

The World This Week #226, Vol. 5, No. 30

## Japan-Australia's Reciprocal Access Agreement, and the Amazon Summit

Femy Francis and Dhriti Mukherjee



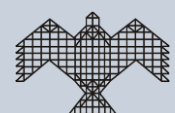
(Image Source: Reuters)

## Japan-Australia: Building defence cooperation under strategic urgency

Femy Francis

### What happened?

On 08 August, Japan's Foreign Ministry announced that Japan-Australia's Reciprocal Access Agreement is set to kickstart on 13 August 2023. The ministry stated: "On 08 August 2023, diplomatic notes for the entry into force of the 'Agreement between Japan and Australia on Facilitation of Mutual Access and Cooperation between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Australian Defense Force ('Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement', or 'Japan-Australia RAA')' (signed on 06 January 2022) were exchanged in Tokyo and Canberra. Following this exchange, this agreement will enter into force on 13 August 2023." Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi expressed that the initiative would help strengthen cooperation between the two countries. Post the agreement, Australia is only the second country whose armed forces would be allowed in Japan after the US.



The agreement was framed on 06 January 2022, signed by Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison. RAA aimed at facilitating defence cooperation between the two countries. In addition to defence cooperation, the agreement removes restrictions and provides easy access to the transportation of weaponry and other supplies to conduct joint exploration and inter-operability, from military to disaster management initiatives. PM Fumio Kishida called it a: "Landmark agreement that will bring Japan-Australia security cooperation to a new level." At the same time, Scott Morrison stressed that this: "opens a new chapter for advanced defense and security cooperation." The agreement was mooted in 2014, and a broad agreement was reached by 2020 over RAA, after which a lull was observed owing to the issue of Japan's death penalty policy law as Australia stands against capital punishment. To address this, an appendix in the agreement states that Australia will be allowed to refuse the transfer of accused soldiers to Japan.

### What is the background?

First, strategic urgency against China's expansion. Beijing's aggressive imposition hindering the status quo in the region developed concerns amongst regional and international players. Beijing's frequent infringement on the Senkaku Islands and disregard for the contiguous waters near the island aggravated the concerns. China has been continuously imposing its sovereignty in the South China Sea. Its maritime claims have been violently asserted, and it has consistently sent its vessels to patrol and trespass into the contentious area. Australia has continuously complained of "economic coercion" owing to various trade disputes and feels it is at the receiving end of the coercion. The belligerent Chinese expansion is a prominent reason for the agreement, as the two countries do not plan to overcome China but want to maintain order and rule in the region.

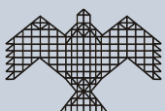
Second, bilateral cooperation strengthening 'minilateralism.' The cooperation between Canberra and Tokyo benefits them and supports minilateral organizations like Quad. Reinforcing bilateral ties between two individual members would make the Quad and the larger alliances stronger. Stronger cooperation would increase their influence in the regions and provide them with a stronger front to deter Chinese aggression.

Third, limiting reliance on the US. The cooperation aims to look beyond the US-led regional alliance. For years the US has navigated through Asian geopolitics by influencing like-minded regional actors. It used these regional players to contest and deter countries like Russia and China. Establishing an alternative security collaboration provides leverage for Canberra and Tokyo to negotiate with Washington and Beijing.

Fourth, mutual energy cooperation. With the Ukraine war, the world is facing an energy supply crisis. Japan's energy imports are hit due to regional tensions and the contentious South China Sea. Australia is looking to find alternative buyers other than China for coal and gas, to distribute export dependence beyond one country. Tokyo is one of the vital energy trading partners, with Canberra fulfilling one-third of its total energy requirements. The bilateral cooperation further aids in fulfilling the energy demand, benefiting both countries.

### What does it mean?

First, the Reciprocal Access Agreement is a much-needed cooperation between the two countries. After years of passive bureaucratic process and political hurdles, the RAA stands as a constructive step towards growing relations that would play a vital role in shaping Indo-Pacific geopolitics.



Second, establishing bilateral cooperation not mitigated by the US shows the changing dynamics of foreign policy within the region. There is a shift towards prioritizing national interest by not placing their security decision-making and interest in the hands of the US.

Third, the agreement indicates to China and other actors that Canberra and Tokyo are willing to work with each other with defense and strategic aid when needed, establishing a stronger front supported by mutual strategic urgency and mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation.

