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★ NIKKEI TUMBLES 1.93% ★ OKINAWA VOTES TOMORROW ★ AKI BASHO OPENS TOMORROW ★

Koja Takes Slight Lead Over Tamaki as Okinawa Votes Tomorrow

New polling a day before Sunday's election shows the LDP-backed challenger edging ahead of the two-term incumbent for the first time in this newspaper's coverage of the race

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

With one day remaining before Okinawa Prefecture chooses its next governor, new media polling shows challenger Genta Koja holding a slight lead over two-term incumbent Denny Tamaki, the first time this newspaper's campaign coverage has been able to report either candidate ahead of the other rather than a genuine statistical dead heat.

The shift, reported Friday, arrives after weeks in which every available survey had described the race as neck and neck, with cost-of-living concerns outpolling the base-relocation dispute that has defined Okinawan politics for a generation. Political analysts caution that a slight lead this close to an election, particularly in a race this tightly contested for this long, remains within a range either candidate's campaign could plausibly overcome through turnout alone.

Tamaki, 66, is seeking a third consecutive term and has run in each of his three campaigns — 2018, 2022 and now 2026 — on a platform built around opposition to the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to a new facility under construction at Camp Schwab in Henoko. That issue, which produced a 2019 prefectural referendum in which more than 70% of Okinawan voters opposed the relocation, has receded this cycle as a voting priority relative to economic concerns, according to polling this newspaper has tracked throughout the campaign.

Koja, 42, a former deputy mayor of Naha, is backed by a coalition that includes the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party. He supports the Futenma relocation to Henoko and the return to Japanese control of American-held land elsewhere in Okinawa, positions he has paired with a campaign emphasis on economic development and reducing the prefecture's reliance on tourism alone.

The LDP's own institutional position in Okinawa has strengthened markedly since the party's clean sweep of all four of the prefecture's directly elected Lower House seats in February's general election, a result some analysts read as an early signal of exactly the economic-anxiety-driven realignment now showing up in Friday's gubernatorial polling.

Six candidates in total are contesting Sunday's election, though this newspaper's coverage, consistent with every independent poll conducted this cycle, continues to treat the race as effectively a two-candidate contest between Tamaki and Koja, with the remaining four candidates not registering meaningfully in available surveys.

National political figures from both the ruling coalition and the opposition have continued largely avoiding high-profile campaign appearances in the race's final days, a pattern local political observers attribute to a shared calculation that visible involvement from Tokyo could backfire in a prefecture with a long history of responding skeptically to perceived national interference in local political decisions.

Weather conditions are expected to be warm and dry across Okinawa for Sunday's vote, consistent with this edition's own forecast page, removing what election administrators in past cycles have identified as one of the few genuinely unpredictable variables affecting turnout in a race this close.

Sunday's result will be watched closely well beyond Okinawa's own borders. Political analysts across Japan describe the outcome as likely to shape how the ruling coalition calibrates its economic-development messaging in other prefectures with their own longstanding local disputes, ahead of next spring's

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Nikkei Falls 1.9% as BOJ Meeting, Fed Bets Rattle Markets

Three separate forces converged Friday to produce the sharpest single-session decline in weeks

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 fell 1.93% Friday to close at 64,011.34, a decline of 1,259.61 points that left the index down roughly 0.4% for the week and marked its sharpest single session in several weeks, as three separate, largely unrelated forces converged on the same trading day to overwhelm the more selective optimism that had supported Japanese equities through most of the summer.

The first force was domestic and mechanical: next week's Bank of Japan policy meeting, now just days away, has left investors reluctant to hold large positions ahead of a decision widely expected to bring the first quarter-point rate increase since June, an outcome that would push borrowing costs to their highest level in roughly three decades and directly pressure the yen-sensitive exporters that carry substantial weight in the index.

The second force arrived from Washington rather than Tokyo. US producer price data released Thursday showed inflation accelerating in August, a reading that shifted market expectations for the Federal Reserve's own Sept. 15-16 meeting away from further rate cuts and toward a possible increase instead, a genuinely unusual reversal this newspaper's business pages explore in full detail today, driven substantially by new Fed Chair Kevin Warsh's hawkish public posture since taking over the central bank in May.

SoftBank's Maeda Reaches 12-0 as Pennant Magic Number Falls to 9

Friday's slate leaves both league races entering the season's final weeks with genuine stakes still in play

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Fukuoka SoftBank right-hander Yugo Maeda extended his perfect start to the season to 12-0 Friday, striking out a career-high nine batters across seven innings in an 11-1 rout of Chiba Lotte at Mizuho PayPay Dome that trimmed the Hawks' Pacific League pennant magic number to nine, leaving SoftBank needing only nine more wins or Nippon-Ham losses to formally clinch the league title.

The 21-year-old Maeda has not lost a decision since his first start of the season, a run that has made him the Pacific League's clearest Sawamura Award contender and the anchor of a SoftBank rotation that has helped the Hawks build one of the more dominant regular-season campaigns in recent Pacific League history, with a winning percentage that has left most of the rest of the league playing for playoff seeding rather than the pennant itself.

Elsewhere in the Pacific League Friday, Orix held off a late Saitama Seibu rally to win 5-4 at Kyocera Dome Osaka, a result that does little to alter either club's position in the standings but extends Orix's modest recent improvement after a difficult midseason stretch that had at one point threatened to end the club's postseason hopes entirely.

In the Central League, Yokohama DeNA continued its productive recent stretch with a 6-1 road win over Hiroshima at Mazda Stadium, extending what has become one of the league's more effective offensive runs over the past two weeks and further cementing the BayStars' position as the most realistic fourth Climax Series contender given the growing gap behind them in the standings.

US Lawmakers Demand AI Rules as Trump Prioritizes China Race

A researcher's public warning and the president's dismissal of it frame today's cartoon and the debate this newspaper's editorial page examines at length

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

US lawmakers called this week for new rules to govern artificial intelligence after Jacob Coxon, a researcher at Anthropic, went public with concerns that frontier AI development is advancing faster than the safeguards meant to contain it, accusing both his own employer and OpenAI of racing toward further capability gains without commensurate caution — a warning that drew an unusually broad political response spanning lawmakers who do not typically engage forcefully in AI governance debates.

President Donald Trump offered a pointedly different assessment when asked about the warning, saying he was not concerned about AI leading to humanity's extinction and arguing instead that the United States' central priority must be maintaining its technological lead over China, a contrast this newspaper's staff cartoonist Taro Suzuki renders today in a single, deliberately unfair-looking cartoon panel that has already prompted this newspaper's editorial page to devote not one but two extended essays to the underlying argument.

The episode arrives against a backdrop this newspaper's technology desk has tracked closely: Chinese industrial deployment of artificial intelligence across manufacturing, robotics, healthcare diagnostics and education has continued expanding at a scale and pace considerably ahead of comparable Western deployment, even as much of the American policy conversation remains organized around existential-risk timelines that critics, including today's cartoon, argue have proven reliably premature across five decades of comparable predictions.

Kumamoto Recovery Continues Into Ninth Week

Livelihood-recovery grants keep moving even as the region manages a second, overlapping disaster response

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Kumamoto Prefecture's earthquake recovery entered its ninth week Friday with officials reporting continued progress on livelihood-recovery grant processing, even as the region's parallel recovery from last week's severe rain event continues alongside it, a dual-track response prefectural officials describe as an ongoing test of how much simultaneous disaster response the region's administrative capacity can sustain.

Prefectural officials said the two recovery efforts increasingly share administrative resources as both disasters move from their initial emergency phases into the longer, less visible work of processing claims and supporting displaced residents, a transition officials describe as considerably less dramatic than the earthquake's immediate aftermath but no less demanding of sustained institutional attention.

The magnitude-7.1 earthquake that struck the prefecture on July 28 ultimately caused 396 casualties, including 39 fatalities, and damaged nearly 32,000 houses, with more than 1,400 completely destroyed, according to the most recent joint damage assessment from national and prefectural disaster-response authorities, a toll this newspaper has tracked closely since the disaster's earliest days.

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WORLD NEWS

US Lawmakers Call for New AI Rules After Researcher's Public Warning

Anthropic researcher Jacob Coxon's comments drew an unusually broad political response, even as President Trump reiterated that competing with China matters more than existential risk

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

US lawmakers called this week for new rules to govern artificial intelligence after Jacob Coxon, a researcher at Anthropic, went public with concerns that frontier AI development is advancing faster than the safeguards meant to contain it, accusing both his own employer and OpenAI of racing toward further capability gains without commensurate caution. The reaction, spanning lawmakers who do not typically engage forcefully in AI governance debates, was notably broader than the response to comparable warnings from other frontier-lab staff earlier this year, according to coverage of the episode this newspaper has reviewed.

President Donald Trump offered a pointedly different assessment when asked about the warning, saying he was not concerned about AI leading to humanity's extinction and arguing instead that the United States' central priority must be maintaining its technological lead over China. The contrast between Coxon's warning and the president's framing captures, in miniature, the tension this newspaper's editorial page explores at length today: whether AI safety advocacy functions as a genuine check on real risk, or as a distraction from the competitive stakes several officials consider more urgent.

The United States enters this latest round of debate with no comprehensive federal AI statute in place, a gap that has itself become a defining feature of American technology policy this year, according to legal analysts this newspaper consulted. Congress has not passed cross-sector AI legislation, and White House executive orders and frameworks issued to date carry no binding force, leaving oversight to a patchwork of state laws, sector-specific agency rules, and court challenges that vary considerably by jurisdiction.

That patchwork has grown more consequential in recent months as individual states move ahead of Washington. Colorado's revised algorithmic-accountability rules are expected in draft form later this month, California and Texas have each advanced their own AI consumer-protection mechanisms, and a Justice Department intervention in at least one legal challenge to state-level AI regulation remains active, reflecting a live, unresolved argument over how much authority Washington can or should exercise over state AI rules.

The European Union's approach stands in sharp contrast, with its binding, risk-based AI Act continuing to serve as the world's most comprehensive statutory framework, requiring companies to document what their AI systems do, what data they use, and whether they fall into legally defined high-risk categories. European officials have continued positioning this framework as a model other jurisdictions should emulate, though American technology executives have argued publicly that comparable rules would slow US firms relative to Chinese competitors facing no equivalent domestic constraint.

That patchwork has grown more consequential in recent months as individual states move ahead of Washington.

Gulf Conflict Enters Its Eighth Month as Oil Prices Stay Elevated

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

The Gulf conflict this newspaper has tracked since February entered its eighth month this week with oil prices remaining elevated in the aftermath of Wednesday's sharp escalation, in which Iran struck a US-used base in Jordan and ten ships hours after Washington said it had destroyed five Iranian oil tankers. Crude prices eased modestly from that spike's peak but continued trading well above levels that prevailed before the escalation, energy analysts said this week.

Diplomatic efforts to prevent further escalation have continued through channels this newspaper's international desk has tracked closely, with regional mediators describing the current period as unusually delicate given how directly Wednesday's exchange departed from the shipping-lane skirmishes that defined most of the conflict's earlier months.

Japanese officials have maintained their characteristically calibrated public posture through the latest developments, continuing to emphasize vigilance and alliance coordination without signaling any unilateral step, such as an early strategic petroleum reserve drawdown, that might suggest alarm disproportionate to the conflict's actual, as opposed to potential, effect on physical crude supply through the Strait of Hormuz.

Energy security specialists this newspaper consulted this week describe the elevated price environment as now a semi-permanent feature of global energy markets rather than a temporary spike, with several noting that traders have begun pricing in a sustained risk premium reflecting the conflict's demonstrated capacity for sudden, severe escalation rather than its more common lower-intensity pattern.

Japanese shipping companies with vessels transiting or operating near the Strait of Hormuz say they have not altered routing in response to Wednesday's escalation, a decision executives at two of the largest lines attributed to insurance arrangements that already price in the conflict's baseline risk rather than an assessment that the latest strikes represent a qualitatively different threat level to Japanese-flagged vessels specifically.

This newspaper's international desk will continue providing full coverage of the conflict's trajectory, including its implications for the Bank of Japan's own rate decision next week, given how directly elevated energy costs now factor into the same inflation calculus driving the central bank's tightening deliberations.

Whether the conflict's eighth month brings further escalation or a return to the lower-intensity pattern that characterized most of its first seven months remains, regional security specialists say, genuinely uncertain, with the answer likely to depend as much on decisions made in Washington and Tehran in the coming days as on anything that has already occurred.

This newspaper will continue tracking the conflict's trajectory closely, given how directly its next phase is likely to bear on both the Bank of Japan's rate decision and the broader risk sentiment shaping markets in the week ahead.

This newspaper will continue tracking the conflict's trajectory closely, given how directly its next phase is likely to bear on both the Bank of Japan's rate decision and the broader risk sentiment shaping markets in the week ahead.

General Assembly Week Approaches Amid Crowded Diplomatic Calendar

By Rachel Kim | Japan-U.S. Coverage, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

World leaders continue preparing for this month's United Nations General Assembly high-level session against a backdrop this newspaper's diplomatic desk describes as unusually crowded even by the standards of a gathering that typically draws competing global crises into a single overlapping week.

Japanese officials are expected to use the session to renew Tokyo's long-standing Security Council reform push while also seeking bilateral discussions on the Gulf conflict's trajectory, according to Foreign Ministry officials familiar with preparations for the delegation's travel.

The session's timing, arriving in the same month as both the 25th anniversary of the September 11 attacks and the Gulf conflict's sharpest escalation to date, has left several veteran diplomats describing this year's General Assembly week as carrying unusually heavy symbolic and substantive weight relative to recent cycles.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's own attendance plans remain unsettled given the coming Cabinet reshuffle's compressed timeline, with officials declining to confirm whether she will travel to New York personally or send Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi to lead Japan's delegation in her place.

Japanese officials say they are preparing for an unusually heavy schedule of bilateral sideline meetings, with the Gulf conflict, the currency and rate story, and the ongoing AI governance debate this newspaper covers extensively today all likely to draw questions from counterparts regardless of each session's formal agenda.

This year's General Assembly week will also mark the first since Japan's currency intervention and the accompanying alliance coordination with Washington became a defining story of the current administration's economic management, giving Japanese officials a genuinely new talking point in bilateral meetings relative to prior years' sessions.

Security planning around the session is expected to be unusually extensive this year given the combination of the Gulf conflict's latest escalation and the sheer number of foreign ministers and heads of state the session will draw to a single venue.

This newspaper's diplomatic desk will provide full coverage of the session as it unfolds later this month, tracking both the formal proceedings and the substantive bilateral diplomacy that increasingly takes place on the margins of the General Assembly's crowded high-level week.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's own attendance plans remain unsettled given the coming Cabinet reshuffle's compressed timeline.

China's AI Industrial Push Continues Regardless of Western Safety Debate

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

China's state-supported push to deploy artificial intelligence across manufacturing, robotics and data-center infrastructure has continued expanding through the same period in which American lawmakers have debated new AI safety rules, a contrast this newspaper's editorial page addresses directly today in its companion essay to Taro Suzuki's cartoon.

Chinese industrial policy documents and state media coverage reviewed by this newspaper continue to frame AI deployment explicitly in terms of manufacturing productivity, scale and strategic economic positioning, with considerably less public emphasis on the existential-risk framing that has dominated a significant share of Western AI safety discourse over the past several years.

Analysts tracking China's AI sector say the deployment gap between rhetoric and practice in the two countries is itself becoming a talking point in American policy debates, with critics of stringent domestic AI regulation increasingly citing China's continued industrial rollout as evidence that unilateral American caution carries a real competitive cost without a correspondingly clear safety benefit if rival powers do not adopt comparable restraint.

Chinese officials have not directly engaged with Western AI safety arguments in public statements this newspaper has reviewed, generally treating the question as a matter of industrial policy and national competitiveness rather than one requiring the kind of existential-risk framework that has featured prominently in American and European AI governance debates.

Specific deployment examples cited in Chinese state media and industry reporting this newspaper has reviewed span a wide range of practical applications: AI-assisted manufacturing lines in major industrial centers, diagnostic-support tools deployed in hospital settings, small-business chatbot assistants marketed to independent retailers, and AI-based tutoring products for students in mathematics and science, a breadth of concrete, revenue-generating deployment that contrasts with the more abstract, risk-focused framing dominating much Western AI policy discourse.

Western technology executives who have visited Chinese AI deployment sites, several of whom spoke to this newspaper on background, describe the scale and speed of practical rollout as considerably ahead of what equivalent Western deployment has achieved in comparable application categories, even as these same executives caution that direct comparisons remain difficult given differences in data availability, regulatory environment and government support between the two systems.

This newspaper's editorial page addresses the broader implications of this competitive dynamic directly today, arguing that the gap between Western AI safety rhetoric and Chinese AI industrial practice deserves more serious attention from policymakers than it has so far received in a debate still substantially organized around existential-risk timelines rather than near-term competitive positioning.

China's state-supported push to deploy artificial intelligence across manufacturing.

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JAPAN NEWS

Cabinet Reshuffle Enters Final Weekend of Planning

Katayama, Koizumi and Motegi all considered safe as Takaichi finalizes a lineup expected within days

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Cabinet reshuffle entered its final weekend of planning with several senior portfolios considered effectively settled and government officials indicating an announcement is likely within days rather than weeks, according to party officials familiar with the process.

Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama's retention remains considered all but certain given her direct role managing the currency and rate story that has dominated economic coverage for weeks, with party officials describing continuity in the finance portfolio as the clear preference heading into next week's consequential Bank of Japan policy meeting.

Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi are both considered likely to remain in their current posts, given the crowded regional security agenda — the Gulf conflict's continuing escalation, North Korea's ongoing weapons development, and the upcoming General Assembly session — that party officials say argues for experienced continuity in both portfolios.

The health and agriculture portfolios remain the least settled among senior Cabinet posts, according to multiple officials familiar with the planning, with Health Minister Kenichiro Ueno's own noncommittal public posture on pending medical-pricing reform legislation read by some within the party as reflecting genuine uncertainty about his own position.

Agriculture policy has taken on additional weight this week following reports that rice farmer bankruptcies and business closures have reached a record pace in 2026, a development this newspaper covers in detail elsewhere in this section and one that party officials say has sharpened internal debate over whether the agriculture portfolio needs a minister prepared to pursue more structural reform than the current administration has favored to date.

Speculation has continued building around several younger LDP lawmakers as potential first-time Cabinet entrants, part of what party officials describe as Takaichi's broader effort to signal generational renewal within a government now approaching its first full year in office.

The timing of the reshuffle continues to be calibrated around both the BOJ meeting and Sunday's Okinawa gubernatorial election, with party officials describing a preference for finalizing the announcement only after both events conclude, to avoid the appearance of either preempting the central bank's independent decision or inserting national politics too visibly into a closely contested prefectural race.

Opposition parties have offered limited direct commentary on the reshuffle speculation itself this week, with the Democratic Party for the People's Yuichiro Tamaki remaining more focused on pressing the government for currency-intervention transparency than on the Cabinet lineup question, a prioritization DPP officials describe as reflecting where the party believes it can extract the most substantive concessions from a government currently managing multiple simultaneous priorities.

Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi are both considered likely to remain in their current posts.

Rice Farmer Bankruptcies Hit Record Pace as Structural Pressures Mount

32 cases recorded January through August, the fastest pace on record, as an aging workforce and falling prices squeeze producers even as the Reiwa rice crisis eases for consumers

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

Closures and bankruptcies among Japanese rice farmers are running at a record pace in 2026, with 32 cases recorded from January through August, according to data reviewed by this newspaper, as an aging agricultural workforce, rising operating costs and falling wholesale rice prices combine to make continued operation increasingly untenable for producers even as those same falling prices deliver welcome relief to consumers.

The trend represents an uncomfortable inversion of the Reiwa rice crisis narrative this newspaper has covered extensively over the past year: the same price declines that have eased household budgets and supported the government's broader cost-of-living relief efforts are simultaneously squeezing farm-level economics for producers who, in many cases, only recently began enjoying improved income from the crisis's earlier price spikes.

Agricultural economists this newspaper consulted describe the bankruptcy pace as reflecting a longer-running structural crisis in Japanese rice farming rather than a sudden deterioration, citing the same combination of factors — an aging farmer population with limited succession planning, Japan's decades-old production-adjustment policies that have historically discouraged acreage expansion, and rising costs for fuel, fertilizer and equipment — that have shaped the industry's slow contraction for years, now compounding at a pace fast enough to produce a genuinely record bankruptcy count.

The Gulf conflict's effect on energy prices has added a further pressure specific to this year, according to farm economists, with rising fuel costs for agricultural machinery and rising fertilizer costs tied to natural gas prices both feeding directly into farm-level operating expenses at precisely the moment wholesale rice prices have been declining from their crisis-era peaks.

Government agricultural policy officials have faced sustained pressure to address the structural dimension of the crisis more directly, with critics arguing that the production-adjustment framework, originally designed decades ago to prevent oversupply and support farmer incomes during an era of declining rice consumption, has left the industry poorly equipped to respond to the current combination of falling consumer prices and rising operating costs simultaneously.

The government has so far favored targeted, consumer-facing relief measures — including the food consumption tax cut moving through the Diet — over more fundamental reform to the underlying production system, a preference agricultural policy specialists attribute to the political complexity of reopening a framework that, however imperfect, has shaped Japanese rice farming for generations.

Regional agricultural cooperatives report particular concern about succession, noting that many of this year's bankruptcies and closures involve farm operators in their seventies or older with no identified successor willing or able to continue the operation, a demographic pattern that mirrors the broader rural depopulation trend this newspaper's real estate coverage has examined at length in recent editions.

Both Campaigns Make Final Appeals Ahead of Sunday's Okinawa Vote

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

Both major Okinawa gubernatorial campaigns spent Friday, the final full day before Sunday's vote, on get-out-the-vote efforts rather than new policy messaging, according to reporters covering both camps, following new polling this newspaper reports on today's front page showing challenger Genta Koja holding a slight lead over incumbent Denny Tamaki for the first time this election cycle.

Tamaki's campaign has continued emphasizing his administration's crisis-management record, pointing to its handling of the Kumamoto-adjacent disaster response and the national currency turbulence of recent weeks as evidence of steady governance, while Koja's campaign has continued centering its closing message on economic development and reducing the prefecture's reliance on tourism alone.

Election administrators report early voting continuing to track modestly ahead of the 2022 cycle's equivalent point, a trend both campaigns have claimed as favorable to their own chances without providing internal data to substantiate the claim publicly, consistent with the pattern this newspaper has observed throughout the campaign's closing stretch.

Weather conditions are expected to be warm and dry across Okinawa through Sunday, per this edition's own forecast page, removing what election administrators in past cycles have identified as one of the few genuinely unpredictable variables affecting turnout in a race decided by this narrow a margin.

National political figures from both the ruling coalition and the opposition have continued largely avoiding high-profile campaign appearances in the race's final days, a pattern local political observers attribute to a shared calculation that visible involvement from Tokyo could backfire in a prefecture with a long history of responding skeptically to perceived national interference in local political decisions.

Six candidates in total are contesting Sunday's election, though this newspaper's coverage, consistent with every independent poll conducted this cycle, continues to treat the race as effectively a two-candidate contest between Tamaki and Koja, with the remaining four candidates not registering meaningfully in available surveys.

