherto provided 12 ships to the Coast Guard to play a part in improving the Philippines’ maritime security capability. Furthermore, a Japanese firm delivered a warning and control radar to the Philippine Air Force last month in order to improve Air Domain Awareness.

Also yesterday, Japan agreed with the Philippines to provide coastal surveillance radars to the Philippine Navy as the first cooperation project in the world under Japan’s newly established Official Security Assistance (OSA) this year. Japan will continue to contribute to the enhancement of the Philippines’ security capabilities, thereby contributing to regional peace and stability.

Furthermore, we concurred with President Marcos to commence formal negotiations on a Japan-Philippines reciprocal access agreement (RAA). Japan intends to further deepen strategic cooperation with the Philippines in the future.

##### (3) Economy and Investment

Next, I would like to touch upon cooperation in the areas of economy and investment.

Japan is the largest donor to the Philippines. Through the 600 billion yen public-private assistance announced in February which runs through March next year, we will continue to support economic and social development, in line with President Marcos’ “Build Better More” program.

For example, the construction of the Philippines’ first subway system is underway in Manila with Japanese assistance. I am going to visit the construction site later today. I am proud of the fact that Japan can play a part in this subway project, which is said to be a 50-year dream.

Furthermore, Japan is one of the largest investors



Prime Minister Kishida visited the Metro Manila Subway Project construction site and a Philippine Coast Guard patrol ship (photo), both supported by Japan.

in the Philippines on a private-sector basis. Public-private partnerships and investments in companies that contribute to decarbonization are also underway. The public and private sectors are eagerly working together to support the economic growth of the Philippines.

We welcome the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of Tourism. We hope that through efforts such as the FIBA Basketball World Cup co-hosted by Japan, the Philippines, and Indonesia this year, our “Golden Friendship” will lead to the next generation.

#### (4) Cooperation on Global Issues

Japan and the Philippines have also deepened coordination in addressing global issues.

As a native of Hiroshima, nuclear disarmament is my lifework. I will continue to promote realistic and practical efforts toward a “world without nuclear weapons.” With this in mind, I am pleased that in September we were able to co-host the Commemorative High-Level Event on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) with Foreign Minister Manalo.

Regarding climate change, which the Marcos administration also attaches great importance to, we are deepening cooperation on energy transition through the realization of the “Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC)” concept. We will hold the AZEC summit meeting, and will work with participating countries to pursue the common goal of “Net Zero” via various pathways for energy transitions according to each country’s circumstance.

#### (5) Strengthening Japan-Philippines-U.S. Cooperation

Lastly, I would like to offer a few words about the cooperation among Japan, the Philippines, and the U.S.

In order to maintain and strengthen a free and open international order based on the rule of law, multilayered cooperation among allies and like-minded countries is crucial. In September, President Marcos, U.S. Vice President Harris, and I exchanged views for the first time and confirmed to enhance cooperation.

In the South China Sea, trilateral cooperation to protect the freedom of the sea is underway. In addition to the participation of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces in the joint U.S.-Philippines exercises held last month, the first joint exercise by the coast guard agencies of the three countries was held in June this year. Through these efforts,

let us protect the maritime order, which is governed by laws and rules, not by force.

#### 5. Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I have mentioned, the relationship between Japan and the Philippines has made great strides over the past half century. I believe that the people-to-people connection is the bedrock of this relationship.

I offered flowers yesterday at the monument to Dr. José Rizal. Dr. Rizal, who had once stayed in Japan in his youth and had the opportunity to interact with Japanese people, envisioned that our two countries would one day engage in a full-fledged relationship.

Indeed, exchanges between the peoples of the two countries have been unwavering. After the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, the Philippines sent a medical assistance team, and Filipino caregiver candidates remained in the affected areas to provide dedicated care, saying, “We cannot abandon the elderly people.”

In return, when Typhoon Yolanda struck in 2013, Japanese people from the disaster-stricken area of Tohoku went to the Philippines to assist in the recovery and reconstruction efforts.

This kind of relationship is what former Prime Minister of Japan Fukuda articulated, a “heart-to-heart” relationship. I believe that it is the responsibility of those living in the present to take the “heart-to-heart ties” established by our predecessors to new heights and pass them on to the next generation.

The slogan for the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation is “Golden Friendship, Golden Opportunities.” At the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit Meeting in December, I hope to work with President Marcos and other ASEAN leaders to ensure that the “golden friendship” between Japan and ASEAN will be a “golden opportunity” that leads to the next generation.

To friends of the Philippines, ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the warm hospitality upon my visit to the Philippines. I will continue to do my utmost to ensure that the strong friendship between Japan and the Philippines will last and further develop in the future.

