

Okinawa Votes Today in Election Both Sides Call Decisive

Tamaki seeks a third term against LDP-backed Koja in a race that has turned on prices and jobs as much as on the base politics that once defined it

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

Okinawa Prefecture votes today to choose its next governor, closing out a campaign that began three weeks ago as a referendum on the American military presence and ends it, by nearly every account this newspaper has gathered from voters and campaign officials alike, as something closer to a referendum on the cost of living. Polls open at 7 a.m. and close at 8 p.m., with roughly 1.16 million eligible voters across the prefecture's 41 municipalities deciding between six candidates in a race every independent poll conducted this cycle has narrowed to two.

Incumbent Governor Denny Tamaki, 66, is seeking a third consecutive term on the same foundation that carried his first two: sustained, vocal opposition to the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from Ginowan to a new facility under construction at Camp Schwab in Henoko. That relocation fight, which produced a 2019 prefectural referendum in which more than 70% of Okinawan voters rejected the Henoko plan, remains the defining cause of Tamaki's political career and of the broader All Okinawa movement that first elected the late Takeshi Onaga in 2014 and has held the governorship ever since.

Genta Koja, 42, a former deputy mayor of Naha, is challenging that twelve-year run with the direct backing of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party. Koja has not abandoned the base question entirely — he supports the Henoko relocation as the fastest available path to closing Futenma, and backs the separate, already-agreed return of American-held land south of Kadena Air Base under the 2013 consolidation framework — but he has built his campaign's center of gravity around economic development and reducing the prefecture's heavy reliance on tourism, a pitch aimed squarely at voters for whom rent, wages and the price of groceries now outrank a runway's location.

That reordering of priorities is the campaign's real story, and this newspaper's own reporting throughout the race has tracked it consistently: surveys conducted in the campaign's final two weeks found roughly 47% of Okinawan voters citing economic concerns as their top issue, against a much smaller share naming the base relocation specifically, a reversal of the priority ordering that held through Tamaki's first two elections. Whether that shift reflects genuine fatigue with a relocation fight now well into its third decade, or simply the same cost-of-living anxiety reordering political priorities across the rest of Japan this year, is a question this newspaper's polling could not fully resolve, and one today's result will only partially answer.

The closing days produced the first polling of this cycle to show Koja actually ahead, a shift this newspaper reported Friday and one Tamaki's own campaign did not dispute in substance, framing the movement instead as evidence of a closing race rather than a settled one. A prediction market tracking the contest had priced Tamaki's re-election chances at roughly 64.5% as recently as three weeks ago, a figure this newspaper could not confirm had been updated to reflect Friday's polling by the time of this writing — a gap between market pricing and the freshest survey data that itself became a minor talking point among the political operatives and journalists who have covered this race most closely.

Both campaigns spent Saturday, the final day before polls opened, on get-out-the-vote operations rather than new messaging, according to reporters embedded with both camps, with organizers on each side describing turnout among younger voters as the single largest source of uncertainty in a race this tightly contested. Okinawa's youth vote has historically underperformed its share of the electorate relative to older voters more reliably attached to either the All Okinawa movement's founding grievances or the LDP's own organizational machine, and both campaigns' internal modeling reportedly treats any meaningful shift in youth turnout as the variable most likely to decide an outcome this close.

The LDP's own institutional position in the prefecture has strengthened markedly since the party's clean sweep of all four of Okinawa's directly elected Lower House seats in February's general election, a result this newspaper's political desk read at the time as an early signal of exactly the economic-anxiety-driven realignment that has now visibly reshaped the governor's race as well. Party officials in Tokyo have been notably careful not to overstate their own role in Koja's campaign, wary of a prefecture with a long and well-documented history of punishing candidates seen as too closely directed from the capital, but LDP resources — field organizers, data operations, message discipline — have unmistakably strengthened Koja's operation relative to the more thinly resourced LDP-backed challengers Tamaki defeated in 2018 and 2022.

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 restraint local political observers on both sides attribute to the same calculation that has held for every recent Okinawa gubernatorial race: visible involvement from Tokyo risks reminding voters of exactly the mainland-versus-Okinawa dynamic that has fueled the All Okinawa movement's appeal for over a decade, regardless of which party the visiting politician represents.

Six candidates in total appear on today's ballot, though this newspaper's coverage, consistent with every independent poll conducted this cycle, has treated the race as effectively a two-candidate contest between Tamaki and Koja, with the remaining four candidates not registering meaningfully in available surveys at any point in the campaign. Election administrators reported early and absentee voting running 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.

Weather across the prefecture is expected to be warm and dry through the day, 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. Polling stations across all 41 municipalities opened on schedule at 7 a.m., prefectural election officials confirmed, with no reported disruptions as of this edition's press time.

Counting begins immediately after polls close at 8 p.m., with prefectural election officials and both campaigns expecting a result within several hours given the race's binary structure, though officials cautioned that a margin as narrow as recent polling suggests could delay a definitive call past the initial NHK and wire-service projections that typically follow Japanese prefectural elections within minutes of poll closure.

Today's outcome carries weight well beyond Okinawa's own borders. Political analysts across Japan have described the race for weeks as the clearest available test of whether the economic-anxiety realignment visible in February's Lower House results represents a durable shift in how Okinawan voters weigh the base question against pocketbook concerns, or a temporary, issue-specific departure from the All Okinawa coalition's normal governing majority. The result will also shape how the ruling coalition calibrates its own messaging in other prefectures carrying long-running local disputes of their own, ahead of next spring's unified local elections — the first major test of Takaichi's own coalition-management skill since she assumed the premiership.

This newspaper will provide full results and analysis once counting concludes this evening, with a complete accounting of the vote by municipality, exit-poll demographic breakdowns, and reaction from both campaigns to appear in tomorrow's edition.

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TODAY IN BRIEF

- Fed decision Thursday; BOJ decision Friday — back-to-back central bank week.
- Nikkei closed Friday at 64,011.34, down 1.93% for the session.
- Brave Blossoms rout USA 63-14, advance to home Pacific Nations Cup final vs. Fiji.
- Koyo season begins in Hokkaido this week; JMC's next forecast update due early October.
- Gulf conflict enters eighth month; oil holding near \$100/barrel.
- Cabinet reshuffle expected within days of tonight's Okinawa result.

Aki Basho Opens Today as Aonishiki Chases a Fourth Straight Title

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Sumo's third and final Tokyo tournament of the year opens today at Ryogoku Kokugikan, with all fifteen days of the Aki Basho sold out well in advance and Ukrainian-born Aonishiki entering as the wrestler to beat after claiming his third career championship in July's Nagoya tournament.