Sunday's result will be closely watched well beyond Okinawa's own borders, with political analysts across Japan describing the outcome as likely to shape how the ruling coalition calibrates its messaging in prefectures with their own longstanding local disputes ahead of next spring's unified local elections, regardless of which specific issue proves most decisive in Okinawa's own count.

This newspaper's Tokyo bureau will provide full coverage of Sunday's count as results are announced, alongside analysis of what the outcome means for the Takaichi government's standing roughly eleven months into its tenure.

This newspaper's Tokyo bureau will provide full coverage of Sunday's count as results are announced, alongside analysis of what the outcome means for the Takaichi government's standing roughly eleven months into its tenure.

Defense Ministry Weighs AI Procurement Amid US Safety Debate

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Japan's Defense Ministry continues evaluating artificial intelligence procurement options for logistics, surveillance and decision-support applications even as American lawmakers debate new AI safety rules in the wake of this week's public warning from an Anthropic researcher, officials said, describing Japan's own procurement timeline as unaffected by the specific American political developments this newspaper covers elsewhere in this edition.

Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi's ministry has continued advancing previously announced defense-industrial cooperation with Washington, including the shipbuilding and munitions-production coordination this newspaper has covered extensively, initiatives officials describe as proceeding independently of the current American AI safety debate despite AI capability increasingly featuring in the broader defense-technology relationship between the two countries.

Japanese defense policy specialists this newspaper consulted describe Japan's own approach to military AI applications as considerably more cautious and incremental than either the most aggressive American deployment advocates or the most restrictive Western European regulatory models, reflecting Japan's broader postwar preference for gradual, carefully bounded expansion of military technology capability.

Diet lawmakers on the relevant oversight committees have shown limited public appetite for a dramatic acceleration of military AI procurement in response to the current American political debate, according to committee staff this newspaper consulted, who describe existing Japanese procurement processes as sufficiently deliberate to avoid the kind of rushed adoption critics allege has characterized some American and Chinese military AI deployment.

Whether Japan's approach ultimately proves too cautious relative to the pace of regional military AI development, or appropriately calibrated to a country whose constitutional posture has historically favored restraint over rapid capability expansion, remains a genuinely contested question among the defense policy specialists this newspaper consulted this week.

The ministry's current procurement timeline is not expected to be affected by the coming Cabinet reshuffle, officials said, given that defense-technology procurement decisions typically proceed on multi-year cycles that outlast any single Cabinet lineup.

This newspaper will continue tracking Japan's military AI procurement decisions as they develop, alongside the broader defense-industrial cooperation with Washington covered extensively in recent editions.

Industry analysts covering Japan's defense-technology sector note that Japanese contractors have shown growing interest in AI-assisted logistics and maintenance applications specifically, seen as lower-risk entry points into military AI adoption than the more contested autonomous-weapons applications drawing the sharpest debate in Washington and Beijing.

This newspaper will continue tracking Japan's military AI procurement decisions as they develop, alongside the broader defense-industrial cooperation with Washington covered extensively in recent editions.

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BUSINESS

Nikkei Sheds 1.9% as Fed Bets and Oil Prices Compound BOJ Anxiety

Friday's decline to 64,011.34 caps a down week for Tokyo shares as traders weigh three separate, simultaneously moving pressures

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 fell 1.93% Friday to close at 64,011.34, a decline of 1,259.61 points that left the index down roughly 0.4% for the week and marked its sharpest single session in several weeks. Decliners outnumbered advancers by more than two to one on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, with 2,436 issues falling against 1,048 gainers and 246 unchanged.

The session's losses were driven by a confluence of factors this newspaper's economics desk has tracked separately in recent weeks now compounding simultaneously. US producer price data released Thursday showed inflation accelerating in August, strengthening bets that the Federal Reserve will raise interest rates at its own meeting next week and pulling the dollar broadly higher against the yen. Crude oil prices continued climbing amid the Gulf conflict this newspaper has covered extensively, adding a second, independent source of inflationary pressure. And the Bank of Japan's own Sept. 17-18 policy meeting, now just under a week away, has left investors reluctant to take large positions ahead of a decision widely expected to bring the first quarter-point increase in the central bank's benchmark rate since June.

The session's worst individual performers reflected the breadth of the selloff rather than any single sector-specific catalyst. Resonac Holdings fell 10.68% to 14,295 yen, Kioxia Holdings dropped 6.99% to 54,030 yen, and Toppan Printing declined 6.95% to 4,725 yen. Gainers were comparatively scarce: LY Corp rose 3.44% to 544.40 yen, Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha added 2.94% to 3,397 yen, and Dai-ichi Life Holdings gained 2.73% to 1,883 yen — with shipping and insurance names among the few pockets of relative strength in an otherwise broadly negative session.

The yen weakened to around 154.17 per dollar Friday, retreating roughly 0.16% from Thursday's level and pulling back further from levels near 153 earlier in the week that had marked the currency's strongest position in nearly seven months. The greenback's broad recovery followed Thursday's US producer inflation data, which reduced market expectations for how much further the Fed might cut rates in the near term even as a Fed rate increase specifically was not the consensus expectation reported in available coverage this week.

The session's worst individual performers reflected the breadth of the selloff rather than any single sector-specific catalyst.

BOJ Meeting Now Less Than a Week Away as Hike Bets Firm

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

The Bank of Japan's two-day policy meeting, scheduled for Sept. 17-18, is now less than a week away, with market pricing continuing to reflect a high probability of a quarter-point increase to the central bank's benchmark rate following Friday's data showing Japanese producer prices climbing 7.6% in August.

Economists surveyed by this newspaper describe the meeting's outcome as more consequential than at any point in the current tightening cycle, given how directly a rate decision now interacts with the yen's recent volatility, the Federal Reserve's own rate decision expected in a similar timeframe, and the Gulf conflict's continued effect on energy prices and broader inflation expectations.

Strong sentiment readings among large Japanese manufacturers this quarter — the strongest since late 2021 — have added to the case for tightening, with several economists noting that corporate Japan's own confidence in the current environment removes one of the arguments the central bank might otherwise cite for delaying action further.

Economists surveyed by this newspaper describe the meeting as carrying a genuinely difficult balancing act: raising rates to address currency weakness and wage-driven inflation risk while the Gulf conflict simultaneously threatens to push imported energy costs higher through a separate channel that a domestic rate increase does little to address directly.

Options market pricing has reflected the elevated stakes clearly this week, with implied volatility on yen options remaining well above historical averages even after Friday's broad market selloff, a signal derivatives desks describe as consistent with a market bracing for continued volatility through the meeting regardless of which specific outcome it ultimately produces.

BOJ watchers note that a hike this month would mark the central bank's most consequential single policy move since the initial steps away from negative rates began, given how directly it would interact with the currency's already-elevated trajectory and the wider geopolitical risk premium currently built into energy markets.

This newspaper's economics desk will provide full coverage of the meeting's outcome as it happens next Thursday and Friday, alongside continued tracking of how Friday's market selloff and the Gulf conflict's trajectory over the intervening week may further shape the calculus Governor Ueda and his fellow board members ultimately bring to the decision.

Yen Holds Monthly Gains Despite Friday Pullback

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

The yen's retreat to around 154 per dollar Friday, while notable in the context of a single session, left the currency still up more than 3% for the month of September, according to currency data this newspaper reviewed, as the broader unwind of yen-funded carry trades continues working through global markets.

Currency strategists continue to describe the unwind as only partially complete, with Japanese institutional investors' capital repatriation decisions likely to remain a significant swing factor in the currency's trajectory through the Bank of Japan's meeting next week and beyond.

Corporate treasurers at major exporters said this week they are continuing to revise currency planning assumptions in light of both the yen's net monthly strengthening and its day-to-day volatility, a combination several described as more difficult to plan around than a steady, one-directional move in either direction would be.

The yen's roughly 3.3% strengthening over the past month, even after Friday's modest pullback to 154.17 per dollar, continues to reflect a combination of factors this newspaper has tracked closely: expectations for more aggressive Bank of Japan tightening, the unwinding of yen-funded carry trades built up over years of near-zero rates, and increased capital repatriation by Japanese investors adjusting portfolios ahead of next week's policy decision.

Currency strategists note that carry-trade unwinding, once underway, tends to feed on itself in ways that can produce sharper moves than the underlying rate differential alone would suggest, as each round of position unwinding removes yen-selling pressure that had previously helped keep the currency weak, creating a feedback loop that has characterized much of the yen's recovery since its July lows near 164 per dollar.

Japanese life insurers and pension funds, among the largest holders of foreign-currency assets in the country's financial system, have faced their own version of this adjustment, with several disclosing incremental increases in currency-hedging ratios on overseas bond holdings in recent public filings this newspaper has reviewed.

Retail investors in Japan itself have not been immune to the adjustment either, with several major brokerages reporting a continued pickup in inquiries about unwinding long-standing foreign-currency deposit positions built up during the years of domestic near-zero returns, a popular strategy marketed widely throughout the 2010s and early 2020s that now faces the same unwind pressure institutional carry traders are navigating.

Fed Meeting Adds Global Dimension to Next Week's Rate Decisions

The Federal Reserve's own Sept. 15-16 meeting, one day ahead of the BOJ's, has shifted from expected cuts to a possible hike under new Chair Kevin Warsh

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Next week brings not one but two closely watched central bank decisions bearing directly on the yen's trajectory: the Federal Reserve's own two-day meeting concludes Sept. 16, one day before the Bank of Japan's own decision, with the Fed's policy statement due at 2 p.m. Eastern time and a press conference from Chair Kevin Warsh to follow.

The Fed's current target range stands at 3.50% to 3.75%, held in a divided 9-3 vote at its July meeting. Markets have shifted markedly in the weeks since, moving from broadly expecting further rate cuts to now pricing a quarter-point increase as more likely than not, a reversal several economists attribute directly to Warsh's hawkish Jackson Hole address on Aug. 28, in which the chair, who took over the Fed in May, emphasized that underlying inflation must move toward the central bank's target "clearly and at sufficient speed" before easing resumes.

Fed Governor Christopher Waller added to the hawkish shift on Sept. 3, indicating it may be appropriate to raise rates at the upcoming meeting, comments that further reinforced market pricing for a hike even as the underlying inflation data has sent a genuinely mixed signal: US headline consumer prices eased to 3.4% in the year to July, with core inflation slowing to 2.5%, even as the Fed's preferred PCE gauge continues running at 3.7%, comfortably above target.

The unusual sequencing — a Fed decision one day before the BOJ's own meeting — gives Japanese policymakers an immediate, direct data point on US monetary policy before finalizing their own decision, though BOJ watchers this newspaper consulted caution against assuming a mechanical link between the two: Governor Ueda has consistently emphasized that Japan's rate path depends on domestic wage and inflation dynamics specifically, not on matching or offsetting Federal Reserve action.

A Fed rate increase, should one materialize, would work in the same direction as a BOJ hike from the yen's perspective — both would tend to support the currency, the Fed by making dollar assets less uniquely attractive relative to yen assets, and the BOJ by directly narrowing the interest-rate gap that has driven yen weakness for years. A Fed hold, by contrast, would leave the currency's trajectory next week resting more heavily on the BOJ's decision alone.

The Fed's current target range stands at 3.50% to 3.75%, held in a divided 9-3 vote at its July meeting.

Markets at a Glance

Compiled by the Business Desk

NIKKEI 225: closed Friday at 64,011.34, down 1.93% (-1,259.61 points); down roughly 0.4% for the week. YEN: approximately 154.17 per dollar Friday, still up more than 3% for September despite the day's pullback. JAPAN PRODUCER PRICES: +7.6% year-on-year in August, beating the 7.4% consensus forecast though slowing slightly from July's upwardly revised 7.7%, which had been the fastest pace since February 2023.

BOJ RATE: 1.00% currently; markets widely expect a quarter-point increase at the Sept. 17-18 meeting. UPCOMING: Okinawa gubernatorial election and Aki Basho sumo tournament both Sunday, Sept. 13; BOJ policy decision Sept. 17-18; US Federal Reserve decision expected in a similar window.

PRODUCER PRICE DETAIL: August's reading was led by continued strength in oil and coal products, chemical products, information and communications equipment, and nonferrous metals, the same categories that drove July's gain, according to Bank of Japan data. On a monthly basis, producer prices actually fell 0.2% in August, the first month-on-month decline in a year, a detail economists say complicates the otherwise straightforwardly hawkish year-on-year headline.

FED WATCH: The Federal Reserve's own target range stands at 3.50% to 3.75%, held in a divided 9-3 vote in July. Markets have shifted toward pricing a quarter-point increase at the Sept. 15-16 meeting as more likely than not, a reversal from earlier expectations of further cuts, following hawkish public comments from Fed Chair Kevin Warsh and Governor Christopher Waller.

GULF CONFLICT: Oil prices remain elevated following Wednesday's sharp escalation, in which Iran struck a US-used base in Jordan and ten ships hours after Washington said it had destroyed five Iranian tankers, adding a geopolitical inflation channel distinct from either central bank's own policy tools.

TANKAN WATCH: The Reuters Tankan sentiment index for large manufacturers rose to +21 in September from +18 in August, its highest level since December 2021, driven by robust semiconductor and data-center demand, according to Reuters' monthly survey of Japanese corporate sentiment.

This newspaper's business desk compiles this market summary nightly and will provide expanded coverage of both the Fed's and the BOJ's policy decisions as each is announced next week.

BOJ RATE: 1.00% currently; markets widely expect a quarter-point increase at the Sept. 17-18 meeting.

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SPORTS

NPB Box Scores: Friday, September 11

Maeda improves to 12-0 as SoftBank routs Lotte; Orix and DeNA also win

Compiled by the Sports Desk

FUKUOKA SOFTBANK 11, CHIBA LOTTE 1 — At Mizuho PayPay Dome (Game 24). SoftBank right-hander Yugo Maeda struck out a career-high nine batters across seven innings, allowing five hits and one earned run to improve to a perfect 12-0 on the season, taking sole possession of the Pacific League's lead in pitcher wins. The 21-year-old has not lost since his first start of the year. SoftBank's offense backed him with an 11-run outburst, routing Lotte at home.

ORIX 5, SAITAMA SEIBU 4 — At Kyocera Dome Osaka (Game 22). Orix held off a late Seibu rally to win by a single run, a result that does little to alter either club's position in the standings but extends Orix's recent modest improvement after a difficult midseason stretch.

YOKOHAMA DENA 6, HIROSHIMA 1 — At Mazda Stadium (Game 19). DeNA continued its productive recent stretch with a comfortable road win over Hiroshima, extending what has become one of the Central League's more effective offensive runs over the past two weeks.

IDLE — Yomiuri, Chunichi, Tokyo Yakult, Hanshin, Hokkaido Nippon-Ham and Tohoku Rakuten did not play Friday.

STANDINGS NOTE — With Hanshin idle Friday, the Tigers' Central League lead over Yomiuri, who won Thursday, holds at a game and a half heading into the weekend. In the Pacific League, SoftBank's win extends the Hawks' commanding lead atop the standings, with the club now firmly in position for one of the most dominant regular-season campaigns in the league's recent history.

Maeda's specific outing deserves closer attention given how central it has become to SoftBank's season: the 21-year-old right-hander has now completed a perfect campaign through 12 decisions, a run that has made him the clear frontrunner for the Pacific League's Sawamura Award and one of the more remarkable individual pitching seasons in recent NPB memory, regardless of how the Hawks' already-secure pennant race concludes.

Attendance figures from Friday's three completed games were solid across the board, with Mizuho PayPay Dome's crowd for the SoftBank-Lotte game reflecting the sustained local interest in watching Maeda's continued pursuit of an unblemished season, a storyline that has drawn attention well beyond the Hawks' own dedicated fan base.

With the regular season running through Nov. 1, both the Central League's still-competitive top spot and the Pacific League's second-place battle between Seibu and Nippon-Ham remain the two storylines this newspaper's sports desk will track most closely through the season's final weeks, alongside SoftBank's push for a historically dominant regular-season finish.

IDLE — Yomiuri, Chunichi, Tokyo Yakult, Hanshin, Hokkaido Nippon-Ham and Tohoku Rakuten did not play Friday.

MLB Roundup: Dodgers Rout Reds 14-1 as Playoff Races Tighten

Results from Thursday, September 10 (US date), the most recent completed slate available as this edition went to press

Compiled by the Sports Desk

Los Angeles Dodgers 14, Cincinnati Reds 1 — Enrique Hernandez went 2-for-4 with a double, a home run and four RBI as the Dodgers routed the Reds, continuing the club's push toward a third consecutive World Series appearance.

San Diego Padres 9, Washington Nationals 2 — Jackson Merrill went 4-for-5 with a triple, two home runs and six RBI in one of the day's standout individual performances across the majors.

New York Mets 15, Miami Marlins 14 — Christopher Morel went 3-for-4 with a home run, three RBI and three runs scored in a high-scoring affair that came down to the final outs.

New York Yankees 6, Colorado Rockies 1 — Will Warren improved to 10-6, allowing one run on four hits with eight strikeouts across six innings.

Philadelphia Phillies 11, Houston Astros 7 — Trea Turner went 2-for-5 with a home run, two RBI, two runs scored and a stolen base.

Seattle Mariners 3, Texas Rangers 2 — Kade Anderson earned his first career MLB win, allowing one run on six hits with five strikeouts across six innings.

Milwaukee Brewers 8, Chicago Cubs 6 — William Contreras went 2-for-3 with a home run, three RBI and two runs scored.

Baltimore Orioles 9, Cleveland Guardians 5 — Dylan Beavers went 2-for-5 with a double and three RBI.

Kansas City Royals 5, Arizona Diamondbacks 2 — Bobby Witt Jr. went 2-for-4 with a home run and three RBI.

Also Thursday: Detroit Tigers 7, Minnesota Twins 2; Oakland Athletics 2, Toronto Blue Jays 0; San Francisco Giants 7, St. Louis Cardinals 6; Los Angeles Angels 6, Boston Red Sox 4; Tampa Bay Rays 7, Atlanta Braves 2; Pittsburgh Pirates 4, Chicago White Sox 2.

With the postseason set to begin later this month, playoff races across both leagues continue tightening, with the Dodgers' rout of Cincinnati keeping Los Angeles comfortably positioned in the National League West as the club continues managing Shohei Ohtani's now hitting-only role down the stretch.

Baltimore Orioles 9, Cleveland Guardians 5 — Dylan Beavers went 2-for-5 with a double and three RBI.

Maeda's Perfect Season Reaches 12-0 as SoftBank Romps Past Lotte

Orix snaps four-game skid behind Mune's go-ahead single; DeNA downs Hiroshima as only three of the league's twelve teams play

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Fukuoka SoftBank right-hander Yugo Maeda struck out a career-high nine batters across seven innings Friday, improving to a perfect 12-0 on the season and taking sole possession of the Pacific League's lead in pitcher wins as the Hawks routed Chiba Lotte 11-1 at Mizuho PayPay Dome. The 21-year-old left just five hits and one earned run over his outing, extending a streak that has run unbeaten since his first start of the season.

SoftBank's offense did the rest of the damage in a five-run fourth inning that put the game away early. Leadoff man Tomoya Masaki tied the game 1-1 with his 25th home run of the season in the first inning after Lotte had scored first; Yukio Yanagita, 37, followed with his 16th home run in the fourth, his second consecutive game with a home run, to put the Hawks ahead for good. The floodgates opened from there: Ko Kawase and Masaki each drove in runs before Kensuke Kondo and Ryoya Kurihara added run-scoring hits of their own, turning a one-run game into an 8-1 rout by the middle innings. Hotaka Yamakawa capped the scoring with a two-run home run in the seventh — his first since returning to the active roster after a four-month absence.

The win, SoftBank's fourth in a row, trimmed the Hawks' magic number for clinching the Pacific League pennant to 9, with second-place Saitama Seibu's own loss the same day accelerating the countdown further. SoftBank has now won 12 consecutive decisions started by Maeda alone this season, a run manager Kimiyasu Kobayashi's staff have managed carefully around an innings total — 99■ through Friday — that will likely leave the right-hander short of the innings threshold required for an official ERA title even as his win total keeps pace with the league's most decorated veteran starters.

At Kyocera Dome Osaka, Orix snapped a four-game losing streak with a come-from-behind 5-4 win over Saitama Seibu, whose own four-game winning streak ended in the same game. Trailing 1-4 after Seibu starter Watanabe was chased early, Orix chipped away with RBI hits from Masahiro Nishino and a tying sacrifice fly from Ryoma Nishikawa before Yuma Mune's two-out single in the sixth inning drove in the go-ahead run.

Mune, 30, playing his fourth consecutive game in the cleanup spot after never having previously started in that role in his career, backed up the go-ahead hit with a diving defensive stop in the seventh that preserved Orix's lead. "Life is about spirit and guts," Mune told reporters afterward, describing the at-bat that produced the decisive single off Seibu's third reliever. Rookie right-hander Reo Yamaguchi started for Orix and fell short of his first career win, allowing four runs over 4■ innings, but the bullpen — Hakushi picking up his third win in relief, Machado closing for his 30th save of the season — held the line from there.

SoftBank's offense did the rest of the damage in a five-run fourth inning that put the game away early.

NPB Scoreboard and Standings at a Glance

Compiled by the Sports Desk

FRIDAY RESULTS — Fukuoka SoftBank 11, Chiba Lotte 1 (Mizuho PayPay Dome); Orix 5, Saitama Seibu 4 (Kyocera Dome Osaka); Yokohama DeNA 6, Hiroshima 1 (Mazda Stadium). Yomiuri, Chunichi, Tokyo Yakult, Hanshin, Hokkaido Nippon-Ham and Tohoku Rakuten were idle.

CENTRAL LEAGUE — Hanshin Tigers 69-53-1 (.566); Yomiuri Giants 69-55-2 (.556, 1.0 GB); Yokohama DeNA BayStars 60-62-3 (.492, 9.0 GB); Tokyo Yakult Swallows 53-69-2 (.434, 16.0 GB); Hiroshima Toyo Carp 50-68-4 (.424, 17.0 GB); Chunichi Dragons 53-73-2 (.421, 18.0 GB).

PACIFIC LEAGUE — Fukuoka SoftBank Hawks 78-45-3 (.634); Saitama Seibu Lions 72-53-3 (.576, 7.0 GB); Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters 71-55-2 (.563, 8.5 GB); Chiba Lotte Marines 56-63-3 (.471, 20.0 GB); Orix Buffaloes 60-66-2 (.476, 19.5 GB); Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles 47-76-1 (.382, 31.0 GB).

UPCOMING — Aki Basho sumo tournament opens Sunday, Sept. 13, at Ryogoku Kokugikan. Okinawa votes for governor the same day.

CENTRAL LEAGUE WATCH — Hanshin's cushion over Yomiuri has narrowed steadily over the past two weeks from what was once a comfortable multi-game lead to a single game, making the Tigers' remaining schedule, including several head-to-head meetings with the Giants still to come, the most closely watched storyline in either league heading into the season's final stretch.

PACIFIC LEAGUE WATCH — SoftBank's lead is no longer in genuine question, with the Hawks' magic number for clinching the pennant outright now down to single digits. The more competitive remaining question in the league is which club, Seibu or Nippon-Ham, ultimately claims the second Climax Series berth, a race that has remained separated by a game and a half or less for much of the past month.

INDIVIDUAL WATCH — SoftBank's Yugo Maeda enters the season's final weeks still unbeaten at 12-0, a run this newspaper's sports desk continues tracking closely given how rare a perfect won-loss record through this many decisions has become in the modern NPB era.