Thank you very much for your time today. Salamat po. ●

# SNOW PRESENTS THE BEAUTY OF JAPANESE WINTER

*In some Japanese regions, snow falls heavily during the winter.  
This season offers unexpected encounters with nature.  
Even famous sites, visited in winter, reveal different scenery.  
In the harsh weather, moving animals convey warm emotions.*



## CASTLE IN THE SNOW

Hirosaki Castle, located in Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture, is one of the few castles with its original main tower still standing. Remains of the three-storied donjon, castle gate, and other features are open to the public in a large park, famous for its cherry blossoms in the spring and warm colors in the autumn. However, the castle in winter also stands apart. During the annual festival in February, snow lanterns and small *kamakura* (snow domes) are lit, and visitors find themselves immersed in a fantastical world, gazing up at the castle floating in the dark sky.

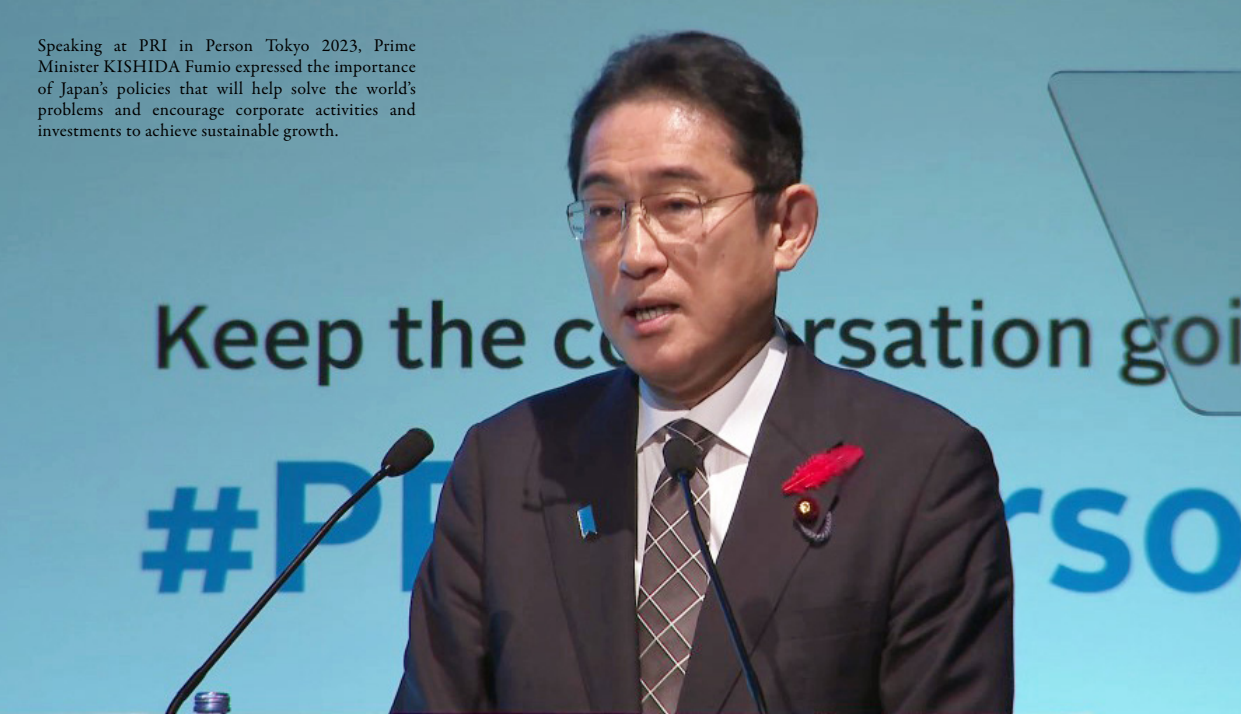


ARLO

## ANIMALS IN THE SNOW

Various animals adapted to snowy scenery live in Japan. The subspecies of the Siberian flying squirrel, Ezo-momonga, that is found only in Hokkaido has adorably large eyes on a small body of about 15 cm. Also found only in Hokkaido, a subspecies of the long-tailed tit, Shima-enaga, a small bird with cute eyes and downy feathers, is appropriately called the “snow fairy.” The likelihood of spotting these creatures is high in the winter, when the trees have shed their leaves. The famous snow monkeys, wild Japanese macaques who live in the monkey park in Nagano Prefecture, Jigokudani Yaenkoen, are the only monkeys in the world who soak themselves in hot springs. Precious wildlife seen only during the Japanese winter is something that you should see with your own eyes.

Speaking at PRI in Person Tokyo 2023, Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio expressed the importance of Japan's policies that will help solve the world's problems and encourage corporate activities and investments to achieve sustainable growth.



# JAPAN'S INCREASINGLY ATTRACTIVE FINANCIAL MARKETS:

## PROMOTING JAPAN AS A LEADING ASSET MANAGEMENT CENTER

*To promote it as a leading asset management center, Japan is advancing a variety of reforms through cooperation with the public and private sectors. A range of events were held in the fall of 2023 aimed at investors and asset management companies from around the world, providing a great opportunity to communicate the appeal of Japan's financial markets.*

Japan is undertaking various initiatives to promote it as a leading asset management center. One of these initiatives, dubbed "Japan Weeks" by the Financial Services Agency, was a series of events running from September to October 2023 that welcomed overseas investors and asset management companies to Japan.

Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio also took the stage daily at related events to announce various moves to realize that goal. At PRI in Person Tokyo 2023, a forum for leading investors who are driving global responsible investment, he stated, "Our objective is that public pension funds reinforce their

work on sustainable finance and spread the movement to the whole financial market." The Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) are advocated by the United Nations (UN) for the purpose of incorporating ESG (environmental, social, and governance) considerations into investors' decision-making processes. At the forum, global stakeholders responsible for promoting the PRI were thrilled to hear Japan's prime minister announce that at least seven representative public pension funds, worth 90 trillion yen, or some 600 billion dollars in assets under management (AUM), will start preparations



for newly becoming signatories to the PRI.

With such statements being made, how do Japan's financial markets appear in the eyes of investors around the world? According to ONOZUKA Emi, president and CEO of Eminent Group, "Japan offers three attractive points as a capital market." A specialist in sustainable finance, she has more than 20 years of experience as an institutional investor at several global financial institutions. Japan's first big attraction is that it boasts nearly 4,000 listed companies, considerably more than other leading markets in Asia, indicating the country's high liquidity and market depth. Japan's second big draw is the level of trust in its regulators. Only with such trust can investors around the world focus on their investment activities. The third point is that Japan is fundamentally an open market in which anyone can participate. Some countries may have a greater number of companies or areas for investment, but they sometimes need to make further regulatory and supervisory improvements, and their markets are not always open to everyone. "Scale, trust, and openness: those are Japan's three strengths," affirms Onozuka.

She also goes on to say that Japan should focus on the following to become even more attractive as a market: "Many firms here need to improve their investment efficiency. In terms of winning investment from overseas, the pressing issues are top management being true to their words and better accountability as an outcome measure, as well as more English support." In that regard, expectations are growing for the establishment of "special business zones for financial and asset management business," which Prime Minister Kishida announced in New York in September 2023; the details will be announced by summer 2024. Various measures to enhance the business and living environment, including the improvement of administrative services in English,



Top: ONOZUKA Emi took the stage at PRI in Person Tokyo 2023 to give a speech on leadership, innovation, and responsible investing.

Right: Onozuka has more than 20 years of experience as an institutional investor, specializing in sustainable finance (ESG, impact investing). She engages in a wide range of activities, including advisory services, research, writing, and lectures on sustainable finance and business value creation.



will be considered for the establishment of the special business zones.

Meanwhile, Onozuka has high hopes for Japan's commitment to ESG investment, as made by Prime Minister Kishida at the recent PRI forum. "For domestic and international investors, improving corporate governance and addressing sustainability issues have become essential prerequisites for evaluating and funding a company. Accelerating sustainable finance, which is strengthened through the joint efforts of the public and private sectors, should become an additional advantage of the Japanese market. If we can capitalize on that, there is a good chance that the domestic market will take a leadership role in transition finance regionwide in Asia."

With Prime Minister Kishida's determination, Japan will continue to work together with both the public and private sectors to make its financial markets even more robust and sustainable. ●

# 18th Annual Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum

October 8 (Sun) - 12 (Thu), 2023



## NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL ERA: THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF FACT-CHECKING

*The Existing Practices against Disinformation, or EPaD, which constitute a collection of the existing practices on countering disinformation compiled by Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, were announced in October 2023. Their emergence highlights the need for international collaboration among multiple stakeholders for fact-checking, which is the process of verifying the factual accuracy of publicized information.*

With the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, disinformation has become commonplace. At the same time, various issues related to human rights violations and copyright infringements have begun to

emerge along with such advances in technologies as generative AI. We therefore live at a time when everyone recognizes the importance of checking facts' accuracy.

The Japanese government encourages voluntary efforts in private-sector fact-checking. As

part of those efforts, Japan hosted October's Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Kyoto 2023. The IGF is an annual forum in which many different stakeholders—from government and the private sector to technical and academic communities, as well as civil

Attending a special session on AI at IGF Kyoto 2023, Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio remarked, "In order to promote the distribution of reliable information, it would be effective to develop and promote the diffusion of technologies that can prove and confirm the originator of the information. The international community as a whole must share that understanding and deal with those issues with a sense of solidarity."

society groups—come together to engage in dialogue on an equal footing on various issues related to the Internet.

The EPaD, announced at IGF Kyoto 2023 as a collection of existing practices on countering disinformation, were prepared by various stakeholders, including private companies and civil society groups. Since Japan was this year's G7 Chair, its Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications compiled the list, which was first declared in April 2023 in the Ministerial Declaration of the G7 Digital and Tech Ministers' Meeting in Takasaki City, Gunma Prefecture.

The EPaD were made public at one of the IGF Kyoto 2023 sessions, Sharing "Existing Practices against Disinformation (EPaD)"—hosted by the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications—at which participants engaged in lively discussion on international collaboration and cooperation. The moderator of the session was FURUTA Daisuke, editor-in-chief of the Japan Fact-check Center, which is one of three fact-checking organizations in Japan certified by the International Fact-Checking Network.