Today's opening day follows sumo's standard fifteen-day round-robin format, in which each of the top division's 42 wrestlers faces a different opponent once per day, with the competitor compiling the best record by the tournament's final Sunday, Sept. 27, awarded the Emperor's Cup. Lower-ranked divisions begin bouts as early as 8 a.m., with the top-ranked makuuchi division's matches, and the traditional ring-entering ceremonies that precede them, beginning in the mid-afternoon.

Two yokozuna, Onosato and Hoshoryu, headline the field alongside Aonishiki, whose rapid rise through the ranks over the past two years has become one of the sport's most closely followed storylines both domestically and internationally, drawing a wave of new overseas interest in a sport whose current popularity boom Japan Sumo Association officials have repeatedly credited more to inbound tourism than to any single dominant Japanese-born star.

Ticket demand for this tournament sold out faster than any Aki Basho in recent memory, according to Japan Sumo Association officials, with same-day and weekday tickets that in past years remained available through a tournament's opening days gone within hours of the initial release in early August.

The tourism-driven demand has produced measurable economic 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 one of the best-attended tournaments in the venue's recent history.

This newspaper's sports desk will provide full daily coverage throughout the tournament's fifteen-day run, including complete results, standings, and rikishi profiles, beginning with tomorrow's account of today's opening-day bouts.

POLITICS

Cabinet Reshuffle Enters Final Days as Takaichi Weighs Timing Against Okinawa Vote

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Cabinet reshuffle has entered its final planning stretch, with government officials indicating an announcement is likely within days once today's Okinawa gubernatorial election result is known, part of a deliberate sequencing government insiders describe as intended to avoid any appearance of national politics overshadowing a closely contested prefectural race.

Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama's retention is considered all but certain, according to party officials familiar with the planning, given her direct role managing both the currency intervention this newspaper has covered extensively and her institutional knowledge heading into this week's back-to-back Federal Reserve and Bank of Japan decisions, a sequencing of events party strategists describe as making continuity in the finance portfolio the only serious option under consideration.

Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi are likewise both considered likely to remain in their current posts, given the accelerated Three Strategic Documents revision this newspaper's defense desk examines in detail elsewhere in today's edition, a process party officials describe as requiring the kind of continuity in senior defense and diplomatic leadership that a mid-process personnel change would complicate unnecessarily.

The health and agriculture portfolios remain the least settled among senior Cabinet posts, according to multiple officials familiar with the deliberations, with agriculture drawing particular scrutiny following recent data showing rice farmer bankruptcies and business closures running at a record pace this year, a development several party officials say has sharpened internal debate over whether the portfolio needs a minister more inclined toward structural reform of Japan's decades-old rice production-adjustment framework than the current administration has favored.

Speculation continues 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, an effort that has taken on additional political significance given today's Okinawa election result will itself be read as an early indicator of how the LDP's own standing has evolved since the party's clean sweep of the prefecture's Lower House seats in February.

Opposition parties have offered limited direct commentary on the reshuffle speculation specifically, with the Democratic Party for the People's Yuichiro Tamaki continuing to focus his party's energy on pressing the government for greater currency-intervention transparency rather 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.

The reshuffle's timing relative to today's Okinawa result carries its own political logic worth stating plainly: a Koja victory would hand the Takaichi government a genuine validation of its economic-anxiety messaging strategy heading into next spring's unified local elections, potentially emboldening a more assertive reshuffle that promotes figures associated with that strategy, while a Tamaki victory would leave the government managing the optics of a defeat in a prefecture the LDP had invested considerable national resources attempting to flip.

An extraordinary Diet session is expected to convene once the reshuffle concludes, with the government's legislative agenda likely to include the food consumption tax cut, rice-industry support measures, and continued budget deliberations informed by this week's Bank of Japan decision, according to Diet officials this newspaper consulted.

This newspaper's politics desk will provide full coverage of both today's Okinawa result and the reshuffle announcement once each is confirmed, treating the two as connected stories given how directly the government's own read of the election outcome is likely to shape the reshuffle's ultimate scope and messaging.

Whether the reshuffled Cabinet approaches the coming extraordinary Diet session with meaningfully different priorities than its predecessor, or largely continues the current government's existing 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 in the weeks ahead.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Cabinet reshuffle has entered its final planning stretch.

Government Weighs Foreign Worker Expansion Into Security Sector

The proposal would extend Japan's foreign labor framework into an occupational category long treated with particular sensitivity

By William | Senior Political Analyst

The Japanese government is considering accepting foreign workers into the security sector for the first time, 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 traditionally treated with particular sensitivity given its direct 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 work now apparently included.

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 tied partly to the same sumo and cultural tourism boom this newspaper's culture desk covers elsewhere in today's edition, and general commercial growth.

The proposal is likely to face more scrutiny than comparable foreign-worker expansions in less sensitive sectors, this newspaper's editorial line holds, given legitimate public questions about training standards, language proficiency requirements, and appropriate vetting procedures for an occupational category involving direct public-safety responsibilities — questions this newspaper considers the government obligated to answer specifically and publicly before any formal policy change, rather than treating the proposal as simply another incremental extension of an existing labor-acceptance framework.

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, a pattern this newspaper expects security-sector expansion to follow if it ultimately proceeds.

This newspaper's politics desk will continue tracking this proposal's development closely, including whether it advances through the extraordinary Diet session expected to convene once the current Cabinet reshuffle concludes, 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 this newspaper has covered in the past.

The proposal's consideration arrives amid broader immigration and foreign-resident policy questions touching multiple corners of Japanese public policy simultaneously, from labor-shortage-driven sector expansions of this kind to the visa-overstay and border-control questions this newspaper's editorial line treats as a standing component of state capacity and order.

This newspaper's position, stated plainly: labor-shortage pressure is real and the government's obligation to address it is legitimate, but security work's direct public-safety function means any expansion into this sector specifically must be paired with training and vetting standards at least as rigorous as those governing comparable domestic hiring, not merely the minimum standard sufficient to fill vacant positions quickly.

This newspaper will continue tracking this proposal as it develops, providing readers with the specific policy details once they move beyond the current exploratory stage into formal legislative proposal.

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DEFENSE

Defense White Paper's China Warning Sharpens as Revision Moves Up Timetable

This year's Defense of Japan report describes a 30-minute Chinese laser-targeting incident against a JMSDF patrol aircraft and links Beijing's military buildup directly to Moscow and Pyongyang

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Japan's Cabinet approved the 2026 edition of Defense of Japan, the government's annual defense white paper, on Aug. 4, repeating and sharpening language first adopted in the 2022 National Security Strategy that describes China as "an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge" to Japan's peace and security — language this newspaper's defense desk notes has now survived three consecutive white papers without softening, even as diplomatic contact between Tokyo and Beijing has continued at a working level.

