

# the japan times

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**IN TODAY'S NYT:  
WHERE ENDING  
A MARRIAGE  
IS REASON  
TO CELEBRATE**  
PAGE 1



**ASIA:  
RAIL DISASTER  
SHOCKS INDIA**  
Worst accident in decades convulses country | PAGE 5



**WORLD:  
ENERGY GLITCH  
IN EUROPE**  
Solar expansion exposes flaws in system | PAGE 6

## Spat comes despite growing calls for dialogue **China and U.S. trade barbs at security meet**

**Focus**  
GABRIEL DOMINGUEZ  
SINGAPORE  
STAFF WRITER

It would have been the ideal setting to halt the downward spiral in U.S.-China relations. But while calls for dialogue and conflict prevention took center stage at Asia's top security conference, the only thing Washington and Beijing exchanged was the blame for a breakdown in military-to-military communications.

While the two superpowers traded barbs at this year's Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, the conference also saw a series of important speeches and sideline meetings that highlighted U.S. efforts to strengthen its security alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region.

But this evolving network of smaller regional partnerships aimed at countering China has also left many in Southeast Asia increasingly concerned about whether a policy of bolstering deterrence without

dialogue actually makes the region safe. The first call for dialogue between the superpowers came from Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, who used a keynote speech to convey the need to re-open high-level communication channels and establish "guardrails" to prevent the situation from veering into conflict. "This isn't about a policy of containment. It's not a question of placing obstacles in the way of any nation's progress or their potential," Albanese said Friday to kick off the conference, calling the issue a matter of "simple, practical structures to prevent a worst-case scenario."

The consequences of a conflict in the Taiwan Strait or elsewhere would not be confined to the big powers, it would be "devastating for the world," Albanese emphasized at the summit before more than 600 military leaders, policymakers and analysts from 40 nations.

Stronger words came the following day from U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who criticized his Chinese counterpart's unwillingness to meet and discuss ways to



Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu delivers a speech during the Shangri-La Dialogue security conference in Singapore on Sunday. AFP/JJI

improve crisis management mechanisms between the two countries' militaries. "For responsible defense leaders, the right time to talk is anytime, the right time to talk is every time, and the right time to talk is now," he stressed. "The more that we talk, the more we can avoid the misunderstandings and miscalculations that could lead to crisis or conflict," he said, calling conflict in the region "neither imminent nor inevitable." Austin had invited Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu for talks on the sidelines of the event but was ultimately snubbed, with

Beijing shifting the blame on Washington's refusal to lift sanctions imposed on Li in 2018 for allegedly assisting China in acquiring Russian-made military equipment. China-U.S. relations have plummeted to fresh lows in recent years, but the downward spiral seems to have picked up pace in recent days. Within less than a week, the Pentagon accused both a People's Liberation Army (PLA) fighter jet in the South China Sea and a PLA destroyer in the Taiwan Strait of conducting "unnecessarily aggressive" and "unsafe" intercepts of U.S. military assets

operating near Chinese-claimed territory. Washington says these military operations are lawful as they take place in international waters and airspace and are meant to prevent "unlawful and sweeping maritime claims" from threatening freedom of navigation. China, however, has taken a different view, one outlined by Li in his own speech Sunday. "We must prevent attempts (by those) who want to use freedom of navigation and innocent passage as pretexts to exercise hegemony of navigation," Li said. **Continued on page 5 →**

## Japan takes steps on farm policy to raise food security

JJI, STAFF REPORT

The government on Friday moved forward with preliminary plans to overhaul its agricultural policy to improve the nation's food security, including a plan to reduce the country's dependence on imports. The new concept governing the direction for policies on food, agriculture and rural areas was adopted at the day's meeting of the government's task force on measures to secure stable food supply, headed by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Kishida ordered farm minister Tetsuro Nomura to create by the end of fiscal 2023 a road map toward implementing specific measures to ensure food security.

"We'll evaluate the food security situations even in ordinary times and create a system for the government to take all-out steps to secure food during a contingency situation," Kishida told the meeting.

Japan's calorie-based food self-sufficiency rate is 38%, which is the lowest among the Group of Seven countries. Food shortages are a growing concern worldwide due to unstable food production caused by climate change.

The war in Ukraine — which is a major exporter of grain — has also worsened the ongoing food crisis in developing countries.

Kishida suggested that the government will work to increase the domestic production of wheat, soybeans and feed grains, all of which Japan relies heavily on imports. The government also aims to make farmers pass on production costs adequately to companies and consumers and promote agricultural technologies, Kishida said.

According to the plan, domestic production will be increased by expanding the production of items for which Japan is highly dependent on imports, with a stable food supply secured by stockpiling.

Also, the promotion of exports is "indispensable for maintaining the foundation of agricultural production at a time when the domestic market is shrinking due to the declining population," the outline said.