Furuta believes that the public release of the EPaD has enabled advanced cases from the G7 and European countries to be more widely shared with those engaged in fact-checking, and that everyone involved has learned a great deal. Reflecting on the significance of holding the session at IGF Kyoto 2023, he says, "Speakers from the Philippines and Indonesia

shared the importance of multi-stakeholder cooperation and media information literacy education including the development of grassroots fact-checkers. The technical cooperation described by the speaker from Microsoft was also encouraging."

Fact-checking takes a huge amount of time and effort. As Furuta states, "That is why it is vital to have collaboration among multi-stakeholder groups such as the media industry, experts, and public institutions, as well as among international fact-checking organizations. It is important to learn from the best practices in other countries and regions and to build on the strengths of each organization, such as strong expertise in AI analysis or

educational initiatives."

Voicing his thoughts about the future direction that Japan should take in the field of fact-checking, Furuta goes on to say, "As an Asian country that continues to maintain a stable democracy, Japan should establish a greater presence in the field of countering the misinformation and disinformation that threaten society. Japan also could serve as a hub for fact-checking and education in Asia."

The Japanese government will continue to work to increase awareness of the EPaD initiative, which it has led as the G7 Presidency, as well as to communicate the importance of international cooperation beyond public, private, and academic frameworks. ●

Right: FURUTA Daisuke, editor-in-chief of the Japan Fact-check Center. After working at Asahi Shimbun and serving as the founding editor of BuzzFeed Japan, Furuta established "media-collab" as its CEO. He currently works as a journalist and media consultant. JUN TSUBOIKE  
Bottom: Screenshots from the session on Sharing "Existing Practices against Disinformation (EPaD)" at IGF Kyoto 2023. Seen in the upper left image (from left to right) are FURUTA Daisuke, editor-in-chief of the Japan Fact-check Center, Aribowo Sasmito, co-founder of MAFINDO in Indonesia, and YAMAGUCHI Shinichi, executive research fellow and associate professor at the Center for Global Communications of the International University of Japan. The upper right image shows Madeline Shepherd, Digital Safety Lead at Microsoft Operations Pte Ltd in Australia, and Chay F. Hofileña, editor of Rappler in the Philippines, appears in the one below.



be able to do our jobs well. And if we're able to do our jobs well, then we can be able to proactive



# THE DISCHARGE OF ALPS TREATED WATER: ENSURING SAFETY AND PAVING THE WAY TOWARD DECOMMISSIONING

*At Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings' Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, where efforts for decommissioning and reconstruction have been underway ever since the accident caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, the discharge of "ALPS treated water" into the sea started in August 2023. The process is being undertaken with safety as the top priority, under strict safety management and in partnership with third-party organizations. Why is the discharge taking place, and what future is envisioned beyond it?*

Since the accident at Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings' Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station (NPS), which occurred shortly after the Great East Japan Earthquake struck the area on March 11, 2011, the company has been advancing decommissioning work to reduce the risk from

radioactive materials to local people and the environment. Such efforts are now reaching a major turning point. Concentrations of radioactive materials in the surrounding sea area have sufficiently decreased, and so have the radiation levels measured at monitoring posts at the site

boundary. Although at the time of the accident it was impossible to enter the site without wearing protective clothes, workers can now wear regular work clothes in about 96% of the area.

"The major challenge from now on will be the retrieval of 'fuel debris,' which is a mixture of melted fuel inside the reactor and reactor materials that have solidified," says Professor OKAMOTO Koji of the Graduate School of Engineering, the University of Tokyo, who has been involved from the start in the decommissioning process. Fuel debris retrieval is one of the most difficult challenges during that process, but according to the professor, "it is necessary to overcome this challenge in order for decommissioning to proceed further."

An essential step in taking on this difficult task is the discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea, which began in August 2023. This is water that contains radioactive materials from inside the buildings of Fukushima Daiichi NPS, and



The discharge of ALPS treated water into the sea has begun at Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings' Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station (center). Decommissioning work has been conducted carefully, with safety as the top priority.

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN COMPANY/ALJ PRESS PHOTO

has been purified and treated by the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) until it satisfies safety standards for all radioactive materials other than tritium. The tanks for storing ALPS treated water on the site are large and their number is increasing, already exceeding a thousand. In order to safely proceed with the decommissioning work, the space occupied by the tanks is needed for the construction of new facilities. It thus became necessary to discharge the water and reduce the number of tanks.

The ALPS treated water is discharged under strict safety management and monitoring. All radioactive materials are removed by ALPS to meet the regulatory standards, with the exception of tritium. And for the level of tritium to also fully satisfy safety standards, the water is diluted with seawater before discharge to reduce the tritium concentration to under 1,500 Becquerels/L, which is approximately one-seventh of the World Health Organization

(WHO) standards for drinking water.