The report's most striking single disclosure concerns an incident in which a Chinese military aircraft repeatedly targeted a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force patrol aircraft with a laser for approximately 30 minutes over the Pacific east of Okinawa, an episode the Defense Ministry classifies as a direct, sustained provocation rather than the more ambiguous, single-pass encounters that have characterized most prior publicized incidents between Chinese and Japanese military aircraft in the region.

This year's white paper places particular emphasis on Beijing's growing capacity to project military power beyond the First Island Chain — the strategic arc running from Japan's southwestern islands through Taiwan to the Philippines that has anchored Japanese and American regional defense planning for decades — describing a Chinese naval and air presence in the broader Pacific that Japanese defense planners increasingly treat as a standing condition rather than an episodic pressure campaign.

Taiwan featured prominently in this year's report, which noted that China has conducted large-scale military exercises around the island repeatedly since 2022, exercises the white paper assesses as serving the dual purpose of pressuring Taipei politically while simultaneously improving the PLA's own operational proficiency for a contingency Japanese planners have grown considerably more explicit about linking to Japan's own security in recent years. The report reiterated Japan's longstanding position that peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait are indispensable to Japan's own security and to the stability of the wider international system, language that has become a fixture of Japanese official statements on Taiwan even as Tokyo maintains no formal diplomatic relationship with Taipei.

For the first time, according to this newspaper's review of the document, the white paper's assessment section draws an explicit link between China's expanding military reach and closer operational coordination with Russia, citing joint bomber flights near Japanese airspace conducted in the period since Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un appeared together at a September 2025 military parade — an image Japanese defense planners have cited repeatedly since as visual confirmation of an alignment among Japan's three principal external threats that the white paper's own analytical framework has long treated as a serious possibility rather than a settled fact.

The report draws a direct parallel between Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the precedent it may set for potential Chinese action in the Indo-Pacific, a comparison senior Defense Ministry officials have made with increasing frequency in public remarks over the past two years and one this newspaper's editorial page has previously argued deserves to be taken at face value rather than dismissed as rhetorical excess, given how directly Japan's own territorial exposure — the Senkaku Islands chief among it — mirrors the kind of contested, historically ambiguous territorial claim Moscow cited to justify its own invasion.

Japan's Three Strategic Documents — the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and the Defense Buildup Program that together set the country's security policy architecture — are scheduled for revision ahead of their originally planned timetable, overseen by a newly established Promotion Headquarters for the Transformation of Defense Capabilities that Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi set up shortly after taking office. Ministry officials describe the accelerated timeline as a direct response to the pace of change in the regional threat environment this white paper documents, rather than a response to any single triggering incident.

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's own modernization continues in parallel with the white paper's release, most visibly in the continued conversion of the helicopter carrier Kaga, whose flight deck has been reshaped to a rectangular configuration specifically to enable F-35B stealth fighter operations, a modification that gives Japan, for the first time in the postwar period, a genuine fixed-wing carrier aviation capability regardless of how the government continues to characterize the vessel's formal designation for domestic political purposes.

What the Accelerated Strategic Documents Revision Will Actually Contain

This newspaper's Sunday deep-dive examines the substance behind the Promotion Headquarters for the Transformation of Defense Capabilities

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Japan's decision to move up revision of its Three Strategic Documents — the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy and Defense Buildup Program that together constitute the architecture of the country's security policy — represents more than an accelerated calendar. This newspaper's Sunday deep-dive examines what officials familiar with the Promotion Headquarters for the Transformation of Defense Capabilities describe as the substantive questions the revision is actually built to answer, beyond the white paper's own threat assessment covered elsewhere in today's edition.

The 2022 documents, drafted under the previous administration, committed Japan to raising defense spending toward 2% of GDP by fiscal 2027 and formally acquired counterstrike capability for the first time in the postwar period — a pairing of budget and doctrine this newspaper's own archive shows was, at the time, described by government officials as sufficient to meet the threat environment for the remainder of the decade. That the government now considers a fresh revision necessary less than four years later is itself a data point worth sitting with: the pace of change in the regional threat environment has evidently outrun even a defense establishment that considered itself, in 2022, to be moving unusually fast by Japanese postwar standards.

Officials familiar with the Promotion Headquarters' internal deliberations, speaking to this newspaper on the condition that they not be identified discussing an ongoing policy process, describe three areas receiving the most sustained internal attention: whether the 2% of GDP spending target itself needs revision upward given both the yen's depreciation-driven effect on the real purchasing power of a yen-denominated budget and the accelerating pace of Chinese military spending the white paper documents; how far counterstrike doctrine can be extended operationally without requiring a fresh, politically difficult constitutional debate; and how to formalize the shipbuilding and munitions-production cooperation with the United States this newspaper has covered extensively into a doctrine document rather than leaving it as a series of individually negotiated industrial agreements.

The spending question carries the most immediate political stakes. Raising the formal target above 2% of GDP would require the kind of sustained multi-year budget commitment that has historically proven difficult to sustain across Japanese electoral cycles, particularly amid the currency and cost-of-living pressures this newspaper's business pages have covered extensively this year. Finance Ministry officials have reportedly pushed back within the interagency process against any upward revision to the formal target, preferring instead to characterize continued spending growth within the existing target as sufficient, a position defense planners within the Promotion Headquarters have reportedly resisted as insufficiently responsive to the white paper's own threat characterization.

Counterstrike doctrine's extension raises a different kind of difficulty. The 2022 documents authorized Japan to strike enemy missile-launch sites under specifically defined circumstances tied to an imminent, ongoing or completed attack against Japan, a formulation constitutional scholars across the political spectrum have described as pushing close to, without formally crossing, the boundary Article 9's renunciation of the threat or use of force to settle international disputes is understood to establish. Any further extension — allowing preemptive strikes against a broader range of targets, or lowering the threshold for what constitutes sufficient evidence of an imminent attack — would revive a constitutional debate the current government has shown little appetite to reopen formally, preferring instead the same pattern of incremental reinterpretation that has characterized Japanese security-policy evolution since the 2001 refueling mission this newspaper's own archive has covered in the context of prior anniversary coverage.

The shipbuilding and munitions-production formalization question is, by comparison, the least politically fraught of the three, reflecting a genuine convergence of Japanese and American interests that has already produced concrete industrial agreements without requiring the kind of doctrinal reinterpretation the counterstrike question demands. Formalizing this cooperation within the Defense Buildup Program specifically would give it a more durable institutional foundation than a series of individually negotiated agreements provides, protecting the cooperation against the possibility that a future government, in either country, might otherwise be able to unwind it more easily.

INTERNATIONAL

Gulf Conflict Enters Eighth Month as Oil Prices Stay Near \$100

This week's exchange between Iran and US forces remains the conflict's sharpest escalation to date, with no clear indication of further de-escalation as markets absorb sustained elevated energy costs
By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

The Gulf conflict this newspaper has tracked since February enters its eighth month with oil prices continuing to trade near \$100 a barrel, still elevated from last week'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, an exchange that remains, by every assessment this newspaper's international desk has gathered from regional security specialists, the conflict's most direct state-to-state confrontation to date.

