

The Third Abe Cabinet

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was re-elected to the top job after the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Komeito coalition victory in the 14 December 2014 general elections.

The Third Abe Cabinet was inaugurated on 24 December 2014. Prime Minister Abe had only recently reshuffled the Cabinet, in September 2014, and it was a conscious decision to leave the Cabinet line-up largely unchanged, the only change being to the position of defence minister.

At a press conference on the day of the inauguration, Prime Minister Abe thanked voters for giving his government a renewed mandate to implement their policies saying:

Through the recent general elections, the Japanese public has given us a firm pat on the back pushing us forward, telling us to stay the course.



Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaking at a meeting he held with managers of small- and medium-sized enterprises at the Prime Minister's Office on 13 January 2015

In his New Year reflections on 1 January 2015, Prime Minister Abe described 2015 as a year of reform:

All the reforms I am pursuing are the most drastic reforms since the end of World War II, with very challenging roads ahead. However, having garnered the great power of the confidence of the people, this year I will push ahead with reforms even more boldly and with an even greater sense of speed. I intend to make this "a year to carry out reforms," with my eyes fixed firmly on the future of Japan.

In other news, in a telephone talk with Prime Minister Tony Abbott on 22 January, the two prime ministers mentioned that the Australian Prime Minister would visit Japan this year.

The Basic Policy of the Third Abe Cabinet—

http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/decisions/2014/1209232_9967.html

The full line-up of the Third Abe Cabinet—

http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/meibo/index_e.html



Mr Fumio Kishida is the Minister for Foreign Affairs, a position he has held since December 2012.

Mr Kishida has been a member of the House of Representatives since he was first elected in 1993 to the Hiroshima 1st Electoral District.

Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement enters into force

The Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement (JAEPA), finalised in 2014, entered into force on 15 January 2015. The first Joint Committee Meeting established under the JAEPA was held the same day in Tokyo.

In a joint statement issued that day, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott warmly welcomed JAEPA's entry into force, stating they looked forward to Australian and Japanese businesses working together to make the most of new opportunities provided by the Agreement.

JAEPA is the most significant bilateral economic agreement since the 1957 Agreement on Commerce. The second half of the twentieth century saw bilateral economic ties boom, and today Japan is still Australia's second largest trading partner (two-way trade in 2013 was \$70.8 billion). Moreover, Japan's place as Australia's largest export market seems likely to be maintained for the foreseeable future.

With JAEPA increasing the ease of access to both markets, the agreement should deliver significant economic benefits to our two countries.

Take off for Japan

Australian airline Qantas has announced it will increase the number of flights to Japan, a move which should make for greater competition in the market and make it easier for Australians to visit Japan. Readers in the north-east of NSW might be interested to hear this will include new direct flights to Tokyo from Brisbane.

To give some context to the extra flights being planned between Japan and Australia, let's consider the latest figures for international arrivals to Japan released by Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO).

In 2014, Japan welcomed over 13.4 million visitors — the highest number ever.

Last year, Japan welcomed over 13.4 million foreign visitors*, the highest number ever, and there was a 29% increase in the number of visitors to Japan compared to 2013.

Looking at Australian visitors to Japan, the figure was up 23.8% on 2013, with a total of 302,700 Australians arriving last year. Month by month, December 2014 saw the largest number of Australians visit (37,600).

Sydney JNTO Executive Director Mr Hiroshi Kuwamoto said that the most popular times for Australians to visit Japan are now, in winter, and in cherry blossom season.

With the extra flights and current exchange rates, it's a great time to consider a trip to Japan!

* Includes business, leisure and stopover visitors.