“Japan has made a huge effort to ensure that radiation doses for people and the environment are extremely low,” says Jim Smith, a professor of environmental science at the University of Portsmouth in England, who studies the effects of radioactive materials on the environment and people. “The release will be conducted over 30 years, which is much longer than would strictly be needed to meet safety standards. This means that annual radiation doses to people and the environment are vanishingly small.”

In addition to thorough confirmation prior to discharge that the ALPS treated water satisfies the discharge limit, the concentration of tritium and other nuclides in the surrounding seawater and marine products are monitored both before and after the start of the discharge, with the results posted on the Internet.\* To further ensure transparency, the International Atomic Energy



Top: Storage tanks containing ALPS treated water line the grounds of the Fukushima Daiichi NPS. Reducing the number of tanks by discharging the water into the sea will make it possible to build the facilities needed for further decommissioning work. <sup>JUJ</sup>

Bottom: Professor OKAMOTO Koji has held his post at the Graduate School of Engineering, the University of Tokyo, since 2004. While conducting research on decommissioning, he regularly visits the Fukushima Daiichi NPS, and discusses and advises on issues faced in the field. Since 2018, he has concurrently been serving as the Director General of the Collaborative Laboratories for Advanced Decommissioning Science of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency.

Agency (IAEA) has been and will be conducting monitoring—in addition to setting up an office in the Fukushima Daiichi NPS area with personnel on site—and will continue to review the safety of the discharge.

Under this system, the first discharge of about 7,800 m<sup>3</sup> of water was fully implemented from August 24 to September 11, 2023. Tritium concentrations confirmed by monitoring were well below the regulatory standard. “The fact that the discharge was carried out safely is a very big step forward in terms of paving the way to fuel debris retrieval,” says Okamoto. To protect people and the environment, Japan will progress, step by step, with the discharge of ALPS treated water and decommissioning efforts, with safety as the top priority. ●



Left: On August 22, 2023, IAEA personnel witnessed the sampling of water treated by ALPS and diluted with seawater, prior to its first discharge at the Fukushima Daiichi NPS. In July, the IAEA released a comprehensive report on the safety review of the ALPS treated water, concluding that Japan’s approach and activities regarding the discharge of the water into the sea are “consistent with relevant international safety standards,” and that the discharge “will have a negligible radiological impact on people and the environment.” <sup>TEPCO/AFPIA/FLO</sup>

Right: Professor Jim Smith of the University of Portsmouth, England, is an environmental scientist who has long studied the impacts of the nuclear accidents at Chernobyl and Fukushima on people and the environment. <sup>SAM SHAW</sup>

\*For detailed information on the monitoring of ALPS treated water  
 Fisheries Agency (<https://www.jfa.maff.go.jp/e/inspection/index.html>) Ministry of the Environment (<https://shorisui-monitoring.env.go.jp/en/>)  
 Nuclear Regulation Authority (<https://radioactivity.nra.go.jp/en/list/309/list-1.html>)  
 Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry ([https://www.meti.go.jp/earthquake/nuclear/hairo\\_osensui/english/shirou\\_alps/monitoring/](https://www.meti.go.jp/earthquake/nuclear/hairo_osensui/english/shirou_alps/monitoring/))

# LEVERAGING FUKUSHIMA'S “HOPE TOURISM” FOR A DISASTER-RESILIENT FUTURE

*Fukushima Prefecture is the only place on Earth to have encountered the compound disaster of a powerful earthquake, a devastating tsunami, and a nuclear accident. The prefecture-wide endeavor Hope Tourism takes visitors to afflicted areas to learn from this disaster with their own eyes and ears, offering a personal experience that redirects their behavior toward building a more sustainable future.*

The Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum in Futaba Town, Fukushima Prefecture

is located 4 km north of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. Here, the memories and lessons of a compound natural disaster accompanied by a nuclear accident—something never before experienced—are conveyed to the world and to future generations. Museum staff member ENDO Miku, who was nine years old at the time of the disaster in March 2011, is one of its “storytellers.” “It is rewarding to know that talking about the disaster in our own words can make this experience resonate personally for our listeners, and

that this can raise their awareness of disaster prevention,” Endo says. She admits that her own recollections are weakening, but adds, “I don’t want the experience of Fukushima to fade. I want to help save every life that I possibly can. That’s why I keep doing this.” The Memorial Museum opened its doors in 2020, and more than 200,000 people have since passed through them.

“Dark tourism,” in which tourists hoping to experience history visit sites of human tragedies, such as the remnants of wars and natural disasters, is drawing attention around the world. “Hope Tourism” is the name given by the prefecture to a study tour that takes people around Fukushima for immersive understanding. It has been actively accepting visitors from Japan and abroad since 2016, and the Memorial Museum is one of its venues. Participants visit areas devastated by the disaster and see Fukushima as it really is, experiencing aspects that remain absent from ordinary media coverage. They talk to local residents and participate in workshops where they consider how lessons drawn from the disaster can be utilized for the future. The hope is that visitors



Top: Visitors learning that the tsunami reached a height of 4 meters in the spot where the Memorial Museum stands today. Bottom: ENDO Miku is a staff member and “storyteller” at the Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum. She often speaks to children born after the disaster, feeling that she can help them better understand it because she is closer to them in age.



will gain new perspectives through “seeing, listening, and considering.” The tour touches on issues such as the disposal of soil collected during decontamination procedures, and population outflows.