Diplomatic efforts to prevent further escalation have continued through channels this newspaper has tracked closely, with regional mediators describing the current period as unusually delicate given how directly last week's exchange departed from the lower-intensity shipping-lane skirmishes that defined most of the conflict's earlier months, without producing, as of this writing, either a further escalation or any concrete step toward de-escalation.

Japanese officials have maintained their characteristically calibrated public posture through the conflict's latest phase, 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, which has not been meaningfully disrupted despite the conflict's persistence and its sharpest escalation yet.

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

This newspaper's economics desk notes the conflict's direct relevance to this week's Bank of Japan decision specifically, given how Gulf-driven energy costs feed into precisely the inflation calculus the central bank must weigh alongside domestic wage growth in determining the size and timing of continued rate increases, a connection this newspaper's business pages explore in fuller detail elsewhere in today's edition.

The General Assembly session convening in New York later this month is expected to provide the next major diplomatic venue for addressing the conflict directly, with mediating governments including Egypt, Qatar, Turkey and the United States expected to use the session's concentration of foreign ministers to press for renewed de-escalation efforts, according to diplomatic sources this newspaper consulted.

Japanese shipping companies with vessels transiting or operating near the Strait of Hormuz say they have not altered routing in response to last week's escalation specifically, 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 or Japanese-operated vessels.

Regional security specialists this newspaper consulted remain divided on whether the conflict's eighth month represents a genuine inflection point toward sustained higher-intensity confrontation, or a temporary spike likely to settle back toward the lower-intensity pattern that characterized most of the conflict's first seven months, 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's international desk will continue providing close coverage of the conflict's trajectory, tracking both its direct security implications and its continuing effect on global energy markets and, through that channel, on Japan's own economic and monetary policy calculus.

For Japan specifically, which imports the overwhelming majority of its crude oil through waters the conflict directly threatens, the stakes extend well beyond the abstract diplomatic question of who ultimately prevails in the underlying dispute between Washington and Tehran, touching directly on household energy costs, industrial input prices, and the broader inflation picture the Bank of Japan must weigh in every policy decision for as long as the conflict continues.

Taiwan Contingency Planning Continues Amid Sustained Chinese Military Pressure

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

Japanese and American defense planners continue refining contingency planning around a potential Taiwan crisis, according to this newspaper's defense desk sources, a process that has taken on additional urgency following this year's Defense of Japan white paper's explicit warning, covered elsewhere in today's edition, that China has conducted large-scale military exercises around Taiwan repeatedly since 2022.

The planning reflects a consistent Japanese official position, restated in this year's white paper, that peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait are indispensable to Japan's own security and to the stability of the broader international system, language that has become a fixture of Japanese statements on Taiwan even as Tokyo maintains no formal diplomatic relationship with Taipei under the One China framework Japan has observed since 1972.

Japan's own southwestern islands, including Yonaguni, sit within sight of Taiwan on a clear day, a geographic reality that has driven a sustained Self-Defense Forces buildup across the Nansei Islands chain in recent years, including new garrisons and missile deployments this newspaper has covered in prior editions as part of Japan's broader effort to harden its own southwestern flank against exactly the contingency planners are now refining.

American and Japanese officials have continued coordinating closely on the shipbuilding and munitions-production cooperation this newspaper has covered extensively, cooperation defense planners describe as directly relevant to any Taiwan contingency given the sustained munitions production capacity such a scenario would require from both countries simultaneously.

This newspaper's editorial line has argued consistently that a Taiwan contingency, should one occur, would not be a distant crisis for Japan to observe from a comfortable remove, but a direct threat to Japanese territory, shipping lanes and alliance credibility, a position this year's white paper's own explicit language substantially reinforces.

Japanese public opinion on the appropriate scope of Japan's own role in a Taiwan contingency remains genuinely divided, according to polling this newspaper has reviewed, with a meaningful share of respondents supporting logistical and rear-area support for American operations while a smaller but non-trivial share continues to favor a more restrictive interpretation of Japan's own security-treaty obligations that would limit Japanese involvement to Japan's own direct territorial defense.

This newspaper's international desk will continue tracking Taiwan-related developments closely as part of our standing defense and alliance coverage, treating the issue as a continuous rather than episodic story given how directly it connects to nearly every other defense and diplomatic theme running through this year's white paper and this newspaper's own coverage of it.

Taiwan's own government has continued deepening its informal security cooperation with both Japan and the United States, according to diplomatic sources this newspaper consulted, cooperation conducted through unofficial channels consistent with the One China framework all three governments formally observe while nonetheless representing a substantive deepening of practical coordination relative to a decade ago.

The Quad grouping of Japan, the United States, Australia and India, alongside deepening ties with the Philippines and the United Kingdom's own increased Indo-Pacific naval presence, together form what Japanese defense planners describe as a complementary architecture to the core US-Japan alliance rather than a substitute for it, each partner bringing distinct capabilities and geographic positioning relevant to a Taiwan contingency without any single partner expected to bear a disproportionate share of the response.

Chinese officials have continued characterizing any foreign involvement in what Beijing considers a purely internal matter as unwarranted interference, a position Japanese officials reject on the grounds that a Taiwan Strait crisis would, by its geographic and economic nature, directly threaten shipping lanes and regional stability well beyond any narrow definition of Chinese internal affairs.

Japanese and American defense planners continue refining contingency planning around a potential Taiwan crisis.

The Gulf conflict this newspaper has tracked since February enters its eighth month with oil prices continuing to trade near \$100 a barrel.

INVESTIGATION & REGIONAL

INVESTIGATION: Foreign Land Purchases Near SDF and USFJ Facilities Draw Renewed Scrutiny

This newspaper's Sunday investigation examines gaps in Japan's land-monitoring framework three years after its introduction
By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

Three years after Japan's land-monitoring law took effect, giving the government authority to survey and, in extreme cases, restrict land use near military and other sensitive facilities, this newspaper's Sunday investigation finds a monitoring framework that officials themselves describe as functioning as intended in its narrow legal scope, while civilian land-security specialists describe persistent gaps that the law's own designers acknowledged from the outset but have not yet closed.

The law, formally the Act on the Review and Regulation of the Use of Real Estate Surrounding Important Facilities and on Remote Territorial Islands, empowers the government to designate "specially designated areas" around Self-Defense Force bases, United States Forces Japan facilities, and other sensitive sites, within which land transactions face government review and land use deemed to interfere with the facility's function can, in principle, be restricted. This newspaper's review of publicly available designation data finds several hundred locations nationwide now under some form of monitoring designation, concentrated most heavily in Okinawa, Hokkaido and the remote southwestern islands this newspaper's defense coverage has identified as the most strategically sensitive geography in Japan's current threat environment.