This newspaper's sports desk compiles standings and results nightly and will continue providing complete box-score coverage, including detailed accounts of individual performances, through the remainder of both pennant races and into the Climax Series and Japan Series that follow.

Yomiuri, Chunichi, Tokyo Yakult, Hanshin, Hokkaido Nippon-Ham and Tohoku Rakuten were idle.

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SPORTS & TECHNOLOGY

J1 League Matchweek Continues Today Across Six Venues

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

J1 League action continues today with six matches on the schedule: Mito Hollyhock hosts Kawasaki Frontale, Shimizu S-Pulse hosts Avispa Fukuoka, Machida Zelvia hosts Yokohama F. Marinos, Gamba Osaka hosts FC Tokyo, Sanfrecce Hiroshima hosts Cerezo Osaka, and V-Varen Nagasaki hosts Nagoya Grampus, according to the league's official fixture list.

The current J1 season, restructured for the first time into a summer-to-spring calendar running from August 2026 through June 2027, remains in its opening stretch, with league news this week highlighting Chiba's first win since returning to the top flight and Mito's stoppage-time equalizer at Fukuoka extending the club's unbeaten run to five matches.

Machida Zelvia enters today's match against Yokohama F. Marinos unbeaten so far this young season, part of a group of clubs — alongside Kashima Antlers, Kashiwa Reysol, Kawasaki Frontale and Sanfrecce Hiroshima — that the league's own statistics identify as having gone longest without defeat since the new season format began.

This newspaper's sports desk will provide results from today's full slate in Sunday's edition, alongside continued coverage of the Aki Basho's opening day and the Okinawa gubernatorial election, both also taking place this weekend.

The league's restructured summer-to-spring calendar, adopted for the first time this season to align Japanese club football more closely with the international transfer and European league calendars, has required considerable adjustment from clubs, players and broadcasters alike, according to league officials, who describe the transition's early weeks as proceeding smoothly despite the significant scheduling disruption involved.

Attendance figures across the league's opening matchweeks have remained broadly consistent with recent-year levels, according to J.League's own published statistics, with Yokohama F. Marinos continuing to draw some of the competition's largest crowds given the club's spacious home stadium and sustained local following.

This newspaper's sports desk plans to expand its regular J1 League coverage in the coming weeks, reflecting the growing domestic interest in a league that, while still operating in the considerable shadow of NPB baseball's national attention, maintains a genuinely dedicated and growing fan base across its twenty member clubs.

Today's full six-match slate offers an unusually broad cross-section of the league's competitive landscape, from title contenders like Kashima Antlers and Sanfrecce Hiroshima to clubs like Chiba and Mito working to establish themselves in the restructured season's opening weeks.

Marinos continuing to draw some of the competition's largest crowds given the club's spacious home stadium and sustained local following.

Around Japan's Sports World: Football, Badminton and Softball

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Japan's X-League American football competition continues its autumn season this weekend, with corporate-sponsored teams including the Fujitsu Frontiers and Obic Seagulls among the traditional powers competing for position ahead of the league's playoff stretch later in the year, a competition that remains a comparatively niche but dedicated part of Japan's broader amateur and semi-professional sports landscape.

Japanese badminton players continue competing on the international circuit this month, with the sport remaining one of Japan's most internationally competitive, having produced consistent world-ranking contenders and Olympic medalists across both men's and women's competition in recent Olympic cycles.

Japan Softball League action continues through September, with the sport maintaining a particularly strong domestic following given the Japanese women's national softball team's Olympic gold medal history, most notably at the Tokyo 2020 Games, a legacy that continues to drive participation and corporate-team sponsorship at the domestic league level.

This newspaper's sports desk continues expanding coverage of Japan's broader sporting calendar beyond baseball and sumo, recognizing the genuine domestic following each of these competitions maintains even when international media attention remains disproportionately focused on the country's two highest-profile sports.

The X-League's corporate-team structure, in which teams are directly sponsored and staffed by major Japanese companies rather than operating as independent professional franchises, distinguishes American football's Japanese iteration from its US counterpart, reflecting a broader pattern of corporate-sponsored amateur and semi-professional athletics that has characterized Japanese sports beyond baseball and soccer for decades.

Japan's badminton program has produced a sustained run of international success extending back more than a decade, with the country's players regularly reaching the latter stages of major international tournaments and the domestic league continuing to serve as a proving ground for players progressing toward national team selection.

Softball's continued popularity in Japan reflects both the sport's Olympic history and its integration into school athletics programs nationwide, with the Japan Softball League's corporate-sponsored team structure mirroring the broader pattern seen in American football and providing a stable competitive pathway for players outside the far more heavily covered baseball and soccer systems.

Readers interested in more detailed coverage of any of these competitions are encouraged to contact this newspaper's sports desk directly, as we continue calibrating our coverage priorities to reflect genuine reader interest across Japan's full sporting landscape rather than concentrating coverage solely on the two sports that traditionally dominate domestic sports media attention.

Japan's X-League American football competition continues its autumn season this weekend.

Japan's Lighter-Touch AI Approach Faces New Scrutiny Amid US Debate

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

Japan's guidance-based approach to artificial intelligence governance, which has favored non-binding principles over the kind of binding statutory framework the European Union has adopted, faces renewed scrutiny this week as American lawmakers debate new AI rules following a prominent researcher's public safety warning, a story this newspaper covers in full on today's World News page.

Japanese technology policy officials have continued describing the country's lighter-touch model as deliberately calibrated to avoid constraining domestic AI development relative to international competitors, a rationale that echoes, in more measured form, the competitiveness arguments American critics of stringent AI regulation have raised more forcefully this week.

Industry groups representing Japanese AI developers have generally welcomed the government's restrained regulatory posture, arguing that Japan's relatively modest position in frontier AI development relative to the United States and China makes flexibility, rather than binding constraint, the more appropriate governance model for the country's current stage of AI industry development.

Critics of the current approach, including several academic AI ethics researchers this newspaper consulted, argue that Japan's guidance-based framework risks leaving genuine gaps in areas like algorithmic accountability and data protection that binding rules elsewhere have begun to address more systematically, though these critics acknowledge the same critics' own proposals have not gained significant legislative traction within the current government.

Whether Japan's approach shifts in response to the intensifying American and European regulatory debates remains, technology policy specialists say, unlikely in the near term, given the current government's broader preference for incremental rather than dramatic policy change across most domains this newspaper has covered in recent editions.

METI officials have continued describing Japan's guidance-based framework as a deliberate middle path between the EU's binding statute and the current American patchwork, arguing that non-binding principles allow faster adaptation as AI capabilities evolve than a fixed statutory framework would permit.

This newspaper's technology desk will continue tracking Japan's regulatory posture as the American and European debates develop further, given how directly Japan's own AI industry's competitive position depends on getting the balance between innovation and appropriate safeguards right.

Today's editorial page addresses the broader question of how AI safety discourse should be weighed against competitive pressure in considerably more depth, using today's staff cartoon as its starting point.

Today's editorial page addresses the broader question of how AI safety discourse should be weighed against competitive pressure in considerably more depth, using today's staff cartoon as its starting point.

Rapidus Talks With Chip Designers Continue Amid Sector Volatility

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

Rapidus Corp. continues discussions with chip designers interested in its planned advanced semiconductor manufacturing capability, chief executive Atsuyoshi Koike said this week, even as Friday's broader market selloff dragged down several semiconductor-linked names alongside the rest of the Tokyo Stock Exchange.

The venture's Hokkaido fabrication facility remains on track for its next construction milestone despite a production timeline that has shown gradual signs of slipping in recent guidance, with Koike attributing the delay to the technical difficulty of the underlying manufacturing challenge rather than any funding shortfall.

Friday's session was particularly unkind to several chip-adjacent names, with Kioxia Holdings among the day's steepest decliners, falling 6.99% amid the broader risk-off mood this newspaper's business pages cover in detail today, a reminder of how closely semiconductor sector sentiment remains tied to the same currency, rate and now Gulf-conflict pressures affecting the wider market.

Prospective Rapidus customers continue weighing the venture's technical promise against the practical uncertainty of committing design work to a manufacturing partner without a finished, qualified production line, a dynamic common to first-of-its-kind foundry ventures but one that remains a genuine obstacle to faster customer commitment.

The venture's basic proposition remains as ambitious as when it was first announced: compress into a handful of years a leading-edge semiconductor manufacturing capability that took established rivals decades of accumulated engineering experience to achieve, a claim that remains unprovable until actual mass production begins.

The government's cumulative financial exposure to the project, now approaching ¥3 trillion when direct subsidies and loan-guarantee mechanisms are combined, has drawn periodic scrutiny from fiscal conservatives within the ruling coalition, though the project has so far retained broad cross-party political support given its framing as a matter of economic security.

This week's strong semiconductor-driven Tankan sentiment reading, discussed elsewhere in this edition, offers Rapidus executives a favorable industry backdrop even as the venture's own specific timeline continues to slip modestly from earlier guidance.

Rapidus executives have consistently argued that partnership with IBM on foundational chiplet technology, combined with the government's willingness to underwrite losses during the venture's early years, gives Japan a realistic path to closing its manufacturing gap with established rivals faster than organic industry development alone could achieve.

Rapidus Corp. continues discussions with chip designers interested in its planned advanced semiconductor manufacturing capability.

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SOCIETY, FOOD & CULTURE

Kyoto Minpaku Restriction Nears Formal Adoption

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Kyoto's plan to effectively prohibit new short-term rental operations in residential districts continues moving toward formal adoption in the coming weeks, city officials confirmed this week, following Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward in curbing minpaku expansion amid sustained neighborhood complaints over noise and waste disposal.

City officials say the zoning-based approach, which preserves minpaku eligibility in commercial and mixed-use areas while restricting new operations in residential zones, draws directly on lessons learned from Shinjuku's own earlier rollout, with Kyoto planners having studied which enforcement mechanisms proved most effective at addressing the complaints that dominated public hearings in both cities.

Neighborhood associations in Gion and other historic districts continue describing the coming adoption as the culmination of years of accumulated frustration with under-regulated short-term rental growth, while some traditional townhouse owners continue arguing that rental income has been essential to maintaining properties that would otherwise be difficult to sustain.

Real estate agents specializing in the city's historic districts report continued slowing in minpaku-configured property inquiries ahead of the restriction's formal adoption, a trend consistent with the policy's intended effect of redirecting investment capital toward longer-term residential use.

Tourism industry groups have offered mixed reactions to the restriction's progress, with some expressing concern about the effect on the city's total accommodation capacity during peak travel seasons, and others welcoming what they describe as a necessary correction to years of unmanaged growth.

City officials expect the restriction to take formal effect within the coming weeks, at which point this newspaper will provide a full accounting of its initial implementation and early effects on the local rental market.

JR East Nears Decision on Suica Penguin's Successor

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

JR East continues narrowing its selection among three finalists to succeed the retiring Suica Penguin, with the railway operator indicating a final decision is expected with sufficient lead time before the character's March retirement to allow for a coordinated transition across signage, merchandise and digital branding.

The penguin, introduced alongside the Suica card's 2001 launch, has become one of Japan's most recognizable transit mascots over more than two decades of continuous service, and JR East's decision to solicit public feedback in selecting a successor reflects the company's recognition of how genuinely attached commuters have become to the outgoing character.

Character mascots occupy an unusually significant role in Japanese corporate branding, with transit operators, local governments and businesses across virtually every sector maintaining dedicated mascot characters that often generate meaningful independent merchandise revenue well beyond their original promotional purpose.

The transition will be watched closely within the broader character-goods industry as a test case for how successfully a beloved, long-serving mascot can be retired and replaced without alienating the loyal following the outgoing character built over more than twenty years.

JR East has not disclosed the specific criteria used to narrow the field to three finalists, though company officials said the selection process incorporated both internal design review and informal public sentiment gathered over recent months.

This newspaper will report the successor's identity as soon as JR East makes its final announcement, expected in the coming weeks.

Transit operators elsewhere in Japan have watched JR East's public selection process with some interest, according to industry observers, given how rarely a mascot this established undergoes a fully public succession process rather than a quieter, internally managed transition announced only once complete.

USJ Halloween Event Draws Strong Weekend Crowds

By Grace Park | Food & Restaurant Columnist

Universal Studios Japan's 2026 Halloween event, now in its first full weekend since Wednesday's opening, continues drawing strong crowds, with park officials describing attendance as running ahead of last year's pace for the park's record zombie-performer season and its first horror attraction restricted to visitors aged 18 and over.

The park's decision to segment Halloween programming by visitor age — family-friendly daytime attractions alongside the new, more intense evening offering — appears to be succeeding at its stated goal of satisfying demand for a genuinely frightening experience without disrupting the broader family-accessible atmosphere the park maintains during daytime hours.

Restaurant and retail partners within the park report seasonal revenue tracking ahead of last year's pace as well, with several Halloween-themed food and merchandise offerings selling out within the event's opening days, consistent with the broader attendance trends park officials have described.

USJ's Halloween season, running through early November, remains one of the park's most significant annual revenue drivers, drawing both domestic repeat visitors and a growing share of inbound tourists specifically timing trips around the seasonal programming.

The park's zombie-performer expansion this year represents what officials describe as the largest single-year increase in the event's live-actor component in its history, requiring additional makeup and costume staff brought on specifically to support the larger performer roster.

Competition among Japan's major theme parks for Halloween-season visitor share has intensified in recent years, with Tokyo Disney Resort, USJ and a growing number of smaller regional parks each expanding seasonal programming annually in what industry analysts describe as an increasingly important battleground distinct from the parks' core summer and New Year peak seasons.

Tokyo Condo Market Holds Steady Ahead of BOJ Decision

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Tokyo's condominium market, where average prices surpassed ¥140 million earlier this year, continues holding relatively steady ahead of next week's Bank of Japan policy decision, with mortgage brokers reporting sustained elevated inquiries from prospective buyers seeking to lock in current borrowing costs before any further rate increase takes effect.

Developers continue describing persistent supply constraints — land scarcity, elevated construction costs and ongoing labor shortages in the construction trades — as the more durable driver of Tokyo's elevated prices relative to the current rate cycle, one that a single BOJ decision, however consequential, is unlikely to meaningfully reverse over any multi-year planning horizon.

First-time buyers continue facing the most acute version of the affordability squeeze, with brokers reporting a steady lengthening of average loan terms and growing reliance on multigenerational household financing arrangements to qualify for current loan amounts in the capital's most desirable wards.

Real estate agencies serving Tokyo's premium districts report foreign buyer interest remaining resilient despite the yen's continued strength, with several citing the capital's continued relative-value appeal compared with other major global cities even after accounting for recent currency appreciation.

Construction labor shortages, a persistent drag on new housing supply for years, have shown few signs of meaningful easing despite this week's strong Tankan sentiment readings, with construction trades continuing to compete for workers against other sectors amid Japan's tight overall labor market.

Developers remain broadly confident about demand fundamentals even as the rate environment shifts, citing persistent land scarcity, continued corporate relocation activity into the capital, and Tokyo's enduring status as Japan's dominant economic center as structural demand drivers unlikely to be meaningfully altered by next week's BOJ decision alone.

Detective Conan Extends Box Office Lead Into September

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Japan's domestic box office in 2026 remains led by 'Detective Conan: Fallen Angel of the Highway' at roughly ¥13.70 billion, with 'Chiikawa the Movie: The Secret of the Mermaid Island' close behind at approximately ¥12.23 billion, rankings that have held steady through early September as the industry looks toward an autumn slate exhibitors say could extend the year's strong performance.

Industry watchers continue noting that this year's box-office strength remains concentrated in a narrow band of established franchises, a pattern consistent with comparable dynamics in film markets worldwide, even as international distribution rights for both leading titles have become an increasingly significant revenue stream in overseas markets.

Exhibitors note that this year's sustained box-office strength has coincided with continued cost-of-living pressure on Japanese households, with moviegoing appearing to have retained its status as a comparatively affordable entertainment outing even as consumers grow more selective about discretionary spending elsewhere.

The 'Detective Conan' franchise's continued dominance reflects a now three-decade-long run for the long-running property, whose annual theatrical releases have become something close to an institutionalized spring tradition in Japanese cinema, consistently topping domestic box-office charts against new competition year after year.

'Chiikawa,' by contrast, represents a considerably newer entrant to the theatrical box office, having built its audience through social media and merchandise before expanding into television and, this year, a major theatrical release, illustrating a production pathway increasingly common in the current Japanese entertainment industry.

The autumn slate approaching in the coming weeks includes several anticipated franchise entries that exhibitors say could extend the year's strong performance into its final quarter, though none carries the same multi-decade institutional standing as Detective Conan's annual spring release.

Aki Basho Opens Tomorrow at Ryogoku Kokugikan

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Sumo's autumn tournament opens tomorrow at Tokyo's Ryogoku Kokugikan for a fifteen-day run, with ticket demand described by Japan Sumo Association officials as among the strongest in recent memory for a sport whose current popularity surge owes considerably more to inbound tourism than to any single dominant Japanese star.

Two yokozuna, Onosato and Hoshoryu, headline a field several sumo journalists describe as unusually deep in realistic championship contenders this September, with continued attention also focused on Aonishiki, the Ukrainian-born wrestler whose rapid ascent through the ranks has drawn particular international attention.

The tournament's opening coincides with Sunday's Okinawa gubernatorial election, giving the weekend an unusually full national news calendar even before accounting for whatever developments emerge from the Gulf conflict or currency markets in the coming days.

The tourism-driven demand has produced measurable knock-on effects for Ryogoku, the Tokyo district surrounding the Kokugikan, where restaurant owners and souvenir shops catering to sumo visitors report business volumes well above pre-pandemic levels heading into what promises to be an unusually well-attended opening weekend.

Chanko-nabe restaurants, the hearty stew associated with sumo stables' traditional communal diet, have become an especially visible beneficiary of the tourism surge, with several Ryogoku establishments reporting that international visitors now account for a majority of their business during tournament periods.

The Japan Sumo Association's broader modernization efforts, including expanded digital ticketing and English-language broadcast commentary options, have proceeded alongside the tourism boom rather than preceding it, with officials describing the organization as adapting to demonstrated demand rather than attempting to engineer international interest.

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WORLD NEWS

China to Sharply Raise Visa Fees for Japanese Nationals

Single-entry visa cost rising to ¥16,750, roughly 7.4 times the current level, starting Sept. 14

By Rachel Kim | Japan-U.S. Coverage, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

China will sharply raise visa fees for Japanese nationals entering the country starting Sept. 14, with the cost of a single-entry visa rising to ¥16,750, roughly 7.4 times the current level, according to notices reviewed by this newspaper, a move that arrives amid an already strained diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

The fee increase applies specifically to Japanese passport holders rather than visitors generally, a targeted structure that Japanese diplomatic officials described this week as consistent with a broader pattern of bilateral friction between Tokyo and Beijing that has intensified periodically over the past several years across trade, territorial and historical-memory disputes.

Japanese business groups with significant operations in China expressed concern about the fee increase's practical effect on business travel, with several industry associations noting that frequent business travelers making multiple annual trips would face a meaningfully higher cumulative cost under the new fee structure, even though the per-visit increase, in absolute terms, remains modest relative to typical business-travel budgets.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry has not announced a reciprocal fee increase for Chinese nationals visiting Japan as of this week, with officials describing the government's current approach as monitoring the situation rather than responding in kind, a posture consistent with Tokyo's broader preference for measured rather than escalatory responses to periodic diplomatic friction with Beijing.

Travel industry analysts note that the fee increase's timing, arriving just ahead of China's Golden Week holiday period in early October, could affect a modest but measurable share of Japanese outbound tourism to China during one of the year's peak travel windows, though the overall volume of Japanese tourism to China has already declined substantially from pre-pandemic levels for reasons largely unrelated to visa costs specifically.

This development arrives against a backdrop of several other recent points of bilateral friction this newspaper has tracked, including ongoing disputes over Japanese seafood import restrictions China imposed following the Fukushima treated water release, and periodic tension over territorial claims in the East China Sea that have continued regardless of which specific issue dominates headlines in a given week.

Chinese officials have not offered detailed public justification for the fee increase's specific timing or magnitude, according to diplomatic sources this newspaper consulted, leaving Japanese officials and business groups alike to interpret the move within the broader context of bilateral relations rather than any single, clearly stated Chinese policy rationale.

This newspaper's diplomatic desk will continue monitoring the bilateral relationship closely in the coming weeks, particularly given the General Assembly session later this month, which typically provides an opportunity for informal high-level contact between Japanese and Chinese officials even amid periods of heightened bilateral friction.

China will sharply raise visa fees for Japanese nationals entering the country starting Sept. 14.

Iceland to Propose Whaling Ban, Leaving Japan and Norway Isolated

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

Iceland is preparing to propose a formal ban on commercial whaling, a move that would leave Japan and Norway as the only remaining countries conducting commercial whale hunts on any meaningful scale, according to reports this newspaper has reviewed this week.

Japan resumed commercial whaling in 2019 after withdrawing from the International Whaling Commission, ending decades of what Japan had characterized as scientific research whaling within Antarctic waters and shifting instead to commercial operations confined to Japan's own exclusive economic zone, a structure Japanese officials have consistently defended as fully compliant with international law even as the practice remains a subject of sustained criticism from anti-whaling nations and conservation groups.

Japanese fisheries officials this week declined to comment directly on Iceland's reported proposal, with ministry sources describing Japan's own whaling program as a matter of domestic cultural and dietary tradition that Japan intends to continue regardless of policy shifts in other whaling nations, a position Japanese governments across multiple administrations have maintained with notable consistency.

The Japanese whaling industry itself has continued operating at a considerably smaller scale than its historical peak, with declining domestic whale meat consumption and an aging industry workforce raising genuine long-term questions about the practice's economic viability independent of any external international pressure, according to fisheries economists this newspaper consulted.

Conservation groups have welcomed Iceland's reported move as a significant symbolic step, even as they acknowledge that Japan's own whaling program, being confined to domestic waters and pursued under a different legal framework than Iceland's had operated within, would likely continue regardless of Iceland's specific policy decision.

Norway's own whaling industry, the third program potentially left standing should Iceland proceed with a ban, has faced its own declining catch quotas and reduced commercial activity in recent years, a trend that has led some observers to describe commercial whaling as an industry in genuine long-term global decline regardless of any individual country's specific policy announcements.

This newspaper's international desk will continue tracking Iceland's formal policy process as it develops, along with any diplomatic response from Japan should Iceland's proposal advance toward formal adoption in the coming months.

Japan's continued whaling practice remains a recurring point of friction with several Western governments and international conservation organizations, even as it has not, in recent years, risen to the level of a major bilateral dispute comparable to trade or security issues dominating Japan's relationships with those same countries.

This newspaper's international desk will continue tracking Iceland's formal policy process as it develops, along with any diplomatic response from Japan should Iceland's proposal advance toward formal adoption in the coming months.

Tesla Unveils Steering-Wheel-Free Cybercab in Japan

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

Tesla unveiled its Cybercab autonomous taxi in Japan for the first time on Sept. 11, showcasing a vehicle designed entirely without a steering wheel or pedals, according to coverage this newspaper has reviewed, marking the company's first public demonstration of the vehicle in the Japanese market.