The concept called for creating a forum for those involved in the supply of food, from producers and processors to distributors.

Farmers may have difficulties passing on higher costs promptly to consumers amid rapidly rising fertilizer prices. The government will compensate for gaps under clear criteria.

## Japan, S. Korea defense chiefs aim to prevent repeat of radar incident

JESSE JOHNSON  
STAFF WRITER

The defense chiefs of Japan and South Korea held their first ministerial talks in more than three years Sunday in Singapore — another concrete signal of the neighbors' rapprochement on the security front after a 2018 fire-control radar incident involving their navies.

Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada met with South Korean defense chief Lee Jong-sup on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue Asia security conference, with Hamada

saying the two had discussed a variety of issues, including ways to prevent a recurrence of an incident similar to the 2018 episode.

"We shared the importance of promoting Japan-South Korea defense cooperation and agreed to accelerate discussions on major issues of concern between our defense authorities, including measures to prevent a recurrence (of the radar incident)," Hamada said.

The December 2018 incident saw Tokyo claim that a South Korean destroyer had

directed its fire-control radar at a Maritime Self-Defense Force patrol plane inside Japan's exclusive economic zone in the Sea of Japan. Japan's Defense Ministry said in a final report on the action in 2019 that the move was considered a "simulation of an attack."

Lee also said that he and Hamada had agreed to come up with measures to prevent a repeat of the radar incident, adding that Seoul and Tokyo would begin working-level talks on the issue soon.

Still, a senior South Korean official told the

Yonhap news agency that the countries' positions on the issue remain unchanged, though the official conceded that the two sides had agreed to focus on crafting measures to prevent another incident.

Under the administration of then-President Moon Jae-in, who oversaw a deterioration in his country's relationship with Japan over a spate of history, economic and security issues, Seoul denied the allegation, decriing the MSDF plane's low-flying approach as a "menacing" flight.

But ties under Moon's successor, President

Yoon Suk-yeol, have dramatically improved, with the South Korean leader more keen to remove obstacles to bolstered ties, especially in the defense arena.

Yoon and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida have even resumed the practice of holding regular reciprocal visits to their respective countries amid growing concerns over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. The improved ties came after Yoon's administration offered a solution to the long-festering issue of wartime labor.

**Continued on page 2 →**

## The Japan firms funding rainforest destruction

ERIC MARGOLIS  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Roads built through untouched forest in a bid to find oil deposits or start logging. Vast areas cleared to make way for plantations and farmland. Trees cut down to become furniture, buildings and charcoal.

Brazil and Southeast Asian countries are in the midst of intense struggles against the destruction of their rainforests. And while these forests lay thousands of miles from Japan, environmentalists and economists alike say investor, company and consumer behavior are all indirectly responsible for clearing forests, polluting indigenous communities and hastening climate change.

And one organization is showing where many of these destructive investments and loans are coming from. Comprehensive datasets made available by Forests & Finance, an initiative by a coalition of environmental groups, reveal thousands of investments and loans made by Japan's top lenders and investment funds that are impacting rainforests around the world. The data examines finances received by



over 300 companies directly involved in the beef, soy, palm oil, paper, rubber and timber industries, whose operations harm tropical forests in South America, Southeast Asia and Africa. Japanese firms and funds have made investments and given loans worth \$27.4 billion to these companies since 2013. And although the majority of the loans come from the three megabanking groups Mizuho Financial Group, Mitsubishi UFJ

**An Indigenous man of the Kayapo tribe looks at logs left by loggers during a surveillance patrol at Krimej village in Brazil's southwest Para state in September 2021.** REUTERS

Financial Group (MUFG) and Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group, over 140 different companies and banks are documented as making investments that facilitate rainforest destruction.

Rainforests contain about half of the existing plant and animal species in the world and provide 20% of the world's oxygen, serving as the world's largest carbon storehouses. They are vital for regulating precipitation and preventing soil erosion, which enables agriculture. Scientists even estimate that a quarter of the world's medicines originate from plants found in these forests.

In Brazil alone, 24 million people live in and rely on the Amazon. According to Marcel Gomes at Reporter Brasil, an organization that investigates socio-environmental damage in the South American country, the mining and agriculture sectors working in the Amazon bring wealth to a few, but costs to many. Deforestation skyrocketed due to deregulation under former far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, and in 2022 trees were cleared at a rate of three football fields per minute. **Continued on page 4 →**

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**INSIDE TODAY**

NATIONAL	2	SUSTAINABLE JAPAN	7
INSIGHTS	3	OPINION	8
OUR PLANET	4	COMMUNITY	9
CLASSIFIED ADS	4	WEATHER	9
ASIA	5	SPORTS	10
WORLD	6		

**Tug-of-war unfolds over exhibit**  
Nagano group pushes for clearer details about notorious Unit 731 | **INSIGHTS, PAGE 3**

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