The framework's central limitation, according to land-security specialists this newspaper consulted for this investigation, is structural rather than a matter of insufficient enforcement effort: the law targets land use and transactions occurring after a parcel's designation, but does not retroactively unwind ownership structures already in place before designation took effect, meaning that any foreign-linked ownership established in the years before the law's 2022 passage remains, in the overwhelming majority of cases, outside the framework's practical reach entirely.

This gap matters concretely in at least a handful of documented cases this newspaper's investigation identified through prefectural land registry records, in which land parcels adjacent to designated facilities changed hands through shell companies with beneficial ownership structures that prefectural and national land registries do not require to be fully disclosed, a transparency gap that predates and persists independently of the 2022 monitoring law's own more narrowly targeted authority.

Government officials involved in the monitoring program's administration, speaking to this newspaper on background given the program's ongoing and sensitive nature, describe beneficial-ownership transparency as the single reform most likely to close the framework's most significant remaining gap, noting that comparable Western democracies have moved toward more extensive corporate beneficial-ownership disclosure requirements in recent years for reasons extending well beyond military land security specifically, including anti-money-laundering and tax-enforcement objectives that could provide a broader political coalition for reform than military land security alone might command.

Chinese-linked capital specifically has drawn the most sustained public and political attention among the various sources of foreign land acquisition near sensitive sites, though this newspaper's investigation found the available public data insufficiently granular to confirm with confidence what share of foreign-linked purchases near designated areas specifically originates from Chinese sources as opposed to other foreign jurisdictions, a data limitation this newspaper considers itself obligated to report plainly rather than allow assumption to fill the gap the available records do not support.

Local municipal officials in several of the designated areas this newspaper visited or contacted for this investigation described a genuine tension between the security rationale for the monitoring framework and the economic reality that foreign capital, of whatever origin, has in some cases represented the only available buyer for agricultural and rural land in areas facing the same depopulation pressures this newspaper's real estate coverage has documented extensively in other contexts, a tension the current law's framers acknowledged in Diet debate preceding the law's 2022 passage without fully resolving.

Three years after Japan's land-monitoring law took effect.

Hokkaido Land Prices Surge Near Rapidus Site as Chitose Region Transforms

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Land prices in the area surrounding Rapidus Corp.'s planned advanced semiconductor fabrication facility near Chitose, Hokkaido, have continued climbing sharply, according to regional real estate data this newspaper has reviewed, offering one of the clearest concrete illustrations of how a single major industrial investment can reshape a regional property market within a remarkably short timeframe.

The price appreciation reflects anticipated employment and economic activity from Rapidus's own workforce needs, expected to eventually number in the thousands once the facility reaches full production, alongside a broader ecosystem of suppliers, contractors and service businesses that regional economic development officials expect to cluster around the facility as it approaches operational status.

Local municipal officials in the Chitose area describe the investment-driven land price surge as a welcome, if double-edged, development, noting that rapidly rising prices have created genuine benefit for existing landowners while simultaneously raising affordability concerns for younger residents and new workers the facility itself will need to attract and house locally.

Hokkaido's broader economic profile has historically leaned heavily on agriculture and tourism, making the Rapidus investment's manufacturing and technology-sector character a genuinely novel addition to the regional economy, one municipal and prefectural officials describe as offering diversification benefits well beyond the immediate employment and land-value effects concentrated in the Chitose area specifically.

Regional transportation infrastructure has faced its own adaptation pressure as the project has advanced, with local officials reporting increased planning attention to road capacity and, in the longer term, potential rail connectivity improvements to support both the facility's own logistics needs and the broader population growth its presence is expected to drive over the coming decade.

This newspaper's business desk has covered Rapidus's own technical and financial progress extensively in recent editions; this regional dispatch focuses specifically on the project's tangible, already-visible effect on the surrounding Hokkaido economy and property market, effects that predate the facility's own eventual production timeline by years.

Prefectural officials describe the Rapidus investment as the centerpiece of a broader Hokkaido economic development strategy that has also drawn interest from data-center developers attracted by the region's cooler climate and relatively abundant land, a pattern regional economic planners describe as a deliberate strategy to diversify the prefecture's economic base beyond its traditional agricultural and tourism sectors.

Skeptics of the current land-price surge caution that speculative investment ahead of the facility's actual production timeline carries genuine risk should Rapidus's own manufacturing timeline continue slipping, as it has modestly in recent guidance this newspaper's business desk has covered, a risk local real estate agents acknowledge while describing current transaction volumes as reflecting genuine end-user and long-term investor interest rather than purely speculative short-term positioning.

This newspaper's regional desk will continue tracking the Chitose area's transformation closely as a bellwether for how major industrial-policy investments reshape regional Japan more broadly, a story this newspaper considers relevant well beyond Hokkaido specifically given the number of other regions competing for comparable investment.

Land prices in the area surrounding Rapidus Corp.'s planned advanced semiconductor fabrication facility near Chitose.

ECONOMY

BOJ, Fed Decisions Loom as Markets Close Out a Volatile Week

Friday's Nikkei close of 64,011.34 leaves the index down for the week heading into Thursday's Federal Reserve decision and Friday's Bank of Japan meeting

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Tokyo markets enter the coming week's back-to-back Federal Reserve and Bank of Japan policy decisions carrying the scars of a volatile Friday session, in which the Nikkei 225 fell 1.93% to close at 64,011.34, down 1,259.61 points, leaving the index lower for the week as a whole even after Thursday's more modest 0.19% decline. With no trading over the weekend, Friday's print remains the most current market data available as this edition goes to press ahead of Sunday's Okinawa election and Aki Basho opening.

The week's losses reflected three distinct pressures converging on the same trading sessions: renewed expectations for a Federal Reserve rate increase following Thursday's producer price data showing US wholesale inflation accelerating in August; continued elevated oil prices tied to the Gulf conflict, which pushed crude benchmarks above \$100 a barrel amid the latest round of attacks on regional shipping; and the Bank of Japan's own widely expected quarter-point increase, which would take Japan's policy rate to its highest level in roughly three decades.

Technology and semiconductor-linked shares led Friday's declines specifically, with Kioxia Holdings falling roughly 7%, SoftBank Group dropping about 4%, Advantest losing 6.5%, and Tokyo Electron declining 2.6%, a pattern consistent with the sector's outsized sensitivity to both the currency's trajectory and the broader risk-off mood that has periodically interrupted this year's AI-investment-driven rally in Japanese chip-linked equities.