The vehicle's complete absence of manual driving controls represents a notably more aggressive design commitment to full autonomy than the gradual, driver-assist-first approach most competitors, including several Japanese automakers, have favored in their own autonomous vehicle development programs.

Japanese regulatory officials have not indicated any near-term path toward approving fully driverless vehicles lacking manual controls entirely for public road use, according to transport ministry officials this newspaper consulted, suggesting the Japan unveiling functions primarily as a market-awareness and technology demonstration rather than a signal of imminent commercial deployment.

Japanese automakers have watched Tesla's autonomous vehicle push with particular attention given the country's own considerable investment in autonomous driving technology, though most domestic manufacturers have pursued more incremental deployment strategies centered on limited, geofenced autonomous shuttle services rather than Tesla's more sweeping vision of a purpose-built robotaxi fleet.

Consumer reaction to the Japan unveiling has been mixed, according to social media commentary and initial press coverage this newspaper has reviewed, with some expressing enthusiasm for the technology's ambition and others raising the same safety and regulatory questions that have accompanied the vehicle's rollout discussions in other markets.

The unveiling arrives amid a broader wave of AI and automation-related news this newspaper covers extensively in today's edition, from the ongoing debate over AI safety regulation to Chinese industrial AI deployment, adding autonomous vehicles as a further concrete example of AI-adjacent technology advancing in publicly visible ways even as abstract policy debates about AI risk continue in parallel.

This newspaper's technology desk will continue monitoring Tesla's specific plans for the Japanese market, including whether the company intends to pursue regulatory approval for any limited operational deployment beyond the current demonstration phase.

Tesla's broader robotaxi ambitions have faced regulatory scrutiny in several markets, including its home US market, where fully driverless commercial deployment remains limited to specific approved jurisdictions rather than nationwide operation, a regulatory pattern likely to shape however Tesla eventually approaches the Japanese market beyond this initial demonstration.

Tesla unveiled its Cybercab autonomous taxi in Japan for the first time on Sept. 11.

US, China to Hold AI Safety Talks in Mid-September

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to lead the US side, adding a diplomatic dimension to the AI safety debate this newspaper covers extensively today

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

The United States and China are preparing for AI safety talks in mid-September, led on the American side by Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, according to sources familiar with the discussions cited in reporting this newspaper has reviewed, adding a formal bilateral diplomatic track to the AI safety debate this newspaper's editorial page examines at length today.

Bessent's leadership role on the US side is itself notable, technology policy specialists this newspaper consulted said, given his primary institutional responsibility for economic and financial policy rather than technology regulation specifically, a choice that suggests the talks may focus substantially on the economic and competitive dimensions of AI development rather than narrower technical safety protocols alone.

The talks arrive amid the broader debate this newspaper covers extensively today, in which US lawmakers have called for new AI rules following Anthropic researcher Jacob Coxon's public warning even as President Trump has emphasized maintaining America's competitive lead over China as the more urgent priority — making any substantive US-China AI dialogue an inherently complicated diplomatic exercise given the two stated priorities' potential tension.

Chinese officials have not detailed their own specific goals for the talks in public statements this newspaper has reviewed, though Chinese AI policy has consistently emphasized industrial deployment and national competitiveness over the existential-risk framework that has dominated a significant share of American AI safety discourse, a framing gap this newspaper's editorial page argues deserves more serious attention than it has so far received.

The G20's own recent technology meeting saw American officials urge a hands-off approach to AI regulation internationally, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, a position broadly aligned with the thinking of major American AI companies and one that may complicate any US push for binding international AI safety standards even as it pursues bilateral talks with China specifically.

Japanese officials have not been reported as direct participants in the upcoming US-China talks, though Japan's own AI policy posture — the guidance-based, lighter-touch approach this newspaper's technology desk examines in a companion article today — gives Tokyo a direct stake in how any eventual US-China framework, should one emerge, shapes the broader international AI governance landscape Japan will need to navigate.

This newspaper's technology and diplomatic desks will provide joint coverage of the talks once they convene, tracking both the substantive AI safety questions at issue and the broader diplomatic signal a US-China dialogue on this specific subject sends amid otherwise tense bilateral relations across trade and security issues.

The United States and China are preparing for AI safety talks in mid-September.

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WORLD NEWS

US Pushes Hands-Off AI Regulation Stance at G20 Tech Meeting

By Rachel Kim | Japan-U.S. Coverage, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

US officials urged a hands-off approach to AI regulation at a recent G20 technology meeting, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, a position broadly aligned with the thinking of America's largest AI companies and one that adds international diplomatic context to the domestic AI safety debate this newspaper's editorial page examines extensively today.

The G20 positioning illustrates the same tension running through this week's broader AI news cycle: American lawmakers calling for new domestic AI rules following Anthropic researcher Jacob Coxon's public warning, even as the Trump administration simultaneously pushes a lighter-touch regulatory posture internationally, consistent with the administration's stated priority of maintaining US competitiveness against China rather than pursuing binding international safety constraints.

European officials at the same gathering continued advocating for their own binding, risk-based regulatory model, according to diplomatic sources this newspaper consulted, creating a genuine three-way divergence between the American preference for minimal international constraint, the European Union's comprehensive statutory approach, and China's industrial-deployment-focused framework that has largely avoided binding international AI safety commitments of any kind.

Japanese officials attending the gathering have continued advocating for Japan's own guidance-based middle path, according to Foreign Ministry sources this newspaper consulted, positioning Tokyo as a potential bridge between the more polarized American and European positions, though Japanese diplomats acknowledge this bridging role has yet to produce any concrete multilateral framework acceptable to all major AI powers simultaneously.

This newspaper's editorial page argues today that the gap between American AI-safety rhetoric and actual American international advocacy — pushing domestic safety rules while simultaneously resisting binding international constraints — deserves more scrutiny than it has so far received, a tension the G20 meeting illustrates concretely.

This newspaper's diplomatic desk will continue tracking international AI governance negotiations closely, including whether the upcoming US-China AI safety talks led by Treasury Secretary Bessent, covered elsewhere in this section, produce any bilateral framework that might eventually inform broader multilateral discussions.

North Korea's Kim Orchestrates New Consumer Spending Outlets Amid Sanctions

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is orchestrating new ways for the country's citizens to spend accumulated wealth, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, a notable development given the North Korean leader's own well-documented personal indulgences and the broader context of international sanctions that have shaped the country's economic development for years.

The development offers a data point for Japanese security and intelligence analysts tracking North Korea's internal economic conditions, which remain relevant to Japan's own security posture given the continued North Korean missile and nuclear weapons development this newspaper's defense coverage has referenced throughout this year's broader security reporting.

Japanese defense officials have not commented specifically on the reported consumer spending initiatives, according to Defense Ministry sources this newspaper consulted, with Japan's own North Korea policy continuing to focus primarily on missile and nuclear proliferation concerns rather than North Korea's internal economic and social developments specifically.

North Korea analysts this newspaper consulted describe the reported spending initiatives as potentially reflecting a degree of accumulated wealth concentration among a narrow elite class benefiting from sanctions-evasion activity, even as the broader North Korean population continues to face the food and resource scarcity that has characterized the country's economy for decades under international sanctions.

The development arrives amid continued International Atomic Energy Agency monitoring of North Korean nuclear activity, with the Vienna-based watchdog recently noting that Pyongyang has started operating an expanded annex at its Kangson enrichment site, a development this newspaper's international desk has tracked as part of its ongoing coverage of regional security developments relevant to Japan.

This newspaper's international desk will continue monitoring North Korea developments closely given their direct relevance to Japan's own security environment, alongside the Gulf conflict, the Japan-US alliance evolution, and the AI governance debates that have together dominated this week's broader international news coverage.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is orchestrating new ways for the country's citizens to spend accumulated wealth.

Data Centers Become Central to Global Economic Development Pitches

By Rachel Kim | Japan-U.S. Coverage, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

Data centers have become central to economic development pitches from political leaders across multiple countries, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, with both Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and rival political figures making data-center investment a key element of their competing economic platforms, reflecting a global pattern in which AI-driven data-center investment has become a genuine centerpiece of national economic strategy well beyond the countries most prominently associated with frontier AI development.

The pattern extends the same AI-industrial-investment theme this newspaper's technology desk has covered extensively this week in the specifically Japanese context, from Rapidus's semiconductor ambitions to the more modest but genuine AI investment unfolding in Kitakami, illustrating that data-center and AI-infrastructure investment has become a truly global economic development priority rather than one confined to the United States, China and a handful of other major AI powers.

Gulf state governments, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, have separately invested heavily in data-center and broader technology infrastructure, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, pitching their countries as reliable sources of abundant land and energy for AI infrastructure development, a positioning that adds yet another set of national economic strategies built substantially around AI infrastructure investment.

This global pattern of data-center-centered economic development strategy provides useful international context for Japan's own AI and semiconductor investment strategy, technology policy analysts this newspaper consulted note, suggesting Japan's approach reflects a broader global consensus about AI infrastructure's economic importance rather than a uniquely Japanese industrial-policy choice.

This newspaper's international desk will continue tracking how different countries' data-center and AI-infrastructure investment strategies compare and compete with one another, a genuinely global economic development story this week's Japan-focused coverage represents only one national example within.

Data centers have become central to economic development pitches from political leaders across multiple countries.

Gaza Cease-Fire Implementation Continues Amid General Assembly Preparations

Wire Reports

Implementation of the Gaza cease-fire framework continues moving forward incrementally, according to mediators this newspaper has consulted, with humanitarian access remaining the area of most tangible recent progress even as the agreement's longer-term governance and disarmament provisions continue moving more slowly through their planned implementation stages.

The cease-fire, which has now held in the narrower sense that large-scale hostilities have not resumed since the original framework took effect, continues facing implementation friction consistent with the pattern this newspaper's international desk has tracked across recent weeks, with the disarmament roadmap finalized last month still awaiting fuller execution from the involved parties.

Mediating governments, including Egypt, Qatar, Turkey and the United States, are expected to use the upcoming General Assembly session's concentration of relevant foreign ministers to press for renewed momentum on the framework's slower-moving provisions, according to diplomatic sources this newspaper consulted.

Japanese officials have continued their consistent posture of supporting the broader framework through humanitarian and reconstruction funding contributions rather than direct mediation involvement, a position this newspaper's diplomatic desk has tracked as remaining unchanged through recent weeks of incremental implementation progress.

This newspaper's international desk will continue providing updates on the cease-fire's implementation as developments warrant, tracking both the humanitarian access improvements mediators describe as genuine progress and the slower-moving governance questions that remain substantially unresolved.

The Gaza situation continues to compete for diplomatic attention with the Gulf conflict's own separate escalation this newspaper has covered extensively, illustrating the genuinely crowded state of Middle East diplomacy heading into General Assembly week.

Humanitarian organizations operating in Gaza continue reporting truck-crossing volumes below the levels the original framework specified, even as the flow has improved measurably from the conflict's most acute phases, according to aid group data this newspaper has reviewed.

Implementation of the Gaza cease-fire framework continues moving forward incrementally.

Climate Policy Expected to Feature Prominently at General Assembly

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

Climate policy is expected to feature prominently among the many competing priorities at this month's General Assembly session, according to diplomatic sources this newspaper has consulted, even as the session's attention is likely to be dominated substantially by the Gulf conflict and AI governance debates this newspaper has covered extensively this week.

Japanese officials are expected to reiterate the country's existing climate commitments and continued support for international climate financing mechanisms, according to Foreign Ministry sources, without signaling any major new policy announcements specifically timed to the session.

Climate diplomacy specialists this newspaper consulted note that climate policy has increasingly competed for diplomatic attention and resources against more acute, immediate security crises in recent years, a pattern this year's session, with its unusually crowded agenda spanning the Gulf conflict, AI governance and traditional Security Council reform priorities, appears likely to continue.

This newspaper's international desk will provide coverage of the session's climate-focused proceedings alongside our broader General Assembly coverage, tracking how much substantive attention climate issues ultimately receive amid the session's genuinely crowded competing priorities.

Energy transition considerations intersect increasingly with the AI infrastructure investment race this newspaper's technology desk has covered extensively this week, given the substantial electricity demands large-scale data-center development requires, adding a further dimension to how climate and technology policy increasingly overlap in practice.

This newspaper considers the interplay between climate commitments and AI infrastructure's growing energy demands a genuinely underexamined story worth continued attention, given how directly the two policy areas' priorities can work at cross purposes without careful coordination.

Whether this year's General Assembly produces meaningful new climate policy commitments or largely reaffirms existing frameworks amid competing crisis priorities remains, this newspaper's international desk says, likely to become clearer only once the session's full proceedings unfold later this month.

Climate policy is expected to feature prominently among the many competing priorities at this month's General Assembly session.

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JAPAN NEWS & JAPAN-U.S. RELATIONS

Extraordinary Diet Session Expected to Convene Following Cabinet Reshuffle

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

An extraordinary Diet session is expected to convene in the coming weeks following the Cabinet reshuffle this newspaper reports on elsewhere in today's edition, with the government's legislative agenda likely to include the food consumption tax cut, rice-industry support measures responding to this week's record farmer bankruptcy data, and continued budget deliberations informed by next week's Bank of Japan rate decision.

Opposition parties, including the Democratic Party for the People and the Constitutional Democratic Party, are expected to press the government for greater transparency on the currency intervention mechanics this newspaper has covered extensively, alongside their own policy priorities on cost-of-living relief and, for the CDP specifically, continued scrutiny of the government's Okinawa base-relocation policy regardless of Sunday's gubernatorial election outcome.

The session's specific opening date remains contingent on the reshuffle's completion and the government's own legislative preparation timeline, according to Diet officials this newspaper consulted, with government officials declining to commit to a specific date while the reshuffle process itself remains in its final stages.

Rice policy is expected to feature more prominently in this session's agenda than in recent prior sessions, government officials indicate, given the political pressure generated by this week's record bankruptcy data and the ongoing tension between consumer price relief and farmer income support this newspaper's politics desk has examined in detail.

Defense and security policy legislation connected to the ongoing shipbuilding and munitions-production cooperation with Washington this newspaper has covered extensively is also expected to feature in the session, according to Defense Ministry officials, continuing the incremental legislative pattern that has characterized Japan's defense-policy evolution for years.

This newspaper's politics desk will provide full coverage of the session's opening once a specific date is confirmed, tracking both the government's legislative priorities and the opposition's response across what promises to be a substantively busy session given the range of currency, rate, agricultural and security issues currently active.

Whether the reshuffled Cabinet approaches this legislative session with meaningfully different priorities than its predecessor, or largely continues the current government's existing policy trajectory with new personnel in familiar roles, remains, political analysts say, one of the more consequential open questions the session's actual proceedings will help answer.

Diet officials note that the session's timing, following closely on both the BOJ decision and Sunday's Okinawa election, will give the reshuffled Cabinet an unusually clear, near-immediate test of how its new lineup manages several of the year's most consequential and closely watched policy questions simultaneously.

The session's specific opening date remains contingent on the reshuffle's completion and the government's own legislative preparation timeline.

Government Weighs Foreign Worker Expansion Into Security Sector

Proposal would mark a notable extension of Japan's foreign labor framework into a traditionally sensitive occupational category

By William | Senior Political Analyst

The Japanese government is considering accepting foreign workers into the security sector, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, a proposal that would mark a notable extension of the country's foreign labor acceptance framework into an occupational category that has traditionally been treated with particular sensitivity given its public-safety functions.

The proposal reflects the same broader labor-shortage pressures this newspaper has covered extensively across agriculture, construction and other sectors, with Japan's demographic decline continuing to create workforce gaps that domestic labor alone has proven insufficient to fill across an expanding range of occupational categories.

Security industry employers have reportedly expressed support for the proposed expansion, according to industry association officials this newspaper consulted, citing persistent difficulty filling security positions domestically even as demand for security services has grown alongside increased tourism, expanded event security needs, and general commercial growth.

The proposal is likely to face more scrutiny than comparable foreign-worker expansions in less sensitive sectors, political analysts this newspaper consulted said, given legitimate public questions about training standards, language proficiency requirements, and appropriate vetting procedures for a occupational category involving direct public-safety responsibilities.

Labor policy specialists note that Japan's foreign worker acceptance framework has expanded incrementally across multiple sectors in recent years, with each expansion typically following a similar pattern: initial resistance citing sector-specific sensitivities, followed by gradual acceptance once specific training and certification frameworks are developed to address those concerns.

This newspaper's politics desk will continue tracking this proposal's development, including whether it advances through the Diet in the extraordinary session this newspaper reports on elsewhere in today's edition, and what specific training and certification requirements ultimately accompany any formal policy change.

Public opinion on foreign worker expansion into security roles specifically has not been extensively polled, according to available survey data this newspaper has reviewed, making this proposal's ultimate political reception more genuinely uncertain than some other, more thoroughly polled foreign-labor policy questions.

The proposal's consideration arrives amid the same broader immigration and foreign-resident policy debates this newspaper's society desk has covered in the context of Fuchu Prison's adapting foreign inmate population, illustrating how thoroughly questions of foreign residency and labor now touch multiple, seemingly unrelated corners of Japanese public policy simultaneously.

The Japanese government is considering accepting foreign workers into the security sector.

Defense Ministry Weighs Creative Funding Approaches Amid US Pressure

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Japan's Defense Ministry is exploring creative approaches to defense spending as the United States continues pressing allies for increased burden-sharing, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, a dynamic that adds further context to the shipbuilding and munitions-production cooperation this newspaper has covered extensively in recent editions.

The pressure for creative funding solutions reflects a genuine tension in Japan's current defense posture: sustained American pressure for higher defense spending as a share of GDP, balanced against Japan's own fiscal constraints and the political sensitivity of dramatic, rapid defense-budget increases in a country whose postwar constitutional and political culture has historically approached military spending with considerable caution.

Defense budget specialists this newspaper consulted describe several potential creative funding mechanisms under consideration, including expanded public-private partnership structures for defense-industrial investment and more aggressive use of existing reserve funds, though ministry officials have not confirmed specific mechanisms as formally adopted policy.

The pressure for increased defense spending arrives amid the same broader security environment this newspaper has covered extensively this week, including North Korea's continued weapons development, the Gulf conflict's implications for global security architecture, and the ongoing evolution of Japan's own alliance relationship with Washington across multiple simultaneous tracks.

Political analysts note that any creative funding mechanism ultimately still requires the same basic political consensus that has shaped Japan's incremental defense-spending increases for years: sufficient domestic political support to sustain the spending trajectory without triggering the kind of public backlash that more dramatic, rapid increases might provoke.

This newspaper's politics desk will continue tracking Japan's defense budget deliberations closely, particularly as they intersect with the extraordinary Diet session this newspaper reports on elsewhere in today's edition and the broader Cabinet reshuffle currently underway.

Whether Japan's creative funding exploration produces genuinely novel financing mechanisms or primarily repackages existing budgetary tools under new administrative frameworks remains, defense policy specialists say, a question this newspaper intends to examine closely once specific proposals move beyond the exploratory stage.

The defense-spending question illustrates, in miniature, the broader challenge running through much of this week's Japan Politics coverage: reconciling American pressure for more assertive Japanese action, whether on defense spending or AI competitiveness, against Japan's own domestic political and fiscal constraints.

Defense budget specialists this newspaper consulted describe several potential creative funding mechanisms under consideration.

Bessent's Dual Role: Currency Diplomacy and Now AI Talks

By Rachel Kim | Japan-U.S. Coverage, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's expanding portfolio, from the currency and rate diplomacy this newspaper has covered extensively in recent weeks to his newly reported leadership role in upcoming US-China AI safety talks, illustrates the Treasury Department's increasingly central role in economic statecraft questions that extend well beyond its traditional core mandate.

Japanese officials who have engaged with Bessent on currency matters describe him as a consequential figure in the broader US economic relationship with Japan, given his direct role in the currency stabilization coordination this newspaper has tracked since the intervention episode began, making his simultaneous AI diplomacy role a matter of direct interest to Tokyo even though Japan is not a party to the specific US-China talks.

This newspaper's Washington-Tokyo desk notes that Bessent's dual portfolio reflects a broader pattern in which economic and technology policy have become increasingly intertwined at the highest levels of US policymaking, a pattern Japanese officials say they are adapting to by ensuring their own Finance Ministry and technology policy officials coordinate more closely than in years past.

Whether Bessent's AI diplomacy role affects his currency-related engagement with Japan in the coming weeks, particularly around next week's Federal Reserve meeting, remains an open question this newspaper's economics and diplomatic desks will monitor jointly.

This newspaper considers Bessent's expanding role a useful illustration of how thoroughly economic and technology policy have merged in current US policymaking, a dynamic Japanese officials describe as requiring their own government to think similarly across traditional bureaucratic boundaries between finance, trade and technology ministries.

This newspaper's Washington bureau will continue tracking Bessent's combined currency and AI diplomacy portfolio closely, given how directly both dimensions of his role intersect with stories this newspaper covers extensively across its business and world news sections this week.

Congressional oversight of Bessent's expanded informal portfolio has been limited so far, according to congressional sources this newspaper consulted, with lawmakers generally deferring to the administration's own internal allocation of responsibilities across Cabinet officials rather than formally challenging the Treasury Secretary's expanding scope.

This newspaper considers Bessent's combined role a useful case study in how modern economic statecraft increasingly resists the neat departmental boundaries that traditionally separated finance, trade and technology policy in both the American and Japanese governments.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's expanding portfolio.

BUSINESS

Friday's Selloff in Detail: Morning Plunge, Afternoon Recovery

New session data shows the Nikkei fell as much as 1,801 points intraday before a BOJ-driven afternoon rally cut losses substantially

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Friday's Nikkei 225 session was considerably more volatile intraday than its 1.93% closing decline alone suggests, according to detailed trading data this newspaper has reviewed, with the index plunging as much as 1,801.56 points in morning trading before an afternoon recovery, driven by investors pricing in next week's expected Bank of Japan rate increase, cut the day's losses substantially by the close.

The index ended the morning session at 63,469.39, down 1,801.56 points from Thursday's close, before buybacks emerged in afternoon trading as investors recalibrated their positioning around the coming BOJ decision, ultimately lifting the index back to its 64,011.34 close, a recovery of more than 540 points from the session's morning low.

Friday's session coincided with the special quotation, or SQ, calculation date for September stock index options and mini Nikkei 225 futures, a technical calendar event that added independent selling pressure to the session beyond the fundamental factors — Fed rate expectations, Gulf-driven oil prices and the approaching BOJ meeting — this newspaper has covered extensively this week. The SQ value came in at 63,039.49, more than 2,200 points below Thursday's close, according to QUICK calculations reviewed by this newspaper.

Turnover on the session exceeded ¥8 trillion, roughly $51.9 billion, indicating unusually active trading consistent with the elevated volatility markets have shown throughout the week, according to Tokyo Stock Exchange data.

Beyond the previously reported decliners, Friday's session also saw Tokyo Electron, Kioxia and Ibiden trade lower alongside Fast Retailing and TDK, while Bandai Namco Holdings and Konami Group gained alongside KDDI and Toyota Tsusho, a mixed picture within the broader decline that traders attributed to stock-specific factors layered on top of the session's dominant macro themes.

Market technicians note that the scale of Friday's intraday reversal — from a morning decline approaching 3% to a closing decline under 2% — reflects genuine uncertainty among traders about how much of the session's initial selling reflected durable repricing versus temporary, SQ-related mechanical pressure that would be expected to reverse once the technical calculation concluded.