“When you hear the term Hope Tourism, it may be misunderstood as solely emphasizing recovery, but that’s not the case. Participants look at both the light and dark sides of Fukushima, feel hope in the resilience of Fukushima, and leave with a newfound affection for the region. As a result, the increase in people who understand Fukushima becomes a source of hope for the local residents,” says William McMichael, associate professor at Fukushima University’s International Center.

McMichael was a step ahead of the prefecture when he launched the Fukushima Ambassadors Program in 2012. This is an innovative short-term study-abroad program in which international students spend 10 days in Fukushima first learning the reasons for the nuclear accident and the details of the compound disaster, then discussing the issues involved, and finally considering Fukushima’s future. Activities may include visiting the Fukushima

Daiichi Nuclear Power Station or helping plant cherry trees in disaster-affected communities. The content of the program has evolved along with the situation, but the primary aim is to show the world what is actually taking place in the region.

The program has been conducted 15 times, with more than 200 international student participants. “Many students continue to hold Fukushima in their hearts even after returning home,” said McMichael. “For example, students studying nuclear energy are left with a profound impact the moment they arrive in Fukushima. Despite the immense challenges the region has faced, they witness the resilience of its people and gain knowledge beyond what textbooks can offer. This experience inspires them to take on their responsibilities with a strong commitment to safety. In essence, they come to Fukushima to learn about the disaster, but end up learning invaluable life lessons from their experience. I find it truly heartening to see this level of dedication.”

McMichael is presently training English-speaking guides to expand Hope Tourism. A certain



Top left: Canadian-born Associate Professor McMichael came to Fukushima entirely by chance. He was assigned to Fukushima as a Coordinator for International Relations of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, and fell in love with the warmth of its people and its beautiful nature. “I was frustrated by the world’s misconceptions about Fukushima after the nuclear accident,” he said. That is why he started study programs for international students making sure that the reality of the situation can be made known. THE FUKUSHIMA MINYU SHIMBUN

Top right: In McMichael’s study program, students discuss in groups the lessons learned and the knowledge they wish to share at the end of their tour.

Bottom: A visit by international students to the Naraha Center for Remote Control Technology Development, which is developing remote robots to conduct the decommissioning of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

phrase is deeply etched in his memory—words shouted out at a series of outdoor rock festivals held in the prefecture half a year after the disaster: “Nothing beats Fukushima, does it?!” True to these words, the people of the prefecture gain encouragement by spinning threads of hope with the help of visitors who learn from the Fukushima experience. Together, they are taking steps into a bright future. ●

Shobuta Beach, packed with people during the summer, opened for tourism in 1888.



# THE ROADMAP TO A BLUE FLAG BEACH AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN MIYAGI

*In June 2023, a beach in the Tohoku region, in the northeast of Japan, received international environmental recognition by winning Blue Flag certification. Now everyone can enjoy the beautiful sea there, preserved after the catastrophic earthquake of March 2011, through the efforts of those who love the region.*

Shichigahama (literally meaning “seven beaches” in Japanese) in Miyagi Prefecture is a small town on a peninsula jutting into the ocean along the eastern coast of Japan’s Tohoku region. Surrounded by water on three sides, it is said to have got its name from its seven beaches, each with a village formed around it. One of the seven beaches, Shobuta Beach, is home to a historic bathing resort that opened in 1888, Tohoku’s first such seaside resort and the third ever in Japan.

It was also this beach that, in June 2023, won Blue Flag certification:

an international environmental designation awarded to beaches, marinas, and sustainable-tourism boats worldwide that meet stringent criteria for water quality, safety, and accessibility. The international NGO Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), headquartered in Denmark, is promoting the designation around the world in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Activities promoting blue



GOKO Akitsugu comes from Murata Town in south-central Miyagi Prefecture. At the time of the 2011 earthquake, he was working some 700 km away in Aichi Prefecture, but moved to Shichigahama having volunteered to help with reconstruction efforts. After working for an NPO providing support for disaster victims, he joined the staff of the Shichigahama Town Tourism Association.



tourism, including the acquisition of Blue Flag status, are becoming popular in many parts of Japan. Blue tourism is a type of sustainable tourism that aims to protect the local environment and achieve sustainable development by utilizing the natural landscape and fisheries of coastal areas as tourism resources.

GOKO Akitsugu of the Shichigahama Town Tourism Association has been instrumental in campaigning for Shichigahama's blue tourism. "Since Shichigahama is a seaside town, we felt that we needed to educate residents about the current state of the ocean and what should be done to protect it, and that we as a tourism association also needed to learn more. It was that thinking that fit with the Blue Flag philosophy," he remarked.