## Amazon Summit: A united front for saving the rainforest

Dhriti Mukherjee

### What happened?

On 8 and 9 August, leaders from eight South American countries – Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela gathered in Belem, Brazil, for a summit hosted by the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO). The much-awaited summit, was held after roughly 15 years, and the countries, all of which are part of the Amazon watershed, gathered to address threats to the ecosystem of the Amazon River. The primary objective that the leaders sought to address was finding ways to end deforestation, illegal mining, detrimental effects on the indigenous community, and climate change.

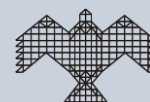
During the summit, Brazil's President Lula de Silva, who hopes to end deforestation by 2030, said: "Nature, which industrial development polluted for 200 years, needs them to pay their part so we can revive part of what was ruined. Nature is in need of money."

The summit ended with signing the Belem Declaration, which Brazil termed "a new and ambitious shared agenda." They recognized the need for protection and acknowledged the rights of the indigenous communities.

### What is the background?

First, the significance of the Amazon rainforests and its abuse. It is fittingly referred to as the "lungs of the Earth" as the forest is responsible for slowing down climate change while producing 16 per cent of the world's oxygen supply. It is also one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet and is considered a carbon sink. Its significance is also linked to it being termed the "pharmacy of the world," as many plants store powerful medicines that benefit humans. However, it was as early as the 16th century when colonizers and imperialists began interfering in the ecosystem, in search of timber and rubber. Over time, regional and global countries have misused the rainforest's extensive resources for economic activities like logging, mining, and agribusiness expansion.

Second, the varying commitments and divergent opinions. The countries in attendance have all ratified the Paris Climate Accord, which seeks to avoid climate change and reduce greenhouse emissions. Despite this shared aim, there has been a noticeable lack of common ground in tackling Amazon's environmental issues. This was proven in the summit where conflicting opinions were exchanged, with the main points of divergence being deforestation and oil exploration. President Lula pushed for zero deforestation by 2030, an aim which Colombia also decided to support. However, getting other countries on board was difficult, like Bolivia, which wants to expand its agricultural production. Colombia's President Gustavo Petro advocating for an end to oil exploration in the Amazon, clashed with President Lula's aim to develop an oil field in the mouth of the Amazon. Petro stated that this was "betting on death and destroying life." The declaration reflected these differences, and the divergence



underlined the complexity of forging a cohesive approach among countries with varying economic and environmental priorities.

Third, economic development and environmental preservation. It was evident that finding an equilibrium between environmental harmony and economic advancement was a trying task for most of the representatives. The primary areas of struggle are gold mining and carbon credit schemes, which are growing industries with unregulated markets. The carbon credit industry is posing a problem, with international communities that cause pollution looking at Para, located in Brazil, as an easy way out. The recent entry of the World Bank in this market, where market forces determine the prices of credits, has led to a surge in its potential. Towards the end of the summit, President Lula admitted, "It's not Brazil that needs money, it's not Colombia that needs money. It is nature that is in need of money."

### What does it mean?

First, a milestone in regional cooperation and shared responsibility. The united front the ACTO nations have displayed after decades of a lack of action highlights a departure from past divisions and a movement towards collective commitment. It also asserts how, since the Amazon rainforest is used by multiple nations, these very nations must take up responsibility together. It is not a problem that only a few nations should have to combat. This extends beyond borders, as leaders called on international countries to help in reviving the forest.

Second, a challenge in finding common ground. The only shared aim that was visible was that of protecting the Amazon rainforest and not the conservation. The differences in priorities, economic needs, and perspectives got in the way of consolidating concrete measures that were unanimously agreed upon. The summit fell short on multiple fronts, by failing to decide on a budget that would be spent to help the forest's revival, as well as deciding on concrete measures that all countries would take.

Third, COP30 and G20 implications for Brazil. Many have seen the Amazon summit as a warm-up for Brazil, which is also set to hold the COP30 and the G20 in 2024. Although President Lula had vowed to take Brazil to the forefront of climate friendly policies, this summit has acted as a lesson that even with shared interests, having a common goal-oriented outcome is not a necessity. He has stated that the Amazon nations are where "the international community should put their money," but only time will tell if interests will align to shape a stronger agreement.

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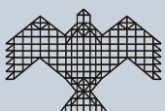
### **Also in the news...**

Regional Round-ups

### East and Southeast Asia This Week

#### **China: Wang Yi calls Philippines to discuss South China Sea dispute**

On 12 August, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi prompted the Philippines to jointly work in defusing tensions in the South China Sea. He apprised Beijing is willing to address the issues with the Philippines and looks forward to reaching a consensus. China has built artificial islands in the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia, adding to bilateral tensions.