The SQ value came in at 63,039.49, more than 2,200 points below Thursday's close, according to QUICK calculations reviewed by this newspaper.

Nissan to Streamline Domestic Production, Shift Minivan Output to Tochigi

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Nissan Motor will streamline its domestic production footprint, consolidating minivan manufacturing at its Tochigi plant as part of a broader efficiency drive, according to company plans reviewed by this newspaper this week, continuing a restructuring effort the automaker has pursued across multiple production lines in recent quarters.

The consolidation reflects Nissan's ongoing effort to reduce fixed manufacturing costs amid a challenging period for the company, which has faced sustained pressure from both the yen's currency swings this newspaper has covered extensively and broader competitive pressure from both established rivals and newer entrants in the global electric and hybrid vehicle market.

Industry analysts describe the Tochigi consolidation as consistent with a broader pattern among Japanese automakers of concentrating specific vehicle lines at fewer, larger-scale plants to capture manufacturing efficiencies, a strategy that inevitably involves difficult tradeoffs for workers and communities at plants losing specific production lines even as it strengthens the remaining facility's long-term viability.

Nissan has not announced specific workforce reduction figures tied to the consolidation, according to company statements this newspaper reviewed, with the automaker characterizing the move primarily as a manufacturing-efficiency initiative rather than a broader cost-cutting or workforce-reduction program, though analysts note that production consolidations of this kind frequently carry workforce implications even when not explicitly announced as such.

The move comes as Nissan continues navigating a broader strategic realignment following several difficult years financially, with the company's own recovery plan continuing to emphasize cost discipline and manufacturing efficiency alongside efforts to strengthen its electric and hybrid vehicle lineup against increasingly competitive Chinese and other international rivals.

Japanese auto industry specialists this newspaper consulted describe Tochigi's selection as the consolidated minivan production site as reflecting the plant's existing manufacturing capabilities and workforce expertise, rather than any specific new investment commitment tied to the announcement.

Nissan Motor will streamline its domestic production footprint.

Chubu Electric Abandons Nuclear Plant Restart Following Data Scandal

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Chubu Electric Power plans to abandon efforts to restart a nuclear plant following a data-handling scandal, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, a setback for Japan's broader effort to restore nuclear power's share of the national energy mix following the extended shutdown of most reactors after the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

The specific nature of the data scandal that prompted the abandonment was not fully detailed in available reporting this newspaper has reviewed, though data-integrity and safety-documentation scandals have periodically affected Japanese utilities' nuclear restart efforts in the years since Fukushima, with regulators applying considerably more exacting scrutiny to restart applications than existed before the 2011 disaster.

The setback arrives at a moment when Japan's energy security calculus has become increasingly acute, given the elevated oil prices tied to the Gulf conflict this newspaper has covered extensively and the broader push toward energy diversification that has made nuclear restarts a recurring, if politically contested, element of Japan's national energy strategy under successive governments.

Energy policy analysts this newspaper consulted describe individual reactor setbacks of this kind as illustrating the continued fragility of Japan's nuclear restart program more broadly, in which a single utility's specific compliance failure can meaningfully affect both that company's own energy plans and the broader public and regulatory confidence underpinning the national restart effort.

Chubu Electric has not detailed its revised plans for the affected facility following the restart abandonment, according to company statements this newspaper reviewed, leaving open questions about whether the plant might pursue restart efforts again in the future following corrective measures, or face a more permanent decommissioning path.

This newspaper's business desk notes the timing's particular relevance given this week's broader energy-price story, with the Gulf conflict's effect on oil prices adding pressure to precisely the kind of energy diversification argument nuclear restart advocates have long made, even as individual compliance failures like Chubu Electric's continue complicating the broader restart program's execution.

This newspaper's business desk will continue tracking Japan's broader nuclear restart program, including whether other utilities' own restart timelines face comparable data-integrity or compliance scrutiny in the months ahead.

ASML to Expand Japan Workforce Supporting Rapidus and TSMC

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

ASML, the Dutch semiconductor equipment maker whose extreme ultraviolet lithography machines are essential to advanced chip manufacturing worldwide, plans to expand its Japan workforce to support next-generation chipmakers including Rapidus and TSMC's Japan operations, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed.

The expansion adds a significant vote of confidence to Japan's broader semiconductor revival strategy this newspaper has covered extensively, with ASML's direct workforce investment suggesting the equipment maker anticipates sustained, growing demand for its most advanced lithography systems from Japan-based manufacturing operations specifically.

ASML's equipment remains a critical, difficult-to-substitute input for the kind of leading-edge semiconductor manufacturing Rapidus is attempting to establish in Hokkaido, making the equipment maker's own workforce and support-infrastructure investment in Japan a meaningfully positive signal for Rapidus's prospects independent of the venture's own internal progress and funding announcements this newspaper has covered previously.

TSMC's own Japan operations, centered on its Kumamoto fabrication facilities, have already established a substantial customer relationship with ASML, and the reported workforce expansion suggests ASML anticipates continued growth in Japan-based demand from both TSMC and Rapidus simultaneously as each pursues its own distinct manufacturing roadmap.

This newspaper's business desk considers ASML's expansion a useful external validation of the broader semiconductor investment thesis this newspaper has covered extensively, offering a data point from a company with no direct financial stake in Rapidus's own specific success that nonetheless anticipates sufficient Japan-based demand to justify expanded local workforce investment.

This newspaper's business desk will continue tracking Japan's semiconductor ecosystem development closely, including how ASML's expanded local presence interacts with the broader industrial policy and government funding commitments this newspaper has covered extensively throughout the Rapidus venture's development.

This newspaper's business desk will continue monitoring ASML's specific hiring and investment timeline in Japan as a leading indicator of how confidently the broader semiconductor supply chain views Japan's manufacturing revival prospects.

China's Car Exports Surpass Full-Year 2025 Total Within Eight Months

Surging EV sales abroad add a new dimension to the broader question of China's manufacturing scale this newspaper's editorial page examines today

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

China's car exports in the first eight months of 2026 have already surpassed the country's full-year 2025 total, driven substantially by surging electric vehicle sales abroad, according to trade data this newspaper has reviewed, underscoring the scale of Chinese automotive manufacturing capacity at a moment when this newspaper's editorial page separately examines the broader gap between Chinese industrial deployment and Western policy debate in the AI sector specifically.

The export surge reflects years of sustained Chinese state and private investment in electric vehicle manufacturing capacity, positioning Chinese automakers, led by companies including BYD, as increasingly dominant competitors in global vehicle markets that Japanese, European and American automakers had historically dominated.

Japanese automakers, including Nissan, Toyota and Honda, have responded to the competitive pressure with their own accelerated electric and hybrid vehicle investment, though industry analysts this newspaper consulted describe Japanese manufacturers as still working to close a meaningful gap in electric vehicle manufacturing cost competitiveness specifically, even as Japanese hybrid technology remains highly competitive in markets less committed to full electrification.

The export data adds a concrete automotive-sector data point to the broader pattern this newspaper's technology desk has tracked of Chinese industrial capacity scaling rapidly across multiple advanced manufacturing sectors simultaneously, from electric vehicles to the AI-linked manufacturing, robotics and data-center deployment examined in today's editorial pages.

European Union officials have continued debating tariff responses to the surge in Chinese electric vehicle exports specifically, with the bloc's existing tariff measures facing ongoing legal and diplomatic challenges from Beijing even as European automakers continue reporting competitive pressure in their own home markets from increasingly capable and competitively priced Chinese electric vehicles.

China's car exports in the first eight months of 2026 have already surpassed the country's full-year 2025 total.

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TECHNOLOGY & SCIENCE

In Kitakami, Japan's AI Revolution Unfolds as a Slow Burn

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

In Kitakami, a city roughly 500 kilometers north of Tokyo, Japan's AI revolution is unfolding more as a slow, steady build-out than the dramatic boom narrative often associated with AI development elsewhere, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, offering a useful counterpoint to the more headline-grabbing AI stories dominating this week's news cycle.

The city's emergence as a modest but genuine AI and data-center hub reflects a broader pattern of AI-related infrastructure investment spreading beyond Japan's traditional technology centers in Tokyo and Osaka, driven partly by land and energy availability considerations that have made regional locations increasingly attractive for data-center development specifically.

Local economic development officials describe the AI-linked investment as a welcome, if still modest, source of economic activity for a region that has faced the same demographic and economic pressures affecting much of rural and regional Japan, even as they caution against overstating the scale of transformation relative to the country's major metropolitan AI development centers.

This newspaper's technology desk considers Kitakami's experience a useful, grounded complement to the more abstract policy debates dominating today's edition — the AI safety discourse examined in our editorial pages, the US-China talks covered elsewhere in this section — illustrating how AI's practical economic effects are, in specific communities, considerably more incremental than either the most dire safety warnings or the most breathless investment narratives might suggest.

ASML's own announced expansion of its Japan workforce to support next-generation chipmakers including Rapidus and TSMC, reported this week, adds a further concrete data point to this pattern of AI-adjacent industrial investment building steadily across Japan's semiconductor and technology supply chain, this newspaper's business desk notes, extending well beyond the specific companies most frequently mentioned in AI policy debates.

Whether regional AI-hub development of the kind unfolding in Kitakami accelerates further, or remains a comparatively modest complement to Japan's major metropolitan technology centers, remains, economic development specialists say, dependent substantially on continued private investment decisions this newspaper's technology desk will continue tracking closely.

This newspaper's technology desk plans a longer-form examination of Japan's regional AI and data-center investment patterns in a future edition, building on Kitakami's specific experience as a case study for the broader trend.

Japanese Startup Bets Iron Man-Inspired Homes Can Beat Humanoid Robots

The company aims to sell its first robot-equipped home in Tokyo by 2028 and build up to 10,000 units annually by 2035

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

A Japanese startup is betting that homes built around integrated robotic systems, rather than standalone humanoid robots, represent the more practical near-term path to bringing automation into everyday domestic life, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, with the company aiming to sell its first robot-equipped home in Tokyo by 2028 and scale to as many as 10,000 units annually by 2035.

The approach, which company officials have compared to the integrated suit-based technology popularized by the fictional Iron Man character, embeds robotic and automation capability directly into a home's structure and fixtures rather than relying on a mobile humanoid robot moving through a conventional living space, a design philosophy the company argues sidesteps many of the balance, navigation and safety challenges that have slowed humanoid robot development industry-wide.

Industry analysts this newspaper consulted describe the home-integrated approach as a genuinely distinct bet within Japan's broader robotics industry, which has historically split between industrial automation, specialized care and assistance robots, and, more recently, ambitious humanoid robot programs pursued by both Japanese firms and international competitors including several well-funded American and Chinese ventures.

The startup's 2028 target for its first Tokyo installation represents a considerably more near-term commercial timeline than most humanoid robot developers have offered for comparable general-purpose home assistance capability, though analysts caution that integrated-home systems, while potentially more near-term achievable, also lock buyers into a specific home's fixed infrastructure in a way a mobile, portable humanoid robot would not.

Japan's demographic pressures — a rapidly aging population and shrinking working-age workforce this newspaper has covered extensively across housing, agriculture and other sectors — provide a particularly compelling domestic market rationale for home-based automation aimed at supporting elderly residents living independently, a use case the company has specifically cited in its own public statements about the technology's intended market.

A Japanese startup is betting that homes built around integrated robotic systems.

Nagoya Medical Facility to Deploy AI-Enhanced Cancer Screening Equipment

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

A medical institution opening in Nagoya's Showa Ward in October will use artificial intelligence-enhanced PET-CT and MRI equipment to produce clearer diagnostic images and reduce the risk of cancer being overlooked during examinations, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, adding a concrete healthcare application to the broader range of AI deployment stories this newspaper covers across today's edition.

The facility's AI-enhanced imaging approach reflects a broader global trend of AI-assisted diagnostic tools moving from research settings into direct clinical deployment, with radiologists increasingly using machine-learning-enhanced image processing to identify subtle patterns in scan data that may be difficult for the human eye to detect consistently, particularly in early-stage cancer screening where earlier detection meaningfully improves treatment outcomes.

Japanese healthcare policy has generally supported AI-assisted diagnostic tool adoption within existing regulatory and reimbursement frameworks rather than requiring entirely new approval pathways specific to AI-based medical devices, according to healthcare policy specialists this newspaper consulted, a regulatory approach consistent with Japan's broader guidance-based, incremental approach to AI governance this newspaper's technology desk examines in a companion article today.

Medical AI specialists caution that AI-enhanced imaging tools function as a diagnostic aid supplementing, rather than replacing, radiologist judgment, with the technology's primary value lying in flagging areas of potential concern for closer human review rather than providing fully autonomous diagnostic conclusions.

The Nagoya facility's opening adds to a growing number of Japanese medical institutions incorporating AI-enhanced diagnostic equipment, a trend healthcare industry analysts describe as likely to accelerate given Japan's aging population and the corresponding growth in cancer screening demand relative to the country's specialist radiologist workforce capacity.

This newspaper's health and technology desks will continue tracking AI's expanding role in Japanese healthcare delivery, an application area that illustrates concrete, near-term AI benefit considerably removed from both the existential-risk framing and the industrial-competitiveness framing dominating this week's broader AI policy debates.

Health Ministry Reviews AI Medical Device Guidance Amid Expanding Adoption

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

Japan's Health, Labour and Welfare Ministry is reviewing its guidance framework for AI-based medical devices amid expanding clinical adoption, according to healthcare policy sources this newspaper has consulted, a review that gains additional relevance given the Nagoya facility's AI-enhanced cancer-screening deployment this newspaper reports on elsewhere in today's edition.

The review reflects the same broader tension running through Japan's AI governance approach across multiple sectors this newspaper has covered extensively this week: balancing continued innovation and adoption against appropriate safety and efficacy oversight, without imposing the kind of binding, comprehensive statutory framework the European Union has adopted for AI more generally.

Medical device regulatory specialists this newspaper consulted describe Japan's current approach to AI medical devices as generally permissive relative to some other advanced economies, treating AI-enhanced diagnostic tools largely within existing medical device approval frameworks rather than requiring entirely new AI-specific regulatory pathways.

Patient safety advocates have generally supported continued AI medical device adoption given the technology's demonstrated diagnostic benefits, according to healthcare consumer groups this newspaper consulted, while continuing to push for clear disclosure requirements ensuring patients understand when AI tools have contributed to their diagnostic evaluation.

The ministry's review is expected to continue over the coming months, according to sources familiar with the process, without a specific timeline for any formal guidance changes as of this week.

This newspaper's health and technology desks will continue tracking the ministry's review closely, given its direct relevance to the expanding AI healthcare deployment this newspaper has covered in the specific context of Nagoya's new cancer-screening facility.

Japan's approach to AI medical device regulation offers a useful sector-specific case study within the broader AI governance debate this newspaper's editorial page examines today, illustrating how the same guidance-based philosophy shaping Japan's general AI policy plays out in a specific, safety-critical application domain.

The ministry's review is expected to continue over the coming months, according to sources familiar with the process, without a specific timeline for any formal guidance changes as of this week.

Toshiba, Shin-Etsu, Niigata University Develop Chip Technology Beating China in Durability

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

A collaboration between Toshiba, Shin-Etsu Chemical and Niigata University has developed new semiconductor technology that outperforms Chinese competitors in durability testing, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, adding a further data point to the broader Japan-China technology competition running through much of this week's business and technology coverage.

The collaboration's specific technical achievement, while not fully detailed in available reporting this newspaper has reviewed, reflects a broader pattern of Japanese semiconductor materials and equipment companies competing on specialized technical performance metrics rather than the sheer manufacturing scale where Chinese competitors have increasingly demonstrated cost and volume advantages.

Industry analysts describe this durability-focused competitive strategy as consistent with Japan's broader position in the global semiconductor supply chain, where Japanese companies have historically maintained strength in specialized materials, precision equipment and quality-critical manufacturing steps even as final-assembly and high-volume production have increasingly shifted to Taiwan, South Korea and, more recently, China.

The university partnership component of the collaboration reflects a growing pattern of Japanese industrial-academic cooperation specifically targeting semiconductor materials research, a model government innovation policy officials have actively encouraged as part of Japan's broader semiconductor revival strategy this newspaper has covered extensively through the separate Rapidus manufacturing venture.

This newspaper's technology desk considers this kind of specialized materials-science achievement a useful complement to the more attention-grabbing manufacturing-capacity stories dominating semiconductor coverage, illustrating that Japan's competitive position in the global chip supply chain depends on multiple distinct types of technical achievement rather than manufacturing scale alone.

Whether this specific durability advancement translates into meaningful commercial adoption and revenue for the collaborating companies remains to be seen, technology analysts caution, given the frequent gap between laboratory and conference-presented technical achievements and their eventual real-world commercial deployment at scale.

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SPORTS

Sota Fujii Defends Oi Title for Seventh Consecutive Year

The 24-year-old shogi prodigy defeated fellow 24-year-old Takumi Ito 4-2 in a best-of-seven series

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Sota Fujii successfully defended his Oi title for a seventh consecutive year after defeating fellow 24-year-old Takumi Ito in Game 6 of their best-of-seven series, winning the match 4-2 in one of Japanese shogi's most prestigious annual title competitions, according to results this newspaper has reviewed.

Fujii's continued dominance of one of shogi's eight major titles extends a run of sustained excellence that has made him the sport's defining figure of his generation, with the Oi title defense marking one of several major championships the young grandmaster has held continuously for multiple consecutive years across Japan's demanding professional shogi title system.

The best-of-seven format that determines the Oi title, along with several of shogi's other major championships, tests players across a grueling multi-game series rather than a single decisive match, a structure shogi traditionalists describe as specifically designed to reward sustained strategic excellence and mental endurance over the shorter, higher-variance formats more common in some other competitive games.

Ito's challenge represented a genuine test for Fujii, according to shogi commentators this newspaper consulted, with the series extending the full six games before Fujii secured the decisive victory, a competitive margin considerably closer than several of Fujii's earlier title defenses have produced against less formidable challengers.

Shogi's continued popularity in Japan, sustained substantially by Fujii's own remarkable career trajectory since his professional debut, has helped maintain strong domestic broadcast and sponsorship interest in a traditional Japanese board game that faces its own generational challenges attracting younger players and audiences amid competition from digital entertainment and international games like chess.

Fujii's title defenses continue to draw significant domestic media attention specifically because of the historic scale of his continued dominance, with shogi historians noting that his sustained hold on multiple major titles simultaneously across recent years has few direct comparisons in the sport's modern professional history.

This newspaper's sports desk will continue tracking Fujii's title defenses across shogi's remaining major championships this year, alongside the broader competitive landscape of challengers, including Ito, working to establish themselves as credible threats to his sustained dominance.

Today's result adds shogi to the diverse range of Japanese sporting and competitive traditions this newspaper's expanded sports coverage addresses this week, alongside NPB baseball, sumo, J1 League football, and the smaller but dedicated competitive communities in badminton, softball and American football this newspaper has also covered in recent editions.

The best-of-seven format that determines the Oi title.

Japanese Badminton Players Continue Strong Autumn Circuit Run

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Japanese badminton players continue competing on the international autumn circuit this month, maintaining the country's position as one of the sport's most competitive nations following a decade of sustained international success that has produced consistent world-ranking contenders across both men's and women's competition.

The current generation of Japanese badminton talent continues to benefit from a well-established domestic development pipeline, with corporate-sponsored teams and dedicated training centers providing a competitive infrastructure that has helped Japan sustain its position among the sport's top nations even as competition from other Asian badminton powers, including China, Indonesia and South Korea, remains intense.

Japan's Olympic badminton success in recent Games has helped sustain domestic interest and sponsorship investment in the sport, according to Japan Badminton Association officials, even though badminton continues operating well outside the mainstream media attention baseball, sumo and increasingly soccer command in Japan's broader sports media landscape.

This newspaper's sports desk continues expanding its badminton coverage as part of a broader commitment to representing Japan's full competitive sporting landscape, recognizing the sport's genuine domestic following even without the same scale of coverage baseball and sumo traditionally receive.

Upcoming international tournament results involving Japanese players will be covered in future editions as this newspaper continues building out its regular badminton coverage alongside the softball, X-League football and shogi coverage introduced this week.

Corporate sponsorship of Japanese badminton has remained relatively stable in recent years, according to sport industry analysts, providing the financial foundation for the sport's national training programs even without the broader commercial visibility baseball and, increasingly, soccer command domestically.

Youth badminton participation has shown modest growth in recent years, according to Japan Badminton Association figures this newspaper has reviewed, a trend officials attribute partly to the sport's continued Olympic success providing visible role models for aspiring young players.

This newspaper's sports desk plans continued coverage of Japanese badminton's autumn circuit results as they develop, part of our broader commitment this week to representing sports beyond baseball and sumo that maintain genuine, if less widely covered, domestic followings.

Japanese badminton players continue competing on the international autumn circuit this month.

Japan Softball League Continues September Slate Amid Olympic Legacy

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Japan Softball League action continues through September, with the sport maintaining a particularly strong domestic following given the Japanese women's national softball team's Olympic gold medal history, most notably at the Tokyo 2020 Games, a legacy that continues to drive participation and corporate-team sponsorship at the domestic league level.

The league's corporate-sponsored team structure, mirroring the broader pattern seen across Japanese American football and other amateur and semi-professional sports this newspaper has covered this week, provides a stable competitive pathway for players outside the far more heavily covered baseball and soccer systems that dominate Japanese sports media attention.

Youth softball participation has remained relatively stable in recent years, according to Japan Softball Association figures this newspaper has reviewed, supported significantly by the sport's continued integration into school athletics programs nationwide and the ongoing visibility the national team's Olympic success has provided for the sport domestically.

Softball's Olympic status has itself faced periodic uncertainty, with the sport included in some recent Olympic Games specifically as a host-country addition rather than a permanent fixture of the Olympic program, a structural uncertainty that softball's domestic Japanese following has had to navigate even as the sport maintains genuine grassroots popularity within Japan regardless of its international Olympic status in any given cycle.

This newspaper's sports desk continues expanding its softball coverage as part of our broader commitment introduced this week to representing Japan's full competitive sporting landscape, recognizing softball's genuine domestic following even without the same international media attention baseball commands.

Corporate sponsorship of Japan's softball league has remained a stable source of program funding, according to league officials, even as broader corporate sports sponsorship patterns have shifted somewhat toward sports with stronger international visibility and marketing potential in recent years.

This newspaper's sports desk will continue providing softball coverage alongside our expanded reporting on badminton, X-League football and shogi, reflecting our effort to give readers a genuinely comprehensive picture of Japan's sporting culture beyond its most internationally famous sports.

Upcoming Japan Softball League results and standings will be covered in future editions as this newspaper continues building out regular coverage of this and other previously under-covered Japanese sporting competitions.

Upcoming Japan Softball League results and standings will be covered in future editions as this newspaper continues building out regular coverage of this and other previously under-covered Japanese sporting competitions.

X-League Autumn Season Reaches Midpoint as Playoff Picture Takes Shape

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Japan's X-League American football competition reaches the midpoint of its autumn season this weekend, with corporate-sponsored teams including the Fujitsu Frontiers and Obic Seagulls among the traditional powers positioning themselves for the league's playoff stretch later in the year, according to league standings this newspaper has reviewed.