The yen has weakened somewhat from its recent seven-month high near 153 to the dollar, trading closer to 154 as the week closed, even as currency strategists this newspaper consulted describe the underlying trend as still pointing toward continued yen strength once the coming week's central bank decisions are behind markets, given how directly a BOJ rate increase would narrow the interest-rate differential that has driven yen weakness for the better part of three years.

Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh, who assumed leadership of the American central bank in May, has struck a notably more hawkish public tone than his predecessor in recent weeks, telling audiences that inflation must move toward the Fed's target "clearly and at sufficient speed" before the central bank resumes the rate cuts markets had broadly expected as recently as midsummer. Fed Governor Christopher Waller's own Sept. 3 comments indicating a rate increase may be appropriate at this week's meeting further reinforced market pricing for a hike, a genuinely unusual reversal from a cutting cycle that appeared well established only months ago.

Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda faces his own increasingly complex calculus heading into Friday's decision, with board member Kazuyuki Masu's public comments indicating continued tightening even as the Gulf conflict's inflationary pressure through energy prices complicates the timing question by adding an imported-cost pressure a domestic rate increase addresses only indirectly at best.

Japan's producer prices offer one of the clearer data points supporting the case for continued BOJ tightening: prices rose 7.6% year-on-year in August, beating consensus forecasts and marking the third consecutive month above 7%, driven substantially by petroleum, coal and chemical product costs tied directly to the same Gulf-conflict energy pressure affecting markets more broadly. On a month-on-month basis, however, producer prices actually fell slightly in August, a detail economists say complicates any simple reading of the year-on-year figure as unambiguous evidence of accelerating underlying inflation.

Business sentiment among Japan's largest companies turned positive in the July-to-September quarter for the first time in two quarters, according to the closely watched Reuters Tankan survey, which found manufacturer confidence at its highest level since December 2021, driven by robust semiconductor and data-center demand alongside improving conditions in hospitality, restaurants and finance. Companies across most size categories and industries now expect higher sales and profits for the current fiscal year, with capital investment projected to grow roughly 11%.

Corporate treasurers at major exporters continue adjusting hedging strategies to account for both the yen's underlying strengthening trend and its considerable week-to-week volatility, a combination several described to this newspaper as more difficult to plan around than a steady move in either direction alone would be, particularly with two major central bank decisions now due within days of each other.

Markets, Currencies and Prices at a Glance

Compiled by the Economics Desk

NIKKEI 225: 64,011.34 Friday close, down 1.93% (-1,259.61 points); down for the week. No weekend trading. TOPIX: 4,028, down 0.65% Friday. YEN: approximately 154 per dollar, off its recent seven-month high near 153 but still up more than 3% for September.

US MARKETS (Friday close): S&P 500 7,656.98 (+0.86%); Dow 30 52,573.29 (+0.98%); Nasdaq 26,333.04 (+0.96%). VIX 15.84. Gold \$4,408.90/oz. Crude oil (WTI) approximately \$100/barrel, off its intra-week peak above \$108 amid continued Gulf conflict disruption.

BOJ RATE: 1.00% currently; a quarter-point increase to 1.25% widely expected Friday, which would be the highest level in roughly three decades. FED RATE: 3.50%-3.75% currently; markets now price a quarter-point increase as more likely than not at Thursday's meeting, a reversal from earlier expectations of continued cuts.

JAPAN PRODUCER PRICES: +7.6% year-on-year in August, third consecutive month above 7%. TANKAN LARGE MANUFACTURERS: +21 in September, highest since December 2021.

UPCOMING THIS WEEK: Okinawa gubernatorial election result (tonight); Aki Basho sumo, Day 1 (today); Federal Reserve decision (Thursday); Bank of Japan decision (Friday).

YEN CARRY TRADE WATCH: Currency strategists this newspaper consulted describe renewed questions building around the yen carry trade specifically as the currency's strengthening trend continues, with positions built during years of near-zero Japanese rates facing growing unwind pressure the closer the BOJ moves toward Friday's expected increase.

LNG & ENERGY: Producing and consuming nations meeting in Tokyo this week agreed to strengthen supply-chain cooperation, an agreement this newspaper's business desk reads as directly relevant to Japan's own energy security calculus amid the Gulf conflict's continued effect on global energy prices.

GREEN TRANSFORMATION: The government has designated 18 regions nationwide as green transformation strategy areas, qualifying projects in those regions for subsidies and eased regulatory review, part of the same decarbonization investment push this newspaper's editorial page examines critically today.

This newspaper's economics desk compiles this summary nightly and will provide expanded coverage of both central bank decisions as each is announced next week.

US MARKETS (Friday close): S&P 500 7,656.98 (+0.86%); Dow 30 52,573.29 (+0.98%); Nasdaq 26,333.04 (+0.96%).

BUSINESS

Toyota's Record Quarter Built on Weak Yen Faces Reversal as Currency Strengthens

The automaker's fiscal first-quarter profit nearly doubled on a yen trading near 160 to the dollar. That yen no longer exists
By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Toyota Motor reported fiscal first-quarter net profit of \$9.4 billion for the April-to-June period, nearly double the \$5.29 billion recorded a year earlier, with the automaker's own disclosures crediting a combination of solid demand in the United States and India and a currency effect that added \$2.2 billion to quarterly operating profit — a currency effect built on a yen trading near 160 to the dollar that this newspaper's business pages have spent the past two months documenting has substantially reversed.

The dollar traded at approximately 145 yen during the equivalent quarter a year earlier, compared with approximately 160 yen during this year's April-to-June period, according to Toyota's own financial disclosures, a currency swing large enough on its own to explain a meaningful share of the quarter's profit growth independent of any operational improvement at the company.

That currency environment no longer exists. The yen has strengthened substantially since the joint US-Japan currency intervention this newspaper has covered extensively, trading around 154 to the dollar as of Friday's close, a swing of roughly six yen from the assumption underlying Toyota's own full-year guidance, which the company set at 160 to the dollar for the remainder of the current fiscal year.

Every yen the currency strengthens beyond that assumption directly erodes the value of Toyota's overseas earnings once converted back to yen for financial reporting purposes, a mechanical relationship this newspaper's business desk estimates could meaningfully pressure the company's full-year profit outlook if the yen's current strength persists through the remainder of the fiscal year, particularly once next week's expected Bank of Japan rate increase is factored into currency forecasts.

Toyota's own vehicle sales volumes tell a more mixed underlying operational story than the profit headline alone suggests: the company sold 2.39 million vehicles globally in the quarter, slightly down from 2.41 million a year earlier, even as the company maintained its full-year target of 9.7 million vehicles, suggesting the quarter's profit strength rested more heavily on currency and pricing than on underlying volume growth.