To become a Blue Flag beach, a beach must meet 33 criteria in four areas: environmental education and information, water quality, environmental management, and safety and services. Shobuta Beach was able to obtain Blue Flag status in the space of just one year thanks to their remarkably fast-paced actions, including regular water-quality inspections, the provision of facilities for the physically disabled, and the installation of signs and making of broadcasts in foreign languages.

Many people enjoy not only swimming at the beach, but also engaging in marine sports such as surfing and bodyboarding; yachting and triathlon competitions are also held there from time to time. From the coast, paragliders can be seen



enjoying the view of Matsushima, recognized as one of the three most scenic spots in Japan, known for its stunning archipelago scenery. Shobuta Beach is also awash with diverse types of seasonal seafood, including the finest seaweed, designated worthy even of the Imperial Household. And despite its location—just 30 minutes or so away by car from Sendai, Tohoku's largest city—Shichigahama is ensconced in the sedate pace of rich natural beauty.

Let us return our attention back to the story of Goko—who, in fact, is not from Shichigahama. He arrived in the town after the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011 as a volunteer, helping to take care of the disaster victims and their mental well-being. "I saw people sobbing as they spoke of their experiences of the disaster, and children painfully saying goodbye to volunteers. It made me want to ensure that my relationship with them would be more than just a fleeting one, so I extended my stay as a volunteer for quite a while, and we became like family," he said. "The people of Shichigahama are immensely proud of their small town and do their utmost for the local community. That's why



Top: Matsushima as seen from Mt. Tamozan in Shichigahama. The area's landscape, with about 260 islands dotting the sea, has fascinated people since ancient times.

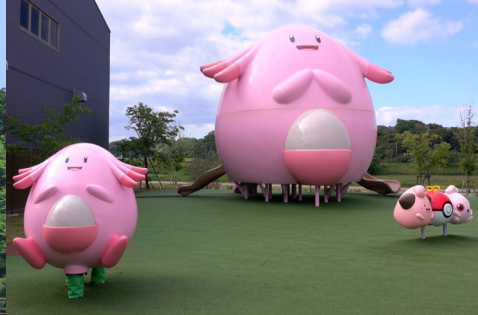
Bottom: Shichigahama was formerly home to a popular summer retreat for foreigners, as famous as the forested town of Karuizawa in Nagano Prefecture. Now, the same area comprises the Shichigahama International Village, which is the town's cultural hub where various events such as concerts and stage performances take place.

they didn't give up when faced with the earthquake and have successfully rebuilt; that, I think, is one of the attractions of the town. I want many people to discover Shichigahama through blue tourism."

The people of Shichigahama are still working strenuously to overcome the earthquake's aftermath, as well as to protect and pass on the beauty of the sea. The Blue Flag that they have gained is one milestone on that journey. ●



Under Pokémon Local Acts, which aims to promote local attractions, activities are being conducted in nine prefectures. In Iwate Prefecture, a train adorned with Geodude illustrations travels along the coast (left), while in Miyagi Prefecture, children enjoy riding on a snow tube shaped like Lapras (right bottom). In Fukushima Prefecture, four parks featuring the adorable Chansey have been opened (right top). RIGHT TOP PHOTO: AFLQ



## POKÉMON WITH TOHOKU: CONTINUING TOWARD A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

*When the giant earthquake hit Tohoku, northeastern Japan, in 2011, Pokémon, one of the world's most beloved video game franchises, promptly responded to provide support, bringing smiles to the faces of children in disaster-stricken communities. In the following years, these efforts have evolved into a joint endeavor to help the Tohoku region recover from the disaster. Grassroots collaboration is further facilitating the revitalization process.*

Since its debut in the form of a Japanese video game, Pokémon has become an international sensation with fans across the globe. The Pokémon Company is currently engaged in unique projects, leveraging the widespread popularity of Pokémon to make these initiatives possible. One initiative involves providing sustainable assistance to the three Tohoku prefectures—Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima—that were severely affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011.

Amidst the aftermath of the disaster, many young children, along with others, faced lives with

uncertainty. In response, The Pokémon Company deliberated on how Pokémon could contribute to the cause. SUGA Daigorotoyohide, director of The Pokémon Company's general headquarters, says, "It all started when some of our staff members volunteered to take plushies and various other toys to evacuation shelters. Eventually, Pikachu began visiting those shelters and elementary schools." His colleague, Senior Director HIROSE Chihiro smiles, "The moment Pikachu showed up, children's faces brightened up instantly. That led to the happy realization that Pokémon could

provide support by just being there."

In December 2011, Pokémon Center Tohoku, an official Pokémon retail store, opened in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture, to bring cheer to children throughout the Tohoku region. On its inaugural day, many parents and children lined up outside,

Pikachu's arrival brought smiles to the children at an event in Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture.