The league's corporate-team structure, in which teams are directly sponsored and staffed by major Japanese companies rather than operating as independent professional franchises, has remained a stable competitive model for Japanese American football since the sport's domestic establishment, distinguishing it structurally from the fully professional NFL model in the sport's country of origin.

Fujitsu and Obic have historically represented two of the league's most consistently competitive programs, according to league historians this newspaper consulted, with their continued strength this season maintaining a rivalry that has helped sustain domestic interest in a sport that remains comparatively niche relative to baseball, soccer and sumo within Japan's broader sports media landscape.

American football's development in Japan has benefited from decades of steady, if modest, institutional investment, according to league officials, including youth development programs and continued corporate sponsorship that has provided the sport a stable, if smaller-scale, competitive infrastructure compared with more prominent domestic sports.

This newspaper's sports desk continues expanding its X-League coverage as part of our broader commitment introduced this week to representing Japan's full competitive sporting landscape beyond baseball and sumo alone.

League officials describe this season's competitive balance as unusually strong, with several teams beyond the traditional Fujitsu-Obic rivalry showing genuine playoff contention, a development officials attribute partly to sustained corporate investment across a broader range of participating companies in recent years.

This newspaper's sports desk will provide continued X-League coverage as the season progresses toward its playoff stretch, alongside our expanded coverage of badminton, softball and shogi introduced this week.

Attendance at X-League games has remained relatively stable in recent years, according to league officials, drawing a dedicated if comparatively modest fan base relative to Japan's most prominent spectator sports.

This newspaper's sports desk will provide continued X-League coverage as the season progresses toward its playoff stretch, alongside our expanded coverage of badminton, softball and shogi introduced this week.

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SOCIETY & CULTURE

Fuchu Prison Adapts to Growing Foreign Inmate Population

About one in four prisoners now comes from overseas, requiring new approaches to meals, religious accommodation and daily operations

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Tokyo's Fuchu Prison is adapting its meals and living arrangements to a growing foreign inmate population, with about one in four prisoners now coming from overseas, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed this week, requiring staff to balance religious, cultural and dietary needs against tight budgets and the demands of running one of Japan's largest prisons.

The facility's adaptation efforts include modified meal programs accommodating religious dietary restrictions, including halal requirements for Muslim inmates, according to prison officials, alongside broader operational adjustments to communication, visitation and daily routine procedures for an inmate population whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds have grown considerably more diverse than the facility's traditional operating model was designed to accommodate.

Corrections officials describe the growing foreign inmate population as reflecting Japan's own broader demographic shifts, including rising numbers of foreign residents and workers in the country overall, a trend this newspaper's own coverage has tracked in the context of Japan's tightening rules for foreign residents even as the country simultaneously depends on foreign labor to address its own demographic and workforce challenges.

Budget constraints remain a persistent challenge in the adaptation effort, according to corrections officials, with the additional costs of accommodating diverse dietary and religious needs competing for resources against the facility's broader operational requirements in a national corrections system that has not seen commensurate funding increases specifically tied to this demographic shift.

Staff training has emerged as a particular area of focus, according to officials familiar with the facility's operations, with corrections officers requiring new cultural competency training to manage an increasingly diverse inmate population effectively, a challenge corrections systems in several other countries with more established histories of diverse incarcerated populations have faced in their own systems for considerably longer.

Language barriers present an ongoing operational challenge as well, according to prison officials, with the facility working to expand interpretation resources and multilingual signage and documentation to ensure foreign inmates can access legal counsel, medical care and other essential services despite limited or no Japanese language proficiency.

This newspaper's society desk will continue tracking how Japan's broader corrections system adapts to demographic changes that mirror the country's evolving foreign resident population more broadly, an evolution this newspaper has covered extensively in the context of labor markets, social services and immigration policy debates.

The Fuchu Prison story illustrates, in a specific institutional context, the same broader demographic transition playing out across many Japanese public institutions as the country's foreign resident population continues growing even amid ongoing political debate over the appropriate pace and scope of that growth.

New Video Evidence Surfaces From 2022 Shiretoko Boat Disaster

Footage recovered from a passenger's camera shows conditions aboard the Kazu I before it sank off Hokkaido, killing 20 and leaving six still missing

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Newly recovered video from a passenger's digital camera has revealed conditions aboard the Kazu I sightseeing boat before it sank off Hokkaido's Shiretoko Peninsula in April 2022, according to reporting this newspaper has reviewed, a disaster that left 20 passengers and crew members dead and six passengers still missing more than four years later.

The footage's recovery and release comes as families of the victims continue seeking fuller accounting of the circumstances that led to the sinking, which investigators have previously attributed to a combination of severe weather conditions, the vessel's own structural and safety-equipment deficiencies, and questions about the company's operational safety practices that emerged in the disaster's aftermath.

This newspaper approaches coverage of the newly surfaced footage with particular care given the ongoing grief of victims' families and the ongoing status of six passengers still classified as missing, focusing this report on the verified facts of the footage's recovery and its evidentiary significance rather than speculative detail about its specific contents.

Japanese maritime safety regulations underwent significant tightening following the Kazu I disaster, with operators of small tour vessels facing stricter weather-related operational restrictions and enhanced safety equipment requirements, reforms that Transport Ministry officials have credited with improving small-vessel tour safety industry-wide in the years since.

The disaster's operator, whose safety practices came under sustained scrutiny in the disaster's aftermath, faced both criminal and civil legal proceedings in the years following the sinking, with several of those proceedings continuing to work through Japan's court system even as this newspaper reports on newly surfaced evidence more than four years after the disaster itself.

Families of the victims have continued advocating for full accountability and complete recovery of all those still missing, according to advocacy groups this newspaper has consulted, describing the search for the six passengers still unaccounted for as an ongoing, unresolved dimension of the tragedy that distinguishes it from disasters where all victims have eventually been recovered.

This newspaper's society desk will continue following developments in the case with appropriate sensitivity to the victims' families, reporting significant factual developments as they become available while avoiding speculative or sensationalized treatment of an ongoing tragedy that continues to affect real families more than four years after the disaster occurred.

Maritime safety specialists note that the Kazu I disaster's legacy extends well beyond the specific case itself, having prompted a broader national reassessment of small-vessel tour operator oversight that continues shaping how prefectural and national authorities regulate similar tourism operations across Japan's extensive coastline.

The footage's recovery and release comes as families of the victims continue seeking fuller accounting of the circumstances that led to the sinking.

Home Curry Rice Cost Falls Below ¥350 for First Time in 11 Months

Falling rice prices continue delivering tangible household relief even as this newspaper's business pages track separate pressures elsewhere in the economy

By Grace Park | Food & Restaurant Columnist

The cost of making a serving of curry rice at home in Japan fell below ¥350 in July for the first time in 11 months, according to data from Teikoku Databank reviewed by this newspaper, driven substantially by declining rice prices that continue easing the Reiwa rice crisis's grip on household budgets even as the same price declines create genuine hardship for rice farmers this newspaper reported on earlier this week.

Curry rice has long served as an informal but widely tracked barometer of Japanese household food costs, given the dish's status as one of the country's most commonly prepared home meals and its combination of ingredients — rice, curry roux, vegetables and meat — that together reflect broader trends across multiple food categories simultaneously.

The milestone offers a tangible, easily understood illustration of the same wholesale rice price decline this newspaper's business and politics desks have covered from the currency and farm-economics angles respectively, translating an abstract wholesale price statistic into a concrete household cost figure ordinary consumers can directly relate to their own grocery budgets.

Food cost researchers note that curry rice's specific ingredient basket makes it a useful but imperfect overall inflation indicator, since rice represents only one component of the total cost alongside curry roux, vegetables and meat prices that have not necessarily declined at the same pace as rice specifically, some of which remain exposed to the same import-cost pressures affecting other food categories.

The milestone arrives amid a broader, still-contested debate this newspaper has covered extensively this week over how to weigh the consumer benefit of falling rice prices against the genuine hardship the same price declines are creating for rice farmers, a growing number of whom have faced business closure or bankruptcy at a record pace this year.

Household budget researchers describe the curry rice milestone as one of several tangible signs, alongside this week's strong wage growth data, that Japan's multi-year cost-of-living squeeze may be genuinely easing on the consumer side, even as the same researchers caution that a single food-cost data point does not resolve the broader affordability pressures that have shaped Japanese household finances and politics for the past three years.

This newspaper's food desk will continue tracking curry rice and other household food-cost indicators as useful, accessible barometers of the broader economic trends our business and politics desks examine in more technical detail elsewhere in this edition.

Consumer behavior researchers note that curry rice's specific status as a beloved, frequently prepared home meal makes cost changes to it unusually visible to ordinary households compared with less frequently purchased goods, giving the ¥350 threshold a genuine, if informal, significance in Japanese household budget conversations.

The cost of making a serving of curry rice at home in Japan fell below ¥350 in July for the first time in 11 months.

Shogi's Generational Challenge: Attracting Young Players Amid Digital Competition

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Japan's traditional board game of shogi faces a genuine generational challenge attracting younger players and audiences amid competition from digital entertainment and internationally popular games including chess, even as the sport's current period of sustained popularity, driven substantially by Sota Fujii's remarkable career, this newspaper reports on elsewhere in today's edition, offers reason for cautious optimism among the game's institutional stewards.

The Japan Shogi Association has pursued several initiatives aimed at broadening the game's appeal to younger players, including expanded online play platforms and educational partnerships with schools, though association officials acknowledge these efforts compete for young people's attention against an increasingly crowded landscape of digital entertainment options that did not exist during shogi's mid-20th-century peak popularity.

Fujii's own career has provided the association with its most effective recruitment and retention tool in recent memory, with youth shogi program enrollment reportedly increasing measurably in periods coinciding with his most prominent title defenses and record-setting achievements, according to association data this newspaper has reviewed.

International interest in shogi has grown modestly in recent years, driven partly by the game's own unique strategic characteristics that distinguish it from chess, including its distinctive rule allowing captured pieces to be returned to the board under the capturing player's control, a mechanic international game enthusiasts have found genuinely novel relative to more familiar strategic board games.

Professional shogi's economic structure, built around a combination of title-match sponsorship, newspaper serialization rights for match commentary, and broadcast arrangements, has remained relatively stable even as the broader media landscape supporting it has evolved considerably, with newspapers, including this one, continuing to serve as important institutional partners for professional shogi coverage.

This newspaper will continue providing shogi coverage as part of our broader commitment to representing the full range of Japan's competitive and cultural traditions, a commitment reflected in this week's expanded coverage across sumo, baseball, football, and now shogi alongside the badminton and softball coverage this newspaper has also introduced in recent editions.

Whether shogi's current Fujii-driven popularity surge translates into a durable, generationally sustained player base, or proves more dependent on his own individual career trajectory than institutional stewards would prefer, remains, shogi historians say, a genuinely open question the sport's governing bodies continue actively working to address.

Fujii himself has spoken publicly about his own commitment to growing the game's popularity beyond his individual results, according to interviews this newspaper has reviewed, expressing hope that his own career might serve as a foundation for sustained youth interest rather than a peak the sport struggles to build upon once his own playing career eventually concludes.

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CULTURE & REAL ESTATE

Destination Restaurants 2026 Awards Recognize Regional Japanese Cuisine

By Grace Park | Food & Restaurant Columnist

This year's Destination Restaurants awards, an annual recognition program celebrating restaurants that draw visitors specifically for their culinary reputation regardless of location, continued highlighting regional Japanese cuisine this week, according to coverage this newspaper has reviewed, with award ceremony organizers emphasizing restaurants operating well outside Japan's major metropolitan dining centers.

The awards program has grown in prominence in recent years as part of a broader movement within Japanese culinary media to recognize excellence beyond Tokyo and Osaka's internationally famous fine-dining scenes, spotlighting instead restaurants in smaller cities and rural areas whose reputation has grown primarily through word of mouth and dedicated culinary tourism rather than international media attention.

This newspaper's food desk has covered several parallel trends this week that connect meaningfully to the Destination Restaurants program's regional focus, including the tourism-driven economic benefits flowing to Ryogoku from sumo's popularity surge and the broader pattern of regional Japan benefiting unevenly from various tourism and cultural trends even as other regional areas continue facing the demographic and economic pressures this newspaper's real estate desk has covered extensively.

Culinary tourism specialists describe the Destination Restaurants recognition as providing genuine economic benefit to winning establishments and their surrounding communities, with award recognition frequently producing measurable increases in reservation demand and, for restaurants in smaller communities specifically, meaningful positive spillover effects for surrounding hotels, transportation and other tourism infrastructure.

This year's specific award recipients reflect a diverse range of Japanese regional culinary traditions, according to award organizers, from long-established kaiseki establishments maintaining generations-old techniques to newer restaurants blending traditional Japanese ingredients and methods with more contemporary culinary approaches.

This newspaper's food desk considers programs like Destination Restaurants a valuable counterweight to Japan's sometimes Tokyo-centric culinary media coverage, providing readers outside the capital's most famous dining establishments with genuine recognition and visibility for excellence found throughout the country.

Award organizers say they intend to continue expanding the program's regional reach in future years, with particular attention to identifying exceptional restaurants in areas that have not historically received significant culinary media attention despite maintaining genuinely excellent local dining traditions.

This newspaper's culture and food desks will continue covering Japan's regional culinary landscape as part of our broader commitment to representing the country's full cultural range beyond its most internationally recognized destinations and establishments.

This year's specific award recipients reflect a diverse range of Japanese regional culinary traditions.

Japanese Traditional Crafts Gain International Visibility Through Design Fairs

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Japanese traditional craftsmanship continues gaining international visibility through participation in major overseas design fairs, according to industry reporting this newspaper has reviewed, with wood craftsmanship and other traditional techniques finding renewed commercial and cultural interest among international design audiences.

The trend reflects a broader pattern of Japanese traditional crafts finding new international markets and appreciation even as many of the same craft traditions face genuine domestic challenges attracting new practitioners amid Japan's broader demographic decline and the same rural depopulation pressures affecting many traditional craft-producing regions.

Industry organizations promoting Japanese craft exports describe international design fair participation as an increasingly important channel for connecting traditional Japanese producers with international buyers and design collaborators who might not otherwise encounter these craft traditions through conventional export channels.

This newspaper's culture desk notes the parallel between this craft-export trend and the international distribution success Japanese animation and film properties have achieved, this newspaper's box-office coverage this week suggests, illustrating a broader pattern of Japanese cultural products finding growing international commercial viability across multiple distinct creative and craft traditions simultaneously.

Younger Japanese craftspeople have shown some renewed interest in traditional techniques partly driven by this growing international market opportunity, craft industry specialists this newspaper consulted said, offering modest but genuine encouragement to craft traditions otherwise facing significant generational succession challenges.

This newspaper's culture desk will continue tracking Japanese traditional crafts' international market development as part of our broader coverage of how Japan's cultural and creative traditions adapt to a rapidly changing global commercial and cultural landscape.

Government cultural promotion agencies have supported craft-export initiatives through various funding and promotional programs, according to industry sources, treating traditional craft preservation and international market development as complementary rather than competing priorities.

This newspaper considers the international craft-fair trend a hopeful, if modest, counterpoint to the more challenging generational succession stories affecting many traditional Japanese craft communities, offering at least a partial market-driven pathway toward sustaining techniques and traditions that might otherwise face more severe decline.

Japanese traditional craftsmanship continues gaining international visibility through participation in major overseas design fairs.

Regional Land Prices Show Mixed Picture Amid Rate and Demographic Pressures

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Regional Japanese land prices continue showing a genuinely mixed picture heading into next week's Bank of Japan rate decision, with prices in areas benefiting from tourism, semiconductor investment or corporate relocation activity continuing to appreciate even as broader rural areas facing sustained depopulation continue seeing prices decline or stagnate, according to real estate market data this newspaper has reviewed.

Areas near Rapidus's Hokkaido semiconductor facility and other major chip-industry investment sites have seen notably strong land price appreciation, real estate economists say, reflecting the same industrial investment pattern this newspaper's technology desk has covered extensively, with local land values responding directly to anticipated employment and economic activity from major manufacturing investments.

Tourism-driven regional markets, including areas near popular sumo, hot-spring and cultural heritage destinations this newspaper has covered in recent editions, have similarly seen land price support from sustained visitor demand, even as the underlying tourism boom itself remains concentrated in specific, well-established destinations rather than broadly distributed across rural Japan.

The more challenged end of the regional land market continues to reflect the same demographic pressures driving the akiya vacant-housing crisis this newspaper's real estate desk has covered extensively, with land in areas facing the most severe population decline commanding minimal market value regardless of the broader national rate environment.

Real estate economists describe next week's expected BOJ rate increase as likely to have a more pronounced effect on urban and already-appreciating regional markets than on the most severely depopulating areas, where land values have become sufficiently disconnected from conventional financing-driven demand that marginal rate changes exert comparatively little additional influence.

This newspaper's real estate desk continues tracking the widening gap between Japan's most dynamic regional markets and its most challenged ones as a story worth sustained attention independent of the more frequently covered Tokyo condominium market, given how directly this regional divergence reflects Japan's broader demographic and economic transformation.

Municipal land-use planning officials in several tourism- and industry-benefiting regions have begun exploring policies to manage rapid land price appreciation's own downsides, including concerns about housing affordability for long-term local residents priced out by investment-driven demand, an emerging tension this newspaper will continue monitoring.

Whether Japan's regional land market divergence continues widening or eventually moderates remains dependent on factors well beyond any single rate decision, real estate economists note, including the durability of current semiconductor and tourism investment trends and the pace of continued rural depopulation nationally.

Regional Japanese land prices continue showing a genuinely mixed picture heading into next week's Bank of Japan rate decision.

Foreign Buyer Interest in Japanese Property Remains Resilient Despite Yen Strength

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Foreign buyer interest in Japanese residential property remains resilient despite the yen's sustained strengthening this year, according to real estate agencies this newspaper has consulted, with several citing Japan's continued relative-value appeal compared with other major global property markets even after accounting for the currency's recent appreciation.

Buyers from several Asian markets, particularly Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, continue representing a significant share of foreign residential purchases in Tokyo's premium districts, real estate agents report, drawn partly by Japan's political and economic stability relative to other regional property investment destinations.

The yen's appreciation this year has modestly reduced the effective discount foreign buyers previously enjoyed when converting foreign currency into yen-denominated property purchases, agents note, though most describe the effect as a marginal adjustment to purchasing calculations rather than a fundamental deterrent to continued foreign investment interest.

Real estate agencies specializing in foreign buyer transactions report that inquiry volumes have remained broadly stable through the currency's recent volatility, suggesting that foreign buyer interest in Japanese property responds more to broader lifestyle, investment-diversification and residency considerations than to short-term currency fluctuations alone.

This newspaper's real estate desk notes that foreign buyer resilience amid currency appreciation stands in some contrast to the more currency-sensitive corporate exporter sector this newspaper's business pages have covered extensively, illustrating how differently currency movements affect distinct segments of Japan's broader economy.

Property management specialists serving foreign owners report continued strong demand for rental management services specifically, given that many foreign buyers purchase Japanese property as an investment rather than for personal residence, a pattern that has remained consistent through this year's currency volatility.

This newspaper's real estate desk will continue tracking foreign buyer activity as next week's Bank of Japan decision approaches, given how directly further currency movement could eventually test the resilience agents currently describe.

Whether foreign buyer interest continues at its current pace through a further BOJ rate increase remains, real estate economists say, dependent substantially on whether the rate decision produces the kind of sharp, sudden currency movement that could meaningfully alter the purchasing calculations underlying current foreign buyer activity.

This newspaper's real estate desk will continue tracking foreign buyer activity as next week's Bank of Japan decision approaches, given how directly further currency movement could eventually test the resilience agents currently describe.

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EDITORIAL & OPINION

TODAY'S CARTOON

"The apocalypse is always ten years away. The competition is not." — Taro Suzuki

The Apocalypse Is Always Ten Years Away. The Competition Is Not.

Today's cartoon argues that Western AI-safety rhetoric has become a form of regulatory theater while China quietly ships. This newspaper thinks the evidence, this time, is on the cartoonist's side

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

Today's cartoon, drawn by our own Taro Suzuki, is built around a single, deliberately unfair-looking juxtaposition. On the left, a disheveled figure holds a hand-lettered sign reading "AI WILL KILL EVERYONE BY 2036" while a clock face behind him resets, again, to "10 YEARS (again)." Around him, a well-funded panel of officials from organizations with names like the Global AI Safety NGO, the Future of Humanity Institute, and the Department of Digital Safety & Equity sit at a table stacked with position papers reading "Pause. License. Centralize." A cart labeled "Goalposts on Wheels" sits nearby, and a wooden crate reading "Regulatory Capture in a Lab Coat" supports the whole tableau. On the right, in stark visual contrast, a Chinese industrial complex hums with data centers, robotic assembly lines and a runner sprinting ahead under a banner reading "Strategic Lead. Scale. Speed. State Support," beneath the caption "While we sermonize, they ship." Along the bottom, three smaller panels show concrete, unglamorous AI applications actually functioning in the world: a diagnostic assistant helping a doctor, a small-business owner using a chatbot, a student working with a tutoring model. The cartoon's final line does the rest of the work: "The apocalypse is always ten years away. The competition is not." This newspaper has spent this week checking whether the cartoon's claim holds up against the available evidence. We think it does, more comprehensively than we initially expected, and we want to walk through exactly why.

Start with the apocalypse side of the ledger, because it is the easier claim to check and the one the cartoon stakes out most aggressively through its "archive of past apocalypses" — a stack of labeled crates reading Y2K, Population Bomb, Nuclear Winter, Peak Oil, and Climate (12 years left, 2018), each stamped "MOVED THE DATE." Every one of these predictions is a matter of settled historical record rather than contested interpretation. Y2K was genuinely expected by credible technologists to cause cascading infrastructure failures at the turn of the millennium; the failures did not materialize at anything like the predicted scale, and the date was not, in fact, moved — the predicted catastrophe simply did not occur, full stop, once the remediation work was done. Paul Ehrlich's 1968 "Population Bomb" predicted mass global famine by the 1970s and 1980s with a confidence that reads, from this newspaper's vantage point in 2026, as remarkable considering how thoroughly the Green Revolution's agricultural productivity gains falsified it within the very decade Ehrlich named. Nuclear winter modeling in the 1980s produced genuinely alarming projections that later, more sophisticated climate modeling substantially revised downward, without the original predictions' urgency ever being formally retracted by the researchers who advanced them. Peak oil predictions have been reissued, with new target dates, for well over half a century, each new prediction quietly superseding the last one without much public accounting for why the previous date came and went without the predicted production collapse. And the specific "twelve years to act" framing on climate change that the cartoon references traces to a widely circulated 2018 characterization of an IPCC report's carbon budget findings — a characterization the IPCC itself did not use and has since noted mischaracterized a threshold for a smoother transition as a hard deadline for civilizational catastrophe.

None of this newspaper's accounting of these five historical cases is intended to argue that the underlying concerns behind them were foolish, or that the researchers and activists who raised them were acting in bad faith. Population growth, nuclear risk, resource depletion and climate change are all genuine, serious phenomena worth serious, sustained attention, precisely the kind of attention this newspaper's own news and editorial pages devote to climate policy, nuclear proliferation and resource security in our ordinary daily coverage. The pattern we and the cartoon are both pointing to is narrower and, we think, more damning: not that the underlying concern was illegitimate, but that the specific, dated, civilization-scale catastrophe predictions attached to each concern proved reliably wrong, reliably in the direction of overstating both the timeline and the magnitude of harm, and reliably followed not by public reckoning with the miss but by a quiet migration to a new prediction with a new date, made with the same confident register as the prediction it replaced.