Chief Officer Takanori Azuma's own comments accompanying the results acknowledged the volume softness while expressing confidence in the full-year sales target, a confidence this newspaper's business desk notes will be tested directly by whatever demand effects emerge from sustained higher borrowing costs in the company's key American market, where the Federal Reserve's own rate decision this week adds a further variable to Toyota's already complex currency and demand outlook.

This newspaper's business desk considers Toyota's results a useful, concrete illustration of the broader exporter vulnerability this newspaper has covered in more abstract terms throughout the currency story: the same yen weakness that flattered corporate Japan's earnings for years has reversed, and companies that built financial guidance around a weak-yen assumption now face a genuine test of how much of their recent profit growth reflected durable operational improvement versus a currency tailwind that has already begun working in the opposite direction.

Toyota is not alone in this exposure. This newspaper's business desk notes that the same currency dynamic affects every major Japanese exporter to varying degrees, with companies holding the least currency-hedged overseas revenue exposure facing the most direct pressure on reported earnings as the yen's trajectory continues.

Toyota's shares have traded with notable volatility in recent sessions, consistent with the broader market volatility this newspaper's business pages have covered extensively this week, as investors weigh the company's genuinely strong underlying demand in key markets against the currency headwind now working against the same overseas earnings that recently flattered results.

This newspaper's business desk will provide full coverage of Toyota's next quarterly results once reported, treating the currency question as the single most important variable determining whether the company's recent profit growth proves durable or was substantially a function of a currency environment that has already changed materially.

Toyota Motor reported fiscal first-quarter net profit of \$9.4 billion for the April-to-June period.

Sony's Diversified Portfolio Cushions Currency Exposure Relative to Pure Exporters

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Sony Group's first-half results showed continued profit and revenue growth, with the conglomerate reporting net income attributable to shareholders of 598.88 billion yen for the six-month period, up from 570.13 billion yen a year earlier, alongside a raised full-year forecast, results this newspaper's business desk reads as evidence of the relative insulation Sony's diversified business structure provides against the currency volatility more purely export-dependent manufacturers like Toyota face directly.

Sony's operating income climbed 20.4% to 768.93 billion yen for the period, with sales from continuing operations growing 3.5% to 5.73 trillion yen, growth the company attributes to strength across its entertainment, gaming and imaging-sensor businesses rather than to any single currency-driven effect of the kind dominating Toyota's own quarterly narrative.

The company's decision to reclassify its Financial Services segment as a discontinued operation, following the previously announced partial spin-off of Sony Financial Group, reflects a broader corporate strategy of concentrating the conglomerate's core business around entertainment, gaming, imaging and semiconductor operations rather than the more diversified financial-services-inclusive structure Sony maintained for decades.

Sony's own full-year guidance projects net income attributable to shareholders easing 1.6% year-on-year, even as operating income is forecast to rise 12%, a combination reflecting one-time accounting effects from the Financial Services reclassification rather than any underlying operational weakness, according to the company's own investor communications this newspaper has reviewed.

This newspaper's business desk considers the contrast between Sony's and Toyota's currency exposure instructive for readers trying to understand why the same broad yen-strengthening trend affects different Japanese exporters so differently: Sony's entertainment and gaming revenue streams, including its PlayStation platform and Sony Pictures film and television operations, generate meaningful yen-denominated domestic revenue and licensing income alongside overseas sales, providing a natural hedge Toyota's more purely export-dependent vehicle manufacturing does not share to the same degree.

Sony's semiconductor and image-sensor business, which supplies camera sensors to smartphone manufacturers worldwide including major Toyota competitor's suppliers, has continued benefiting from sustained global demand for advanced imaging technology, a demand this newspaper's technology desk notes has proven relatively insulated from the currency and rate volatility affecting more traditional manufacturing sectors.

This newspaper's business desk will continue tracking how different Japanese corporate structures navigate the current currency environment differently, using Sony's and Toyota's contrasting results as an ongoing case study in how business-model diversification affects currency exposure across corporate Japan.

Sony's stock performance has shown less volatility than Toyota's in recent sessions, consistent with the more insulated currency exposure this newspaper's analysis suggests, though Sony shares remain subject to the same broader market risk-off sentiment that has periodically affected the entire Tokyo Stock Exchange amid this week's compounding currency, rate and geopolitical news.

Sony Group's first-half results showed continued profit and revenue growth.

BUSINESS

Japan Weighs Export Control Alignment With Washington on Semiconductor Technology

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

Japan continues weighing how closely to align its own export control regime with Washington's restrictions on advanced semiconductor technology sales to China, a question that carries direct commercial stakes for Japanese equipment makers this newspaper's technology desk has covered extensively, including ASML's own reported Japan workforce expansion supporting Rapidus and TSMC.

Japanese semiconductor equipment manufacturers, including Tokyo Electron and several smaller specialized toolmakers, maintain substantial commercial relationships with Chinese chipmakers that predate the current export control environment, relationships that generate meaningful revenue these companies would be reluctant to sacrifice absent clear, sustained American pressure to do so.

This newspaper's editorial line treats export-control alignment as a component of the broader economic-security relationship with Washington this newspaper has covered extensively, alongside the shipbuilding cooperation and currency coordination running through recent months, viewing technology-transfer restriction as a legitimate tool for slowing Chinese military-relevant technological development even when it carries real commercial cost for Japanese firms.

Industry representatives have pushed back on the most expansive proposed restrictions, according to trade association officials this newspaper consulted, arguing that overly broad controls risk driving Chinese customers toward domestic or third-country alternatives that could ultimately erode Japanese equipment makers' market position without meaningfully slowing China's own domestic semiconductor development given the country's substantial and growing indigenous investment in the sector.

METI officials have continued a careful, case-by-case approach to specific export licensing decisions rather than adopting a blanket restriction matching the most expansive American controls, according to trade ministry sources this newspaper consulted, a posture that has drawn periodic American criticism for insufficient alignment even as Japanese officials describe it as appropriately calibrated to Japan's own distinct commercial and strategic interests.

This newspaper's business desk notes that the export control question intersects directly with the broader semiconductor revival strategy this newspaper has covered extensively through the Rapidus venture, given that the same advanced manufacturing capability Japan is investing heavily to develop domestically is precisely the technology category most contested in the current US-China export control debate.

Chinese retaliatory measures targeting Japanese firms specifically remain a genuine risk Japanese officials weigh carefully in any export control decision, according to diplomatic sources this newspaper consulted, with China's recently announced sharp increase in visa fees for Japanese nationals, covered elsewhere in this newspaper's recent coverage, cited by some officials as exactly the kind of targeted retaliatory signal that makes Tokyo cautious about moving too far ahead of a coordinated multilateral approach.

This newspaper's business and diplomatic desks will continue tracking Japan's export control posture closely, treating it as a genuine test of how Tokyo balances the economic-security alignment with Washington this newspaper's editorial line supports against the real commercial costs that alignment imposes on specific Japanese industries.

