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## **Background Brief:**

### **Vietnam's Prime Minister to Visit Japan Scene Setter**

**November 21, 2021**

Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh will pay an official visit to Japan from November 22-25 at the invitation of his Japanese counterpart Kishida Fumio. Could you please address the following questions?

Q1. What is the significance of the timing of PM Chinh's Japan visit?

ANSWER: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida only took office recently, on 4 October. The two prime ministers held talks at COP26 in Glasgow earlier this month.

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh will be the first foreign head of government to visit Kishida as Japan's prime minister in Tokyo. This will be an important opportunity for the two leaders to get to know each other and discuss where they would like to take bilateral relations. Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary told a press conference that the meeting would "build personal trust" between the two leaders.

Vietnam-Japan relations have a sound foundation based on an extensive strategic partnership and close personal relations between the former prime ministers of Vietnam (Nguyen Xuan Phuc) and Japan (Shinzo Abe and Yoshihide Suga).

Japan accords high-priority in its bilateral relations with Vietnam and its relations with ASEAN. Prime Minister Chinh's visit is significant as both countries are preparing for their post-COVID-19 economic recovery.

Q2. What will be the topics for discussion and outcomes of the visit?

ANSWER: The main topic of discussion will be bilateral economic relations in general and continued Japanese assistance to Vietnam to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and post-COVID recovery.

Vietnam's economic recovery is important to Japan as it is a major trading partner and source of foreign investment. A key outcome would be agreement on how Vietnam can facilitate the operations of Japanese businesses that are seeking to relocate from China and ensuring reliable supply chains between the two countries.

In addition, the Vietnam-Japan Joint Initiative recently moved to its eighth phase. Three new groups of issues were added to the current agenda of eleven groups in response to disruption of supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The two prime ministers likely will discuss what steps to take in (1) developing supporting

industry to restore reliable supply chains, (2) innovation and (3) development of highly skilled human resources.

In November, Japan will slowly open its doors for the return of Vietnamese guest workers and apprentices. Prime Minister Chinh will be keen to learn what steps his counterpart proposes to take.

Japan is the largest provider Overseas Development Assistance to Vietnam. It is likely Vietnam will indicate its priority needs and solicit Japanese assistance, such as support for strategic infrastructure, green growth, and digital transformation.

The two prime ministers will discuss coordination of their foreign policies. Chinh likely will brief Kishida on what initiatives Vietnam will take to facilitate ASEAN-Japan relations, including how to restore regional supply chains disrupted by COVID-19.

The two leaders are likely to discuss how to manage separate requests by China and Taiwan to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership. Japan supports Taiwan's membership.

Japan's prime minister might make proposals on how to further the agreement between Japan and Vietnam on the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology and solicit a response from Prime Minister Chinh.

Finally, the two leaders are likely to discuss a range of international and regional issues such as denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, the crisis in Myanmar and "peace, stability, security, safety and freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea." They will also support the peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea on the basis of international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. They will also call for the full implementation of the Declaration on Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and the conclusion of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

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