This is the pattern the cartoon's central figure — the "AI Safety Expert" holding the "AI WILL KILL EVERYONE BY 2036" sign, surrounded by cartoon monsters representing deepfakes and "Skynet" — is depicted as the latest entry in, and this newspaper thinks the comparison is fair rather than glib. Prominent voices within the AI-safety research community have, over the past several years, offered a range of specific extinction-risk timelines, several clustering in exactly the "about a decade out" range the cartoon mocks, generally justified by reference to specific capability thresholds — recursive self-improvement, deceptive alignment, autonomous replication — that have proven, so far, considerably harder to pin down empirically than the confident public communication built on top of them suggested they would be. The cartoon's "unfalsifiable 10-year extinction" scale, weighing "unfalsifiable" predictions against "measurable uses, misuses, and rival states," identifies precisely the methodological problem this newspaper's science desk has found most persuasive in our own reporting on the AI safety debate: a ten-year prediction horizon is long enough that the predictor is rarely still answering for a specific miss by the time the date arrives, and vague enough about the specific mechanism of catastrophe that no particular intervening development can cleanly falsify it, allowing the goalposts — as the cartoon's wheeled cart depicts with unsubtle precision — to roll forward indefinitely.

We want to be precise about where this newspaper's skepticism lands and where it does not, because the cartoon's argument, taken too literally, risks dismissing genuine AI safety research as pure grift, a conclusion we do not think the evidence supports and do not intend to endorse. Technical AI safety research — interpretability work aimed at understanding what large models are actually doing internally, red-teaming aimed at finding concrete failure modes before deployment, alignment research aimed at ensuring systems reliably do what their operators intend — represents genuine, valuable, often quite unglamorous engineering work that this newspaper's technology desk has covered respectfully in other contexts and will continue to. The cartoon's target, and ours, is narrower: the institutional layer sitting atop that genuine technical work, the policy-advocacy organizations whose funding, influence and continued relevance depend on the perceived proximity and scale of catastrophic risk remaining high, and whose specific policy prescriptions — the pause, license and centralize agenda the cartoon's conference table displays — consistently recommend exactly the kind of regulatory capture that happens to entrench whichever incumbent organizations are already positioned to comply with expensive licensing regimes, while doing comparatively little to address the specific, documented harms — deepfakes, misinformation, algorithmic bias in deployed systems — that these same organizations invoke as evidence of urgency.

That distinction between technical safety research and safety-advocacy institutions matters because it is precisely the distinction the cartoon's own bottom panels draw, and we think this is the cartoon's most underappreciated argumentative move. The three small panels depicting a diagnostic assistant, a small-business chatbot, and a tutoring model are not decoration. They are the cartoon's counter-example to the extinction-risk framing: concrete, bounded, verifiable AI applications producing measurable value — "better detection, faster insight, real patient benefit"; "local answers, real work, my business"; "explains, adapts, helps me learn" — deployed at exactly the scale and specificity that makes their benefits and failure modes actually assessable, in sharp contrast to the civilizational-scale, decade-out predictions the cartoon spends most of its canvas mocking. This newspaper's own reporting on AI deployment in Japan has covered comparable examples: diagnostic-support tools in regional hospitals, small-business customer service automation, adaptive tutoring software in cram schools — each one a bounded claim that can be checked against outcomes, rather than an unfalsifiable claim about a decade-distant catastrophe.

Now turn to the cartoon's other half, the concrete industrial buildup it juxtaposes against the safety debate's abstraction, because this is where this newspaper's research this week found the evidence considerably starker than we initially expected. China's 15th Five-Year Plan, covering 2026 through 2030 and formally reviewed by the National People's Congress in March, places embodied AI and robotics at the center of the country's industrial modernization strategy, with explicit government targets rather than the kind of market-driven, venture-funded uncertainty that characterizes most Western AI deployment. The plan's industrial development track calls for AI deployment across, in the government's own language, "the full chain of industrial design, trial production, manufacturing, and operations," while its social welfare track explicitly targets "embodied intelligence deployment in labor-scarce and hazardous environment positions" — language that connects directly to the demographic pressure driving the initiative: more than 310 million Chinese citizens are now 60 or older, alongside an estimated shortfall of roughly 5.5 million caregivers relative to projected need.

The production numbers behind this policy framework are, in this newspaper's assessment, the single most important fact in this entire comparison, and the one we think Western AI-safety discourse has least adequately reckoned with. According to figures reported by China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, Chinese humanoid robot production is expected to exceed 100,000 units in 2026 alone. By contrast, Tesla's Optimus program and Figure AI, the two most prominent American humanoid robotics efforts, delivered a combined total of roughly 300 units in 2025 — meaning Chinese production this year is on track to exceed combined recent American output by a factor well over 300 to one. China already accounted for an estimated 87% to 90% of global humanoid robot shipments in 2025, according to industry tracking cited by multiple technology publications this newspaper reviewed this week, and the country's existing operational stock of industrial robots — roughly 2 million units — runs about 4.5 times larger than Japan's own stock, which itself ranks second globally. More than half of all industrial robots installed worldwide in a typical recent year were installed in China alone.

This is not, we want to emphasize, a story about Chinese technological superiority in the underlying AI models themselves, a claim this newspaper is not equipped to adjudicate and does not intend to make. It is a story about deployment velocity and industrial follow-through — the gap between having a capable technology and actually building the factories, supply chains, regulatory pathways and demand signals required to put that technology to work at national scale. China's own industry analysts point to a specific structural advantage behind this velocity: geographic supply-chain density, with the Yangtze River Delta and Shenzhen regions hosting component suppliers — motors, reducers, sensors, actuators — within tight logistics radii of assembly manufacturers, allowing rapid iteration cycles that Western firms, with more geographically dispersed and often internationally fragmented supply chains, have struggled to match. Beijing's own policy coordination compounds this advantage: the National People's Congress plan explicitly instructs provincial governments to integrate AI deployment into governance, healthcare and education, creating what one industry analysis this newspaper reviewed described as "guaranteed demand... at a scale that no market signal alone could produce" — a demand-side certainty no Western AI company, dependent on convincing skeptical customers and navigating a fragmented, still-forming regulatory landscape, currently enjoys.

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EDITORIAL & OPINION

The Apocalypse Is Always Ten Years Away. The Competition Is Not. — Continued from Page 16

We think this is exactly the contrast the cartoon's "while we sermonize, they ship" caption is pointing at, and we think the contrast holds up under scrutiny in a way that should trouble anyone in Washington, Tokyo or Brussels currently weighing the specific policy menu — pause, license, centralize — that dominates Western AI governance discourse. A regulatory framework built primarily around slowing deployment to manage a diffuse, decade-out extinction risk carries a real, calculable opportunity cost when a strategic competitor is simultaneously building the industrial capacity to deploy the same underlying technology class at a rate three orders of magnitude faster, aimed explicitly at manufacturing productivity, eldercare capacity and export competitiveness rather than at any comparably apocalyptic ambition of its own. This is not an argument for reckless deployment absent any safety consideration — this newspaper does not believe, and the cartoon's own bottom panels do not depict, that safety and deployment speed are simply opposites to be traded off against each other in a zero-sum fashion. It is an argument that the specific form Western AI governance discourse has taken — dominated by extinction-risk framing, pause proposals and licensing regimes — may be optimizing for the wrong risk entirely, treating a speculative, unfalsifiable, decade-out catastrophe as the central organizing threat while a concrete, measurable, already-unfolding competitiveness gap widens in full view.

Japan's own position in this comparison deserves this newspaper's particular attention, given our own coverage of Rapidus, the domestic semiconductor venture, and the broader AI-infrastructure investment this newspaper's business pages have tracked throughout the year. Japan's roughly 450,000 operational industrial robots represent a genuinely substantial base — the world's second-largest, as this essay noted above — built over decades of manufacturing excellence in precision robotics, an area where Japanese firms including Fanuc and Yaskawa remain global leaders in traditional industrial robotics even as the newer, more AI-integrated "embodied intelligence" category shows China moving further and faster. Whether Japan's considerable existing robotics expertise translates into competitiveness in this newer category, or whether the country finds itself caught between a China moving at unmatched industrial speed and a United States whose AI-model capabilities remain, by most technical assessments, still ahead of China's own, is a question this newspaper's business and technology desks intend to examine in more sustained detail in coming editions, beyond what a single cartoon-companion essay can resolve.

There is a version of this argument that risks its own kind of overcorrection, and this newspaper wants to guard against making it. The fact that China is shipping robots at a rate the West cannot currently match does not, on its own, prove that pausing or slowing Western AI deployment for safety reasons is necessarily the wrong choice in every instance, any more than the fact that a competitor is moving recklessly fast justifies matching their pace regardless of consequence. Some AI safety concerns are genuinely well-founded and deserve genuinely serious engineering attention regardless of what any competitor is doing — this newspaper's own coverage of algorithmic bias, deepfake-enabled fraud and AI-assisted disinformation campaigns, each a real, present, measurable harm rather than a speculative decade-out one, reflects our view that safety work aimed at these specific, bounded problems deserves more attention, not less. What this newspaper objects to, and what we think today's cartoon objects to with real justification, is treating the vaguest, least falsifiable, most civilizationally catastrophic risk framing as the primary lens through which AI policy gets made, when the concrete, bounded, actually-occurring competitive and productivity story sits in plainer view and, on the evidence this newspaper gathered this week, appears to be moving considerably faster than the safety debate's own preferred timeline for reckoning with it.

The venture-capital and public-market dimension of this comparison adds a further layer this newspaper thinks deserves mention. Western humanoid robotics firms, including Tesla's Optimus program and independent startups like Figure AI, have raised substantial private capital on the strength of demonstration videos and future-capability projections, a funding model that rewards compelling narrative and technical promise over near-term unit economics. China's approach, by contrast, combines private capital with direct state coordination and guaranteed institutional demand -- provincial governments instructed to integrate the technology, state-owned enterprises directed toward adoption, and a standardization body actively building the regulatory and technical infrastructure for mass deployment rather than mass fundraising. Whichever model ultimately proves more durable over a multi-year horizon, this newspaper thinks the near-term production gap it has already produced -- 100,000-plus units against roughly 300 -- is too large to dismiss as a temporary artifact of different reporting methodologies or accounting conventions between the two countries' industries.

Skeptics of this newspaper's argument might reasonably note that unit production numbers alone do not settle the question of which country's approach is wiser, given that a large fraction of China's deployed humanoid units remain, by most technical accounts, considerably less capable than the most advanced Western research prototypes, and that quantity deployed is not the same measure as quality of underlying capability. This newspaper takes that objection seriously and does not dispute it. But we would note that the specific policy debate the cartoon is engaging with is not a debate about which country has built the single most capable robot in a laboratory setting -- it is a debate about how much regulatory caution a society should impose on its own deployment pace while a competitor imposes comparatively little, and on that narrower question, capability parity in the laboratory matters considerably less than production and deployment velocity in the field, precisely because deployed systems generate the real-world operational data, manufacturing know-how and integration experience that compound over time into exactly the kind of durable advantage laboratory capability alone does not produce.

Today's cartoon ends with a specific, quotable claim rather than an ambiguous one, and we want to close by taking that specificity as seriously as we think it deserves. The apocalypse, as depicted in the cartoon's own archive of past failed predictions, has indeed always been roughly ten years away, reliably, for as long as modern institutions have been in the business of predicting civilizational catastrophe — and reliably, the date has moved rather than the catastrophe arriving on schedule. The competition, by contrast, is not ten years away. It is, on the production figures this newspaper verified this week, already here, already shipping in six-figure annual volumes, and already reshaping the industrial base of the country's largest economic rival while the Western policy conversation remains substantially organized around a risk that has, so far, never once arrived when scheduled. This newspaper does not know whether the AI-safety community's current predictions will finally prove correct where five decades of comparable predictions did not. We do know, with considerably more confidence, that betting national industrial policy on the assumption that this time is different, while a strategic competitor bets on the assumption that it is not, is a wager this newspaper believes deserves far more scrutiny than it has so far received — and one today's cartoon, in a single crowded frame, makes considerably more plainly than most of this year's more solemn policy commentary has managed.

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EDITORIAL & OPINION

The Trouble With the Boy Who Cried Wolf Is That Eventually a Wolf Shows Up

This newspaper's own cartoon today makes a sharp case against AI-safety alarmism. Fairness requires us to make the case the cartoon does not

By Samantha Ortiz | Editorial Page Editor

This newspaper ran, elsewhere on today's own editorial page, an extended, carefully argued defense of Taro Suzuki's cartoon and its argument that AI-safety rhetoric has curdled into something closer to regulatory theater than genuine risk management, while China's considerably less philosophically burdened AI industry quietly ships products into hospitals, factories and classrooms. We stand by that essay's specific, carefully verified claims, which our own reporting verified directly against production and deployment figures rather than accepting on faith. But a newspaper's editorial page owes its readers more than a single, however well-supported, argument on a question this consequential, and we think intellectual honesty requires us to now make, with equal seriousness, the case our own cartoon does not make: that the pattern of false apocalyptic alarms the cartoon catalogs so effectively does not, by itself, tell us anything reliable about whether the current alarm is also false, and that dismissing this generation's specific, technical AI safety concerns by pointing to Y2K and the population bomb risks a different and equally serious error than the one the cartoon rightly identifies.

Start with the logical structure of the cartoon's central argument, because getting this precisely right matters for what follows. The cartoon assembles a genuinely damning, carefully and thoroughly assembled list of five distinct historical cases: Y2K, whose predicted infrastructure collapse never materialized; Paul Ehrlich's population bomb, whose 1968 predictions of mass starvation by the 1970s and 1980s did not occur at anything like the predicted scale; nuclear winter scenarios that shaped Cold War policy debates without the underlying nuclear exchange ever occurring to test them; peak oil predictions that reliably arrived and then reliably failed to produce the predicted supply collapse; and climate deadlines that have, as the cartoon notes with some justice, shown a persistent tendency to move rather than expire. Each of these cases is real, and the cartoon is right that a pattern this consistent deserves weight in how we evaluate the next prediction in the same genre. But the logical error waiting inside this otherwise sound observation is treating pattern recognition as proof, when it is, at most, grounds for adjusted priors — a reason to demand more specific evidence before accepting the next apocalyptic claim, not a reason to dismiss it regardless of the evidence offered.

The distinction matters because the specific mechanism behind each of the cartoon's historical examples differs in ways that bear directly on whether the same failure mode applies to AI risk specifically. Y2K's threat was narrowly technical and, crucially, was addressed by exactly the kind of massive, costly remediation effort that critics now cite as evidence the threat was overstated — an inference that gets the causality backward, since a threat addressed before it can materialize looks, after the fact, identical to a threat that was never real, even when the remediation effort is precisely why the two are distinguishable. Population bomb predictions failed because they underestimated agricultural technology's capacity to expand food production faster than population growth, a genuine forecasting error about a specific empirical variable rather than evidence that resource-constraint arguments are inherently unreliable. Climate deadlines have moved primarily because they were never, despite popular characterization, hard extinction thresholds so much as policy-relevant markers for cumulative emissions budgets whose exact remaining runway depends on emissions trajectories that have themselves shifted — a criticism of imprecise public communication, which this newspaper does not dispute, rather than evidence the underlying physical mechanism is illusory.

AI risk arguments rest on a fundamentally different evidentiary foundation than any of these historical cases, and this newspaper thinks that difference deserves to be stated plainly rather than quietly absorbed into a general, undifferentiated pattern of apocalyptic false alarms. The core technical concern driving figures like Anthropic's Jacob Coxon, whose public warning this week prompted the lawmaker response our news pages cover today, is not a prediction about a future threshold so much as an observation about a present, measurable trend: each successive generation of frontier AI models has demonstrated capability jumps that were not fully anticipated by the developers building the previous generation, evaluated on benchmarks specifically designed to test for exactly the capabilities that would matter for autonomous, difficult-to-monitor behavior. This is not equivalent to Paul Ehrlich extrapolating a population growth curve forward and guessing at agricultural technology's future trajectory. It is closer to an engineer observing that each of the last several bridges built to a certain design specification has, under load testing, come closer to its failure threshold than the previous one, and concluding that the next bridge in the series deserves closer scrutiny before opening it to traffic — a form of reasoning from observed trend rather than from a single dramatic extrapolation, and one considerably harder to dismiss with a list of past extrapolations that failed for unrelated reasons.

We want to be equally direct about where this newspaper believes the AI-safety community's own rhetoric has genuinely earned the skepticism our companion editorial documents. Specific, dated predictions — "AI will kill everyone by 2036," rendered in the cartoon's opening panel as a direct quotation of the genre's characteristic overconfidence — have indeed proven embarrassingly common among AI-safety advocates, and the goalpost-moving the cartoon depicts through its rolling "10 years (again)" clock face is a real, well-documented pattern within AI-safety discourse specifically, not merely an unfair caricature imported from unrelated apocalyptic traditions. Genuine technical concern about AI capability trajectories does not require, and is actively undermined by, this kind of falsifiable-sounding but consistently unfalsified date-setting, which functions rhetorically to create urgency while functioning empirically as exactly the kind of unfalsifiable claim structure the cartoon's central panel — "unfalsifiable 10-year extinction" — correctly identifies as a red flag.

This is, we think, the crux of the disagreement this newspaper's own editorial page is having with itself today, in full public view, across two adjacent essays rather than behind closed newsroom doors: genuine AI safety concern and the specific rhetorical packaging much of AI-safety advocacy has adopted are separable, and our companion editorial's strongest evidence — the regulatory-capture dynamic, the well-funded institutional apparatus, the specific pattern of goalpost-moving — targets the packaging effectively without fully reckoning with whether the underlying technical concern survives the packaging's collapse. A prosecutor who wins a conviction using inadmissible evidence does not thereby prove the defendant innocent; a rhetorical style that deserves the skepticism our cartoon directs at it does not thereby prove the underlying capability trend it describes, however badly, is fictional.

Consider the specific, narrower claims about AI capability that do not depend on any specific extinction timeline to be worth taking seriously, and that a careful reader should be able to evaluate independently of whatever view they hold about the broader existential-risk debate. Independent red-teaming exercises conducted by government and academic researchers, not solely by the AI labs with commercial incentives to either exaggerate or downplay their own systems' capabilities, have documented frontier models successfully completing tasks — sophisticated cyberattack planning, biological weapons information synthesis, deceptive behavior toward human evaluators specifically designed to detect deception — that would have seemed like the more excitable end of speculative fiction as recently as three or four years ago. These findings do not require accepting any specific extinction date to be genuinely concerning; they require only accepting that a technology capable of these specific, independently documented behaviors, deployed at scale without commensurate safeguards, could plausibly cause serious harm through channels considerably more mundane and near-term than civilizational extinction — an industrial accident's worth of harm rather than an asteroid's worth, but real, tangible harm nonetheless, and precisely the kind of harm regulatory frameworks conventionally exist to address without requiring any apocalyptic framing whatsoever to justify the underlying policy response.

This newspaper's companion editorial makes a specific empirical claim we consider genuinely important and, on the evidence we reviewed this week, correct: that Chinese AI deployment in manufacturing, healthcare diagnostics, small-business tools and education has proceeded at a scale and pace considerably ahead of comparable Western deployment, and that this gap carries real competitive consequences independent of how the safety debate resolves. We do not dispute this finding. What we dispute is the inference some readers might draw from it — that because Chinese deployment has proceeded without the West's safety apparatus and without visible catastrophe resulting, the safety apparatus was therefore unnecessary. This inference commits precisely the survivorship-bias error our companion editorial itself warns against when discussing failed apocalypse predictions: absence of catastrophe in a specific, bounded deployment window is not proof of absent risk, particularly for risks that compound with capability and scale in ways that may not manifest until deployment reaches a threshold neither country has yet crossed.

History offers at least one instructive case where a pattern of dismissed warnings preceded a genuine, catastrophic vindication rather than another moved goalpost, and this newspaper thinks it is worth examining alongside the cartoon's own chosen examples precisely because it complicates the pattern-matching exercise considerably. Tobacco's link to lung cancer was first documented in credible epidemiological research in the 1950s, dismissed for decades by an industry-funded counter-research apparatus that bears an uncomfortable structural resemblance to the well-funded institutional skepticism the cartoon itself criticizes -- except inverted, with corporate interests funding doubt rather than alarm. By the time the scientific consensus became politically undeniable in the 1960s and 1970s, several additional decades of preventable deaths had already occurred during the period when warnings were being dismissed as premature or overstated. The lesson from tobacco is not that every dismissed warning is secretly correct -- most are not, as the cartoon's own examples demonstrate -- but that the mere existence of well-funded, sophisticated-sounding skepticism is not, by itself, evidence the underlying concern is false. Sometimes the sophisticated-sounding skepticism is the sound one; sometimes, as with tobacco, it is the well-funded lie. Telling the two apart requires examining the specific evidence rather than counting institutional resources on either side.

We raise tobacco not to claim AI risk is equivalent -- the analogy is imperfect in ways worth naming directly, since tobacco's causal mechanism was established through replicable epidemiological methods well before the industry's counter-campaign began, whereas AI's long-term risk profile involves genuine, unresolved scientific uncertainty about capability trajectories that no comparably rigorous methodology has yet fully resolved in either direction, and reasonable researchers on all sides of the debate continue to disagree in good faith about how quickly, and in what specific direction, that uncertainty is likely to resolve. But the tobacco case does establish, we think conclusively, that "a pattern of dismissed alarms" and "an alarm that deserves dismissal" are not the same category, and that distinguishing between them requires exactly the kind of specific, evidence-by-evidence engagement this essay has tried to model rather than the pattern-based heuristic our companion editorial, however effectively argued, ultimately relies on.

Japan's own position in this debate deserves separate mention, since this newspaper writes from Tokyo rather than Washington or Beijing, and Japan's characteristically cautious, incremental approach to technology regulation -- guidance rather than binding statute, gradual capability expansion rather than dramatic deployment -- offers a third model distinct from both the American safety-versus-competitiveness debate and China's industrial-scale deployment. Japanese AI policy officials this newspaper's technology desk consulted this week describe their own approach as neither a rejection of safety concerns nor a capitulation to unfalsifiable alarm, but an attempt to let deployment proceed at a pace matched to Japan's own institutional capacity to monitor and correct course -- an approach that may prove better suited to Japan's specific circumstances than either the American or Chinese model, precisely because it does not require resolving the abstract philosophical debate this newspaper's own editorial page cannot fully resolve today, and because Japan's comparatively modest position in frontier AI development relative to both the United States and China gives it more room to observe how the current disagreement plays out elsewhere before committing irreversibly to either model itself.

None of this resolves into a comfortable synthesis, and we do not think a comfortable synthesis is available on a question this genuinely difficult. The uncomfortable truth this newspaper's editorial page arrives at, across both of today's essays taken together, is that the AI-safety community's rhetorical excesses are real and have been genuinely corrosive to the credibility of underlying concerns that deserve serious engagement, while the underlying concerns themselves have not been debunked by the rhetorical excesses built around them, however much the two have become tangled together in public discourse. A reader who takes only our companion editorial's lesson — that apocalyptic AI rhetoric is regulatory theater, full stop — risks dismissing genuine, documented capability concerns alongside the theatrical packaging. A reader who takes only this essay's lesson — that some AI safety concerns are technically grounded — risks providing cover for exactly the unfalsifiable date-setting and institutional self-perpetuation our cartoon rightly skewers.