Left: HIROSE Chihiro (left) and SUGA Daigorotoyohide from The Pokémon Company. They are thrilled to contribute to showcasing the charm of both local communities and Pokémon.  
 Right: Under Pokémon Local Acts, “Poké Lids”—maintenance hole covers featuring unique Pokémon designs—were installed in 30 prefectures across Japan. Touring the country in search of different Poké Lids is bound to be fun.

eagerly waiting for its opening. The proceeds from the store’s sales were used to fund The Pokémon Company’s support program for Tohoku, dubbed “Pokémon with You,” ensuring the continuation of its events and activities.

The company has also utilized Pokémon GO, a location-based smartphone app game, to assist with attracting visitors to the Tohoku area.

“We became convinced that Pokémon has the power to move people and invigorate communities,” says Suga. He adds, “As time passed after the disaster, our support evolved into a form of revitalization assistance where we work together to build up communities.”

Following that process, Pokémon Local Acts was launched in 2018. Under the program, Ambassadorial Pokémon have been chosen for various regions in Japan in collaboration with local governments, aiming to showcase the unique charm of each area to both domestic and international audiences. Currently, nine prefectures have chosen their Ambassadorial Pokémon, with Geodude representing Iwate,

Lapras for Miyagi, and Chansey for Fukushima in the Tohoku region. Each Pokémon was chosen based on its connection to the prefecture’s name or local characteristics.

The Pokémon Company does not charge any royalties for the Ambassadorial Pokémon, and these partnerships extend to product development in collaboration with local traditional crafts and specialties, along with Pokémon-related events. In Miyagi Prefecture, for instance, visitors can enjoy a ride in a boat shaped like Lapras, while in Iwate Prefecture, a train adorned with Geodude illustrations travels along the coastline.

One recent initiative within Pokémon Local Acts is the development of parks as gathering spots for local residents. In 2021, playground equipment featuring Chansey as its primary design was

donated to Fukushima Prefecture, establishing Japan’s first park to feature Pokémon. “We want to create places where people can always meet Pokémon. It’s touching to think how Chansey will always hold a special place in the memories of the children who grow up playing in one of Chansey’s Parks,” says Hirose. When these places become integrated into the local scenery, they also attract travelers. Hirose adds, “We are on a mission to connect the world through the power of Pokémon, so we also hope to build bridges with tourists from overseas.”

In the nearly 13 years that have passed since the March 2011 earthquake, and in the years to come, Pokémon will continue to stand by the people of Tohoku, bringing smiles to the faces of both residents and visitors to the region. ●



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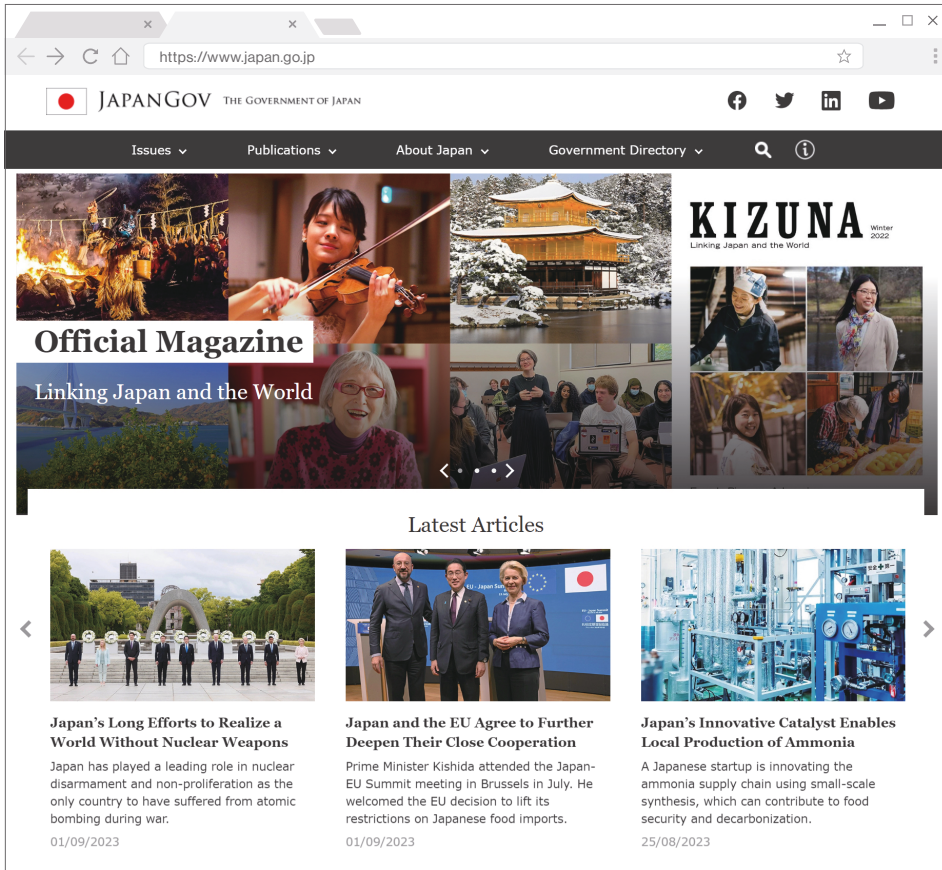
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