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Top diplomats lay foundation for leaders meet

# Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing seek ‘early’ summit

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The foreign ministers of Japan, China and South Korea held their first in-person talks in more than four years on Sunday, with the three agreeing to hold a trilateral leaders summit at the “earliest” possible time.

Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, South Korea’s Park Jin and China’s Wang Yi spent around 100 minutes in talks that focused on a broad swath of issues, amid Beijing’s growing regional military assertiveness and Tokyo and Seoul’s deepening security ties with Washington, their mutual ally.

The trilateral talks in Busan, South Korea, were seen as a steppingstone toward reviving three-way talks between the trio of leader between the leaders of the trio of Asian powerhouses, but progress on hammering out a specific date appeared elusive.

“We, the three ministers, reaffirmed the agreement to hold the summit, the pinna-

cle of the trilateral cooperation system, at the earliest mutually convenient time and agreed to accelerate the preparations necessary for the summit,” the Yonhap news agency quoted Park as saying following the talks.

In opening remarks, Kamikawa said that Japan hoped to use Sunday’s talks as an opportunity to “restart cooperation” among the three countries, while expressing a readiness to discuss a time frame for the leaders summit.

Wang, a former ambassador to Japan who speaks Japanese fluently, did not mention the summit, but was quoted as saying that while three-way cooperation “has never been stopped,” there remains “huge potential, strong demand and a wide range of resources” for improved tie-ups.

In terms of a timeline, South Korea has reportedly sought to hold the leaders summit before the year’s end.

Yet with just over a month left in the year



Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin (center) and Chinese top diplomat Wang Yi pose for a photo ahead of trilateral talks in Busan, South Korea, on Sunday. POOL / VIA KYODO

— and China appearing cool to the idea — the odds of a summit being held in 2023 could be slim.

The meeting came just days after North Korea claimed to have successfully put its first military spy satellite into orbit, and Pyongyang’s increasingly potent nuclear and missile programs were high on the ministers’ agenda.

The satellite launch, which saw a rocket fly over the airspace above Okinawa Pre-



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# Mideast wealth funds draw greater U.S. scrutiny

BEN BARTENSTEIN  
BLOOMBERG

Middle Eastern wealth funds are facing greater scrutiny on U.S. deals from the administration of President Joe Biden, part of a broader pushback on entities perceived to have close ties with Beijing, according to people with direct knowledge of the matter.

The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) is reviewing several multi-billion dollar deals this year on concerns they could pose national security risks, said the people, who requested anonymity as the matter is private. Officials in Biden’s Cabinet are currently reviewing more than half a dozen acquisitions, including deals from Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, Mubadala Investment Co. and Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund, they said.

While the U.S. remains a preferred investment destination for the region’s largest wealth funds, China has emerged as an increasingly attractive jurisdiction. The value of acquisitions and investments by Gulf funds into the Asian country has climbed to \$2.3 billion in 2023 from about \$100 million last year, according to boutique adviser Global SWF. That coincides with Beijing’s push to bolster political ties in the region since President Xi Jinping’s December visit to Riyadh.

“An area where we’re starting to see increased sensitivity is with the Gulf states,” Stephenie Gosnell Handler, a Washington-based partner at Gibson Dunn, said during a webinar last month. “We have been seeing CFIUS start to ask more questions.”

In recent months, Biden officials have expressed mounting concerns that critical technology, infrastructure and data that get to the UAE could potentially end up in the hands of Beijing, people familiar with matter said. The scrutiny is particularly acute for Abu Dhabi because decisions on national security, foreign policy and international investments are made by the same few royals, the people said.

CFIUS has requested access to the internal books of several Gulf funds to assuage U.S. concerns, though the Middle Eastern entities have balked at the idea of opening up their full records to a foreign government, the people said.

# New foreign trainee program to enhance rights protection

## System was criticized as cover for firms to import cheap labor

KYODO

A government panel on Friday compiled a final report on a new system to replace Japan’s controversial trainee program for foreign nationals, featuring improved rights protections with increased flexibility for workplace changes and tougher oversight.