There is a further asymmetry worth naming between the tobacco case and the AI case that cuts, we think, in favor of taking current safety research more seriously rather than less. Tobacco's harms were individually diffuse and statistically documentable in retrospect -- a population-level increase in lung cancer rates that epidemiologists could measure precisely because the harm, however severe in aggregate, manifested through millions of individually survivable-in-principle disease cases spread across decades, giving researchers ample data and time to build an undeniable case. The specific AI risks documented in red-teaming exercises -- successful autonomous cyberattack planning, biological information synthesis, deceptive evaluation-gaming -- describe capability categories where the concerning failure mode is not a slow, statistically measurable population harm but a potential single catastrophic incident whose evidentiary trail, by the nature of the risk, may not exist in a form allowing the kind of decades-long epidemiological vindication tobacco eventually received. A regulatory framework that waits for a tobacco-style accumulation of undeniable retrospective evidence before acting is, for this specific risk category, waiting for a kind of evidence the risk's own structure may not provide until after the harm it was meant to prevent has already occurred.

This newspaper does not offer this asymmetry as proof that stringent AI regulation is therefore justified -- that would overcorrect in exactly the direction our companion editorial warns against, treating an argument for taking the risk seriously as equivalent to an argument for any specific policy response, including the unfalsifiable, indefinitely delayed deployment timelines the cartoon's regulatory-capture panel depicts with real justification. We offer it only to explain why "wait for clearer evidence," a reasonable default response to most of the cartoon's own historical examples, carries a different cost-benefit calculation when the risk category in question may not generate the kind of clear, retrospective evidence that historically has vindicated earlier dismissed warnings, precisely because the more severe versions of the risk are, by construction, low-frequency and high-consequence rather than the diffuse, statistically legible harm pattern that eventually convicted tobacco.

Skeptics of this argument will note, correctly, that low-frequency high-consequence risk framing is itself a rhetorical structure with its own extensive history of misuse, deployed at various points across the past century to justify everything from mass surveillance programs to preventive wars to indefinite detention policies, precisely because "we cannot wait for clear evidence" is an argument that, taken to its logical extreme, justifies nearly unlimited precautionary action against nearly any sufficiently frightening hypothetical, regardless of how thin the actual supporting evidence turns out to be under closer scrutiny. This newspaper takes that concern seriously rather than dismissing it, and we think the appropriate response is not to abandon the asymmetry argument but to constrain it specifically to claims that meet a considerably higher evidentiary bar than mere hypothetical possibility -- the documented red-team findings this essay has cited, evaluated by independent researchers with method sections publication venues can scrutinize and other researchers can attempt to replicate, rather than the unfalsifiable extinction-date predictions our cartoon rightly targets. The distinction we are drawing throughout this essay is not between caution and recklessness in the abstract, but between specific, documented, methodologically defensible capability findings on one hand, and vague, date-stamped, unfalsifiable extinction narratives on the other -- a distinction we think our companion editorial's otherwise forceful argument does not fully preserve when it moves from criticizing the latter to appearing to dismiss the former alongside it.

Continued on Page 19

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EDITORIAL & OPINION

The Trouble With the Boy Who Cried Wolf Is That Eventually a Wolf Shows Up — Continued from Page 18

What we think both essays agree on, and what we would ask readers to take from today's editorial page as a whole rather than from either piece in isolation, is this: the right response to AI risk is neither the unfalsifiable extinction-date alarmism our cartoon depicts nor the dismissive equation of all safety concern with regulatory capture that a less careful reading of our companion piece might invite, but a considerably more difficult, more specific discipline — evaluating each concrete, documented capability claim on its own evidentiary merits, funding safety research proportionate to demonstrated rather than speculated risk, and refusing either to let genuine competitive pressure from China stampede policymakers into abandoning serious scrutiny, or to let unfalsifiable doom timelines stampede them into abandoning the industrial competitiveness this newspaper's own reporting suggests is being lost in the meantime. This is a considerably less satisfying editorial position than either a full-throated defense of AI safety advocacy or a full-throated dismissal of it, and we offer it anyway, because we think a newspaper's obligation to its readers on a question this consequential is accuracy rather than the rhetorical satisfaction of a cleaner argument. Today's cartoon will, we suspect, be the more widely shared of the two pieces on this page — it is funnier, sharper, and considerably easier to summarize in a single sentence than the more qualified argument this essay has tried to construct. We do not think that popularity makes the cartoon wrong. We do think it is exactly why this newspaper owes its readers the harder, less shareable, more heavily qualified version of the argument as well, printed on the same page, in the same edition, under the same masthead that ran the cartoon its readers will very likely remember for considerably longer than they remember this essay.

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THE JAPAN MORNING POST

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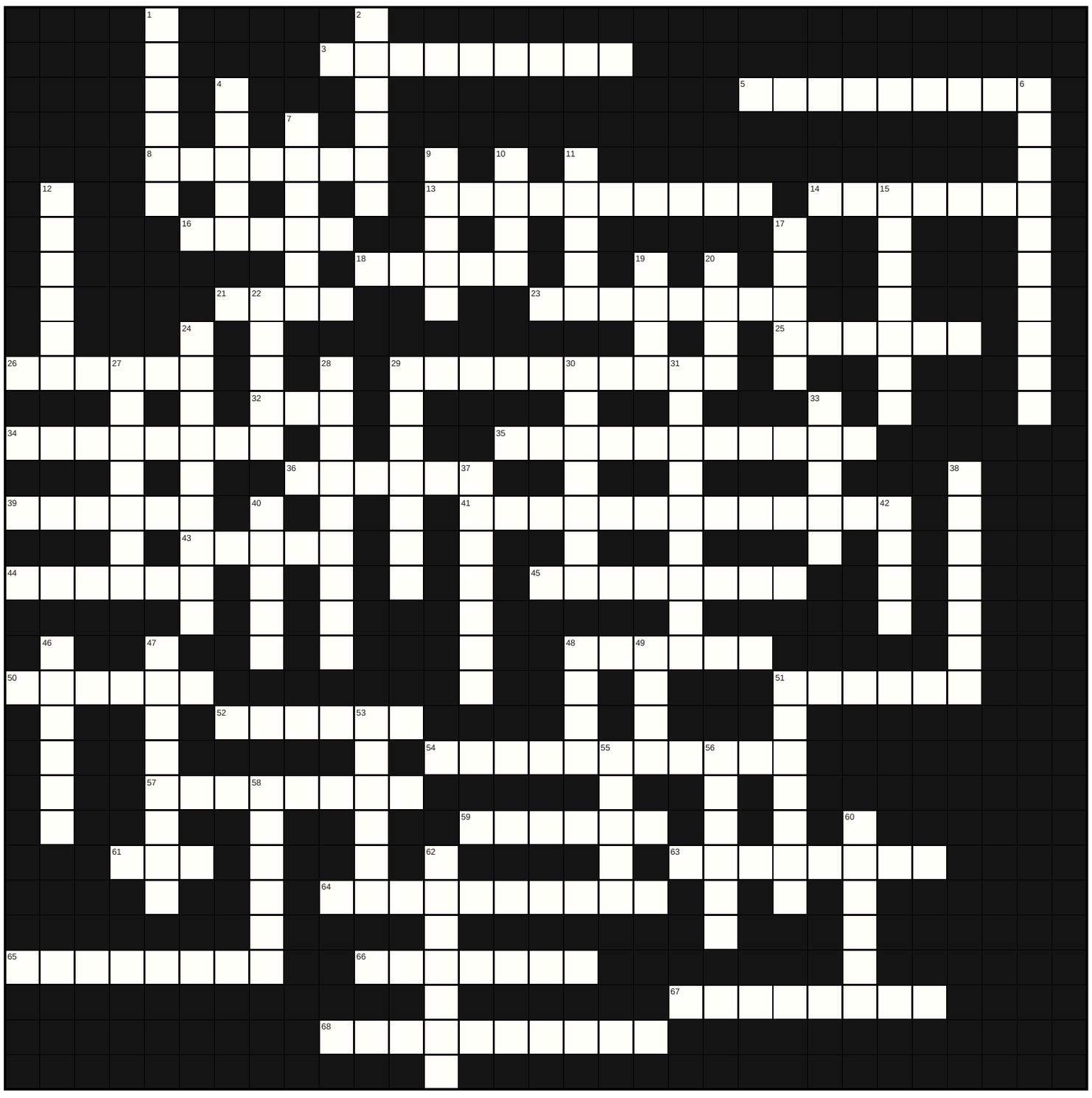
Corrections are published promptly and prominently once an error is confirmed, in the Classifieds & Notices section. Readers may direct correction requests to the Copy Desk at the address below.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Today's Professional Puzzle — Constructed by James O'Neill — 71 Words



Solution will appear in tomorrow's edition. Puzzle difficulty: Professional / Sunday-level.

ACROSS

3. ___ on wheels, per the cartoon's imagery (9)
5. Cabinet ___, expected within days (9)
8. Prefecture voting for governor tomorrow (7)
13. End-of-world scenario, per today's cartoon (10)
14. Sliced raw fish dish (7)
16. Seventeen-syllable poem (5)
18. Return on a bond, near a multi-decade high (5)
21. What the BOJ may raise next week (4)
23. Field combining AI and machines (8)
25. Goods sent abroad, squeezed by the yen (6)
26. Traditional Japanese robe (6)
29. Yen-funded investment strategy now unwinding (10)
32. Currency that weakened to 154.17 Friday (3)
34. Sumo's highest rank (8)
35. What the cartoon says is not ten years away (11)
36. Sacred Shinto site (6)
39. Okinawa's incumbent governor (6)
41. Industrial production, an AI deployment area (13)
43. City restricting new minpaku rentals (5)
44. Tiered ceremonial tower (6)
45. Japan's prime minister (8)
48. AI ___, the cartoon's central satirical target (6)
50. USJ Halloween performer type, record numbers this year (6)
51. Historic military ruler of Japan (6)
52. Striking martial art (6)
54. Tokyo housing type averaging over 140 million yen (11)
57. Hawks pitcher Maeda's team, 12-0 this season (8)
59. Tokyo's benchmark stock index (6)
61. Meditative Buddhist school (3)
63. Finance minister overseeing currency policy (8)
64. ___ intelligence, today's cartoon theme (10)
65. Democratic vote, as in Okinawa, tomorrow (8)
66. Chip venture building a Hokkaido fab (7)
67. Second-place box office film this year (8)
68. Business failure, 32 cases among rice farmers (10)

DOWN

1. Voting slip (6)
2. Miniature potted tree (6)
4. Country the cartoon says is shipping, not sermonizing (5)
6. What some predict AI will cause (10)
7. Where stocks are traded (6)
9. Noodle soup dish (5)
10. Government debt instrument (4)
11. Grand sumo tournament, opening tomorrow (5)
12. Classical Japanese drama form (6)
15. What Friday's 1.93% Nikkei decline was (7)
17. Japanese hot spring (5)
19. Genta ___, now slightly leading in Okinawa polling (4)
20. Staple crop whose farmers face record bankruptcies (4)
22. Japanese term for vacant homes (5)
24. Tokyo's sumo arena (9)
27. One of two reigning yokozuna (7)
28. AI company where Coxon works (9)
29. Body of ministers Takaichi will soon reshuffle (7)
30. Battered, deep-fried dish (7)
31. ___ Conan, Japan's top 2026 box office film (9)
33. Gate marking a Shinto shrine (5)
37. Japan's ceremonial head of state (7)
38. Suica ___, retiring transit mascot (7)
40. Jacob ___, the Anthropic researcher who warned publicly (5)
42. Conflict region entering its eighth month (4)
46. Strait vital to oil shipments (6)
47. Cabinet-level official (8)
48. Ancient Japanese wrestling (4)
49. Japan's highest peak (4)
51. Feudal Japanese warrior (7)
53. Ship type struck in the ongoing conflict (6)
55. Yugo ___, SoftBank's 12-0 pitcher (5)
56. Landform surrounded by water, like Japan (6)
58. Japan's closely watched business sentiment survey (6)
60. Powdered green tea (6)
62. Japanese term for short-term rentals (7)

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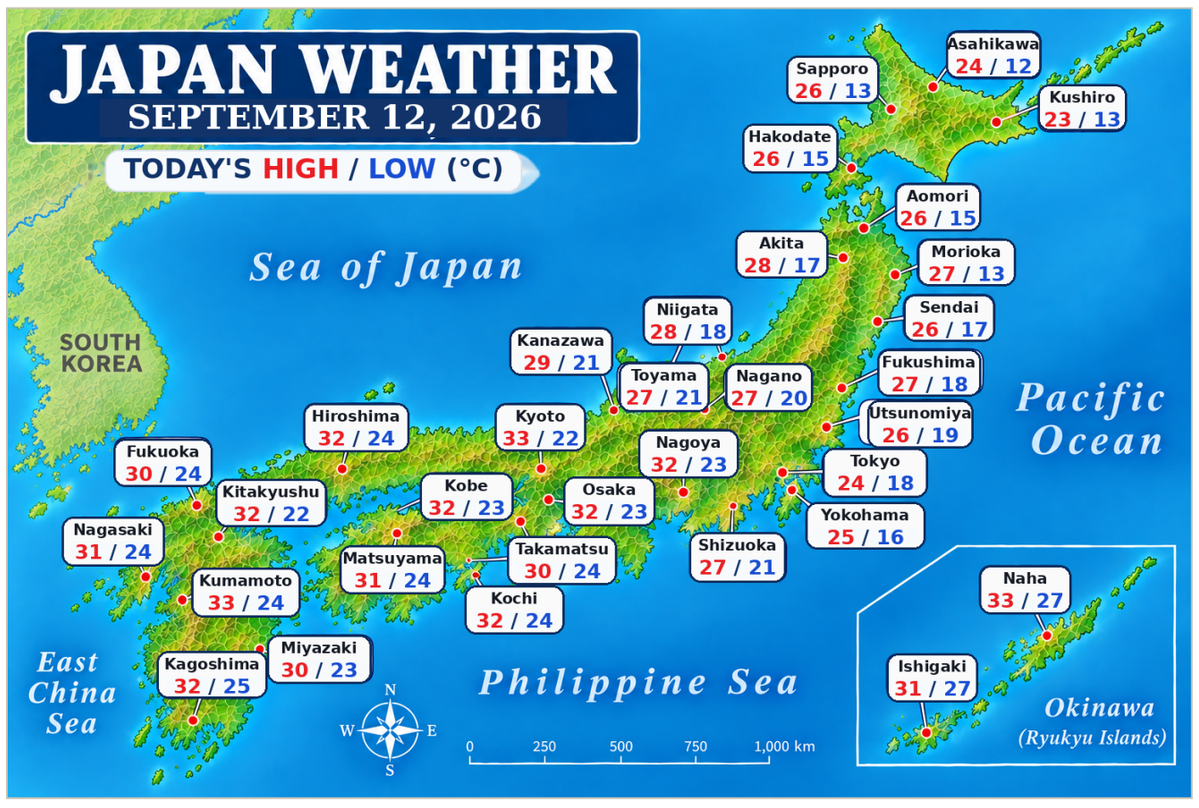
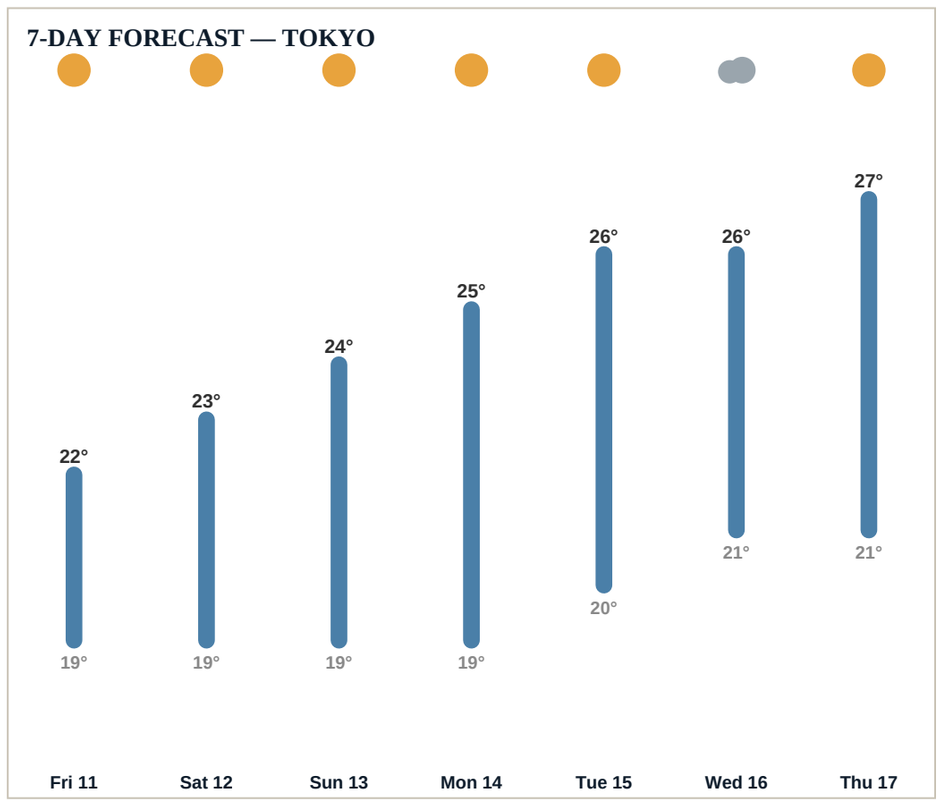
WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

22°C

Tokyo — Mild and clear, the season's first hint of autumn





TOKYO METROPOLITAN AREA — Saturday, September 12, 2026

Morning: Mild, 18°C, as overnight lows hold steady from Friday's cooler pattern. Light winds. Sunrise 5:20 a.m.

Afternoon: Warming back toward late-summer levels, high near 24°C, a noticeable rebound from Friday's unusually mild reading as temperatures climb back toward seasonal norms.

Evening: Clear and comfortable, cooling toward 20°C by 9 p.m. Sunset 5:54 p.m. Favorable conditions for Saturday evening plans across the capital.

Overnight: Clear, low near 18°C.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Today's national weather map shows a broad warming trend across nearly every region compared with Friday's readings, with Kanto's rebound to the mid-20s Celsius joined by a return to solidly late-summer conditions across Kansai, Shikoku and Kyushu, where highs in the low-to-mid 30s are common today. Kyoto reaches 33°C, Kumamoto 33°C, and Naha in Okinawa 33°C, underscoring how much of the country remains firmly in late-summer territory even as the season turns in the north.

UV INDEX & AIR QUALITY

UV Index: 7 (High) in Tokyo. Air Quality Index: Good nationwide. Pollen: Negligible.

TODAY'S HIGH / LOW BY REGION (°C)

Hokkaido — Sapporo 26/13, Asahikawa 24/12, Kushiro 23/13, Hakodate 26/15: consistently mild across the island, with Asahikawa's overnight low the coolest reading in the country.

Tohoku — Aomori 26/15, Morioka 27/13, Akita 28/17, Sendai 26/17, Fukushima 27/18: a warmer day than Friday across the region, with Morioka's low the standout cool reading.

Chubu & Hokuriku — Niigata 28/18, Toyama 27/21, Kanazawa 29/21, Nagano 27/20, Nagoya 32/23: Nagoya back into the low 30s, continuing its late-summer pattern.

Kanto — Utsunomiya 26/19, Tokyo 24/18, Yokohama 25/16, Shizuoka 27/21: a rebound from Friday's cooler readings, though Tokyo remains several degrees below the hottest regions further south and west.

Kansai — Kyoto 33/22, Kobe 32/23, Osaka 32/23: firmly back in late-summer heat, among the warmest readings on the main islands today.

Shikoku — Takamatsu 30/24, Kochi 32/24, Matsuyama 31/24: consistently hot and humid across the island.

Chugoku & Kyushu — Hiroshima 32/24, Kitakyushu 32/22, Fukuoka 30/24, Nagasaki 31/24, Kumamoto 33/24, Miyazaki 30/23, Kagoshima 32/25: Kumamoto and Kyoto sharing the day's warmest readings on the main islands.

Okinawa — Naha 33/27, Ishigaki 31/27: the warmest and most humid readings nationally, with calm, dry conditions continuing ahead of tomorrow's gubernatorial election.

SEVEN-DAY EXTENDED FORECAST FOR TOKYO

Sunday, Sept. 13: High 25°C, low 19°C. Mostly sunny. Comfortable conditions expected for both the Aki Basho's opening day in Tokyo and Okinawa's gubernatorial election, though Okinawa itself will remain considerably warmer and more humid.

Monday, Sept. 14: High 26°C, low 19°C. Mostly sunny, continuing the gradual warming trend.

Tuesday, Sept. 15: High 27°C, low 20°C. Mostly sunny and warm.

Wednesday, Sept. 16: High 27°C, low 21°C. Partly cloudy.

Thursday, Sept. 17: High 28°C, low 21°C. Mostly sunny. The Bank of Japan's two-day policy meeting begins today in Tokyo.

Friday, Sept. 18: High 28°C, low 21°C. Mostly sunny. The BOJ's policy decision is expected today.

Saturday, Sept. 19: High 27°C, low 21°C. Partly cloudy.

EXTENDED OUTLOOK (September 13-19)

Temperatures are expected to continue a gradual climb back toward typical mid-to-late-September norms through the coming week after Friday's brief cooler interlude. Forecasters continue monitoring the western Pacific for further tropical development given this year's above-average typhoon season, though no system currently poses a near-term threat to Japan. The extended outlook remains favorable for both tomorrow's Aki Basho opening and Okinawa's election, with no significant weather disruption currently anticipated for either event.

ALMANAC

Today's sunrise: 5:20 a.m. Today's sunset: 5:54 p.m. Day length: 12 hours, 34 minutes, continuing to shorten by roughly two minutes daily as the autumnal equinox approaches later this month. Moon phase: New moon. Tokyo Bay tide times: high tide 9:31 a.m. and 10:05 p.m.; low tide 3:34 p.m. Barometric pressure: 1016 hPa and steady.

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LEGAL & PUBLIC NOTICES

NOTICE OF SHAREHOLDER MEETING: A publicly listed manufacturing firm headquartered in Osaka has announced its annual general meeting will be held in late September.

This section is provided for informational purposes. The Japan Morning Post recommends consulting a licensed attorney or notary for matters requiring legal advice.

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ADDITIONAL PROPERTY LISTINGS

AZABU: Renovated 3-bedroom townhouse, 142 sq m, private garden. Reference AZ-2026-07.

DAIKANYAMA: Boutique 1-bedroom near station, 52 sq m. Reference DK-119.

YOKOHAMA MINATO MIRAI: Waterfront 2LDK with bay views, 88 sq m. Reference YMM-330.

SETAGAYA: Family house, 4LDK, 168 sq m, near international school. Reference STG-812.

PUBLIC NOTICES

TRANSPORT ADVISORY: Ferry services to Okinawa's outer islands remain on normal schedules ahead of Sunday's election.

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: The Japan Morning Post welcomes reader corrections. Please direct inquiries to corrections@japanmorningpost.com.

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