### China: Commerce and Foreign Affairs ministries slam Biden's executive order on limiting US overseas tech investment

On 10 August, the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in his interaction with media, responded to a question on Biden's latest move to limit technological access under US investment. He said: "Under the guise of national security, the US side restricts the investment of US enterprises in China and engages in pan-security and pan-politicization, the real purpose of which is to deprive China of its right to development and safeguard its own hegemonic and selfish interests, which is naked economic coercion and scientific and technological bullying." On 09 August, Biden signed an order that limits US investment and expertise in semiconductors and microelectronics, quantum computing, and certain artificial intelligence capabilities in China, Hong Kong and Macao.

### Singapore: Skips joint defence exercise amid controversy

On 10 August, Myanmar Now reported that Singapore opted out of an international defence ministers' tabletop exercise hosted by Russia and Myanmar's military regime. This marked the first time an ASEAN member skipped such an event. The exercise, involving the ASEAN Defence Ministers' meeting with experts' working group on counter-terrorism, saw the US, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea boycotting due to concerns over Russia and Myanmar's objectives. Despite parallels to Myanmar's internal conflict, where the junta labels opposition groups as "terrorists," the exercise proceeded. Singapore's absence was attributed to its request for virtual participation being denied. This decision underscores concerns about ASEAN's stance on Myanmar's junta's participation in defence exercises.

### Cambodia: Hun Manet appointed Prime Minister

On 08 August, Khmer Times reported that Cambodia's King Norodom Sihamoni officially named Hun Manet as the country's Prime Minister, marking a peaceful transition of power. In a royal decree, the King appointed Hun Manet as the new leader, succeeding long-serving Prime Minister Hun Sen. Hun Manet, who has a strong military and educational background, is the 33rd premier of Cambodia and the first new head of government in nearly four decades. The transition was based on the ruling party's overwhelming victory in recent elections, where the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) received over 82 per cent of the vote.

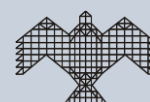
### Philippines: Vows to defend Ayungin Shoal amidst Chinese aggression

On 08 August, Philstar reported that amidst Chinese vessels attempting to block and surround Ayungin Shoal, the Philippines declared its unwavering commitment to defending the territory. Quoting Security Council Assistant Director General Jonathan Malaya emphasized that Ayungin Shoal will not be abandoned by Filipinos, following a recent incident where China fired water cannons at a Philippine Navy vessel escorting civilian boats delivering supplies to the BRP Sierra Madre outpost. The Philippines denounced this action and sent a note verbale to China, asserting that it violates international law.

### South Asia This Week

#### Pakistan: Iran gas pipeline project shelved by Islamabad

On 10 August, Business Recorder reported that Iran refused to accept the force majeure notice served by Pakistan to suspend work on the multi-billion-dollar Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project. It is estimated that according to the penalty clause under the Pipeline Project agreement Pakistan has to pay USD 18 billion if the country does not go ahead with the gas pipeline project.





### Middle East and Africa This Week

#### **Uganda: President Museveni accuses World Bank of coercion**

On 10 August, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni accused the World Bank of trying "to coerce" the government on its anti-LGBTQ legislation introduced in May. The developments come after the World Bank suspended new loans to the country, attributing to the law against the LGBTQ claiming that it contradicts the values. President Museveni stated that it is unfortunate that the lender seeks to "coerce us into abandoning our faith, culture, principles and sovereignty, using money." He added: "They really under-estimate all Africans. We do not need pressure from anybody to know how to solve problems in our society. They are our problems."

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### Europe and the Americas This Week

#### **Russia: Roscosmos launches Luna-25 to study Moon's South Pole**

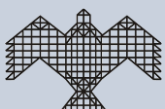
On 11 August, Russia's space agency Roscosmos launched its first lunar mission after 50 years. Luna-25 mission aimed to study the moon's south pole, which is believed to hold water in the form of ice. Such resources will be critical to support life on the moon and help explore the cosmos from the moon's surface. According to the Russian Academy of Sciences spokesperson, "The first goal is to find the water, to confirm that it is there.. to study its abundance." From the geopolitical dimension, the US, China, and India have been consistently working to land on the moon. The ongoing efforts by big space powers to mark their presence are driving a pole race on the moon.