The final report will set the stage for the

government to submit a bill to parliament next year to introduce the new system, which will end the Technical Intern Training Program, which has been in place since 1993.

Originally designed to transfer skills to developing countries, the program has long been criticized as a cover for firms to import inexpensive labor as Japan’s working-age population shrinks. Many trainees ran way due to unjust treatment, with cases of abuse within the program including unpaid wages and harassment.

According to the final report, the new system will focus on “securing and developing human resources” while easing the current program’s stringent rules that have largely

prohibited trainees from changing workplaces unless there are compelling reasons, thus allowing them to transfer to similar jobs more flexibly.

Transfers will be allowed in principle for trainees who have worked for at least a year at one place and have passed a skills test and the easiest level of the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test.

As there have been concerns of potential trainee outflow from rural to urban areas due to workplace changes, the panel had also explored the option of permitting transfers after two years of work.

The final report included a note about the need to consider “necessary transitional

measures” to address abrupt changes, suggesting the possibility of extending the one-year period on an industry-by-industry basis.

Under the new system, after around three years of work, technical interns are expected to have acquired enough expertise to apply for a specified skilled worker system, introduced in 2019, which allows for stays of up to 5 years with the potential for obtaining permanent residency.

To become a specified skilled worker, trainees will have to pass a skills test and improve their Japanese-language skills.

The report also called for tightening requirements and oversight of supervising organizations, which act as brokers

and supervise companies accepting foreign trainees.

The Organization for Technical Intern Training, an entity that oversees the program, will also increase personnel to strengthen support and protection for foreign nationals involved.

The report additionally called for a mechanism to ease the financial burden on trainees, who are often saddled with debt due to expenses associated with entering Japan.

The report will be submitted to Justice Minister Ryuji Koizumi in the near future. As of the end of June, foreign technical interns totaled around 358,000 and specified skilled workers around 173,000.

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**Gangs recruit via social media**  
Platforms offer easy access to anyone willing to commit crimes for cash. | **INSIGHTS, PAGE 3**

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# Cambodia’s big bet on coal faces long delays

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The skeletal exterior of one of the newest coal power plants in Cambodia sat silent among farmland in Oddar Meanchey province on a still afternoon in June. Weeds entangling brick stacks, cement mixers and truck tires showed construction had long been paused.

Locals toasting to happy hour down the road from the front gate complained of months of delayed pay for the site’s security guards, adding there was no set date for operations to resume. There was little more information at the Ou Svay commune hall.

“Maybe the plan changed to complete construction by 2025?” questioned Roenun Phearin, who was a commune consultant for the Han Seng power plant. “The construction is now paused and we don’t know the reason because it is the internal information of the company.”

The confusion surrounding Oddar Meanchey’s Han Seng plant is mirrored in other projects that were part of Cambo-



dia’s big bet on coal in 2020. The kingdom doubled down on fossil fuels with plans to develop three coal power plants to meet rising electricity demand that could not be filled by renewables. This would flip Cambodia’s power production, nearly half produced by renewable energy at the time, toward fossil fuels.

**The construction of the Han Seng power plant in Cambodia’s Oddar Meanchey province has been dormant for more than a year.**  
ANTON L. DELGADO

The move bucked the global push for clean energy and dismayed sustainability advocates, but the announced plants are now facing years of delay — raising questions about when, or if, the kingdom’s “last” coal projects will go online.

When announced, all three plants were attached to China’s infrastructure-focused Belt and Road initiative. While China’s 2021 pledge to cut support for coal power abroad killed projects elsewhere in Southeast Asia, including in neighboring nations, Cambodia’s plans appeared to survive the chopping block.

While the Cambodian government pledged that these projects would be its last coal plants, two of the three sites are in varying stages of inertia. Meanwhile, the third is finished and operational.

In deeply-rural Oddar Meanchey province, the 265-megawatt, half-built Han Seng project missed its deadline to go online last year. Falling revenue for the Chinese companies in charge shifted the project to new contractors, who are sticking with coal — but are also now investing in solar energy at the same plant.

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