#### **Romania: Government to pay foresters to prevent cutting of trees**

On 10 August, the European Commission approved EUR 200 million as an aid to Romania to pay its foresters. Till 2027, the foresters will receive the aid not to cut trees. The motto of the scheme is to reverse biodiversity loss, boost the ecosystem and preserve the habitat. In the press release of the European Commission: "..the scheme was necessary and appropriate to support the development of the forestry sector." In 2020, the Commission began an infringement procedure against Romania to protect the Natura 2000 forests and prevent the illegal cutting of trees. Under the EU's pressure to combat illegal logging for years, Romania has implemented similar measures to control such illegal activities and deployed a police force to follow such crimes. According to many environmentalists, such measures have not been effective.

#### **Europe: Slovenia, Austria, Croatia, Portugal, and Scandinavia experience climate extremities**

On 04 August, deadly floods occurred in Slovenia, resulting in landslides affecting more than 2.1 million people. Following the continued floods, a team from Germany's Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) launched an operation to evaluate the damages and deploy more personnel with equipment for rescue. Slovenia's government announced the execution of a Disaster Response Mechanism, where rescue teams from other EU countries will involve in recovery operations. Apart from this, the German Foreign Ministry will provide USD 767000 for the operation, and France will support it with two special excavators. Similarly, Sweden, Finland, and Norway have issued yellow and orange alerts facing the worst floods and storms in 25-50 years. On 08 August, Portugal experienced forest fires of 6700 hectares in the south, and the north has been issued a red alert to carry out early evacuations. The government has reported the temperatures to have hit 41 degrees Celsius, with more than 120 municipalities marked high-risk areas.



### **The US: Army to start integrating kinetic air defence platforms with its laser weapon**

On 08 August, the head of the US Army Space and Missile Defense Command and the Joint Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems Office director discussed reliability problems associated with directed energy weapons and their integration with kinetic air defence platforms like drones, artillery and missiles. The US Army is yet to receive the fourth and final Stryker-based 50-kilowatt laser prototype next month. Raytheon has developed the Directed Energy Manoeuvre Short-Range Air Defense system, or DE M-SHORAD, which can take down class 1 to 3 aerial drones and incoming rockets, artillery and mortars.

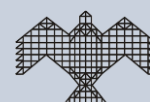
### **The US: Nuclear fusion experiment achieves net gain energy; scientists claim it is like making stars on earth**

On 07 August, Reuters reported that scientists at a lab in California successfully triggered a fusion reaction resulting in a net energy gain. This feat was achieved for the second time in under a year. Nuclear fusion is the energy source for the Sun's radiance and is deemed a cleaner energy with less radioactive decay. The Energy Department called it a crucial step for advancements in national defence and future of clean power.

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#### **About the authors**

Akriti Sharma and Ankit Singh are PhD scholars in the School of Conflict and Security Studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. Padmashree Anandhan, Anu Maria Joseph, Femy Francis and Rishika Yadav are Research Associates at NIAS. Genesy Balasingam, Sandra Sajeev D Costa and Dhriti Mukherjee are Research Interns at NIAS.



### About Global Politics:

The course provides an introduction to contemporary world affairs. The primary objective of the course is two – first, to enhance the understanding of contemporary global developments, with an attempt to comprehend the larger picture. Second, to identify trends leading forecasts on contemporary world affairs.

The Course will also invite senior scholars within and outside NIAS – also from within and outside India to provide lectures on contemporary world affairs.

### **The World This Week**



6 February 2021

**Biden's new US foreign policy priorities, Russia-EU tensions over Navalny, and China's redline on Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Taiwan**



30 January 2021

**The Daniel Pearl case in Pakistan and the new vaccine complications in Europe**



23 January 2021

**The US returns to the Paris Agreement, and India reengages the region through a Vaccine diplomacy**



16 January 2021

**North Korea's Party Congress, Houthis as terrorists, and Elections in Uganda**



9 January 2021

**Disorderly transition in the US, Breakthrough over Qatar, Enrichment in Iran and Arrests in Hong Kong**



27 December 2020

**The Year of COVID, Protests and Elections**



20 December 2020

**India-Bangladesh reset and China's Chang'e-5 success**



13 December 2020

**Morocco recognizes Israel, Maduro consolidates in Venezuela and No-deal Brexit gets real**

### **About TWTW**

The World This Week is an academic initiative of the Global Politics course at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore. The alert, published every Saturday aims to provide its readers with a ready reckoner of major developments during the week under three heads - what happened, what is the background and what does it mean. The Alert also provides an opportunity for the young scholars at NIAS and its partner institutions to follow and comment on contemporary global developments.

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