Whether Japan ultimately moves toward fuller alignment with American export controls, or continues its current more calibrated, case-by-case approach, remains, trade policy specialists say, likely to depend substantially on how the broader US-China relationship develops in the coming months, including whatever outcome emerges from the AI safety talks this newspaper's technology pages have covered this week.

Japanese semiconductor equipment manufacturers.

Japanese Shipping Lines Face Rising Insurance Costs as Gulf Conflict Persists

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Japanese shipping companies operating vessels through or near the Strait of Hormuz continue facing elevated insurance costs as the Gulf conflict enters its eighth month, according to maritime insurance sources this newspaper consulted, even as the companies themselves have not altered actual vessel routing in response to last week's sharp escalation this newspaper's international desk has covered extensively.

War-risk insurance premiums for vessels transiting the strait have climbed substantially since the conflict's February onset, according to maritime insurance brokers this newspaper consulted, with premiums adjusting upward incrementally after each significant escalation rather than through a single large repricing, reflecting insurers' own difficulty pricing a conflict whose trajectory has proven genuinely difficult to forecast even for specialists closely tracking the region.

Nippon Yusen, Mitsui O.S.K. Lines and Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha, Japan's three major shipping conglomerates, each maintain substantial tanker and container operations transiting Gulf waters, giving all three direct exposure to both the insurance cost increases and the broader operational risk the conflict's persistence represents, according to this newspaper's review of the companies' own public disclosures.

This newspaper's business desk notes that the shipping companies' own financial disclosures have not yet fully reflected the conflict's cumulative cost impact, given standard corporate reporting cycles that will only capture the full eighth-month period once the companies report their next quarterly results, making the current insurance cost pressure a leading indicator this newspaper's business desk expects to become more visible in formal corporate disclosures in the coming months.

Alternative routing around the Cape of Good Hope, avoiding the Gulf and the Suez Canal entirely, remains available to shipping companies willing to accept substantially longer transit times, an option several Japanese shipping executives this newspaper consulted describe as still more costly in aggregate than continuing to pay elevated Gulf transit insurance, given the fuel and time costs the longer route imposes.

This newspaper's editorial line has argued consistently that Japan's own energy security strategy must account explicitly for sustained Gulf disruption risk rather than treating the current conflict as a temporary aberration, a position this shipping-cost data reinforces by illustrating how thoroughly the conflict has already been priced into routine commercial operations by the companies most directly exposed to it.

This newspaper's business desk will continue tracking Japanese shipping companies' Gulf exposure closely, including their eventual quarterly disclosures once the conflict's full eighth-month cost impact becomes visible in formal corporate reporting.

War-risk insurance premiums for vessels transiting the strait have climbed substantially since the conflict's February onset.

SOCIETY & LIFE

Kumamoto Recovery Enters Tenth Week as Dual-Track Response Continues

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Kumamoto Prefecture's earthquake recovery entered its tenth week this weekend, with officials reporting continued, steady progress on livelihood-recovery grant processing even as the region's separate recovery from last month's severe rain event continues alongside it, a dual-track disaster response prefectural officials describe as testing the limits of the region's administrative capacity in ways a single-disaster recovery timeline was never designed to accommodate.

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.

The national government's combined contingency and reserve funding for the recovery now exceeds 170 billion yen, officials confirmed, with the bulk of that funding continuing to flow through the livelihood-recovery grant system even as the prefecture simultaneously processes a separate wave of claims tied to the rain-driven flooding that struck several of the same affected districts weeks after the earthquake itself.

Roughly two thousand residents remain displaced across shelters more than six weeks after the earthquake, a figure that has declined only gradually in recent weeks as officials work through the more complicated remaining cases involving damaged private wells, contested property boundaries, and elderly residents without immediate family able to assist with relocation.

The Digital Agency's AI-assisted damage-assessment tool, deployed since the earthquake's early days under an extended emergency provision, continues operating across affected municipalities, with agency officials describing the tool as having meaningfully accelerated claims processing even as its emergency authorization approaches a point requiring a decision on extension or transition to standard administrative processes.

Tourism officials in the prefecture continue reporting encouraging advance bookings for the autumn Silver Week holiday period, a sign officials read as evidence that the region's dual recovery has not significantly deterred domestic travelers, with Kumamoto Castle's nightly illumination, maintained continuously since shortly after the earthquake, continuing to serve as an informal symbol of the recovery effort for visitors and residents alike.

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.

This newspaper's society desk will continue tracking both recovery tracks closely in the weeks ahead, particularly as the region's administrative resources face their own test of endurance managing two overlapping disaster responses simultaneously rather than the more typical single-disaster recovery timeline most Japanese disaster planning has historically been built around.

Local business owners across the affected areas report a mixed picture of recovery progress, with some sectors, particularly hospitality tied to the region's hot-spring tourism, showing signs of genuine rebound, while others, particularly small agricultural operations affected by both the earthquake and the subsequent flooding, continue facing compounded losses this newspaper's business desk has tracked as part of its broader coverage of rural economic pressure.

This newspaper considers Kumamoto's dual-track recovery a useful, sobering case study in the kind of compounded disaster risk Japan's own disaster-resilience planning, one of the standing beats this newspaper's editorial line treats as central to state capacity and order, will need to account for more explicitly as climate variability increases the likelihood of overlapping rather than sequential disaster events.

Kumamoto Prefecture's earthquake recovery entered its tenth week this weekend.

Household Budgets Show Cautious Improvement as Rice Prices Continue Easing

Falling food costs offer genuine relief even as families navigate a still-uncertain currency and rate environment ahead of this week's central bank decisions

By Grace Park | Food & Restaurant Columnist

Japanese households are showing cautious signs of budget improvement heading into autumn, driven substantially by continued declines in rice prices that have eased the Reiwa rice crisis's grip on household food budgets even as the same price declines have created genuine hardship for rice farmers this newspaper's politics desk has covered in the context of this year's record farm-bankruptcy data.

The cost of preparing a serving of curry rice at home, a dish widely tracked as an informal barometer of Japanese household food costs given its combination of rice, curry roux, vegetables and meat, fell below 350 yen for the first time in eleven months, according to data from Teikoku Databank this newspaper has reviewed, offering families a concrete, easily understood illustration of the same wholesale rice price decline shaping broader economic and political debates this year.

This year's wage data has provided a further source of cautious household optimism, with nominal wage growth running at its fastest pace since January 1997 and real wages posting consecutive months of gains, even as this newspaper's business desk has consistently cautioned that the gains have been distributed unevenly across firm sizes and sectors, with smaller employers generally lagging the large corporations driving the most impressive headline figures.

Families with school-age children face a somewhat more mixed picture heading into the new school term, with education-related costs, including juku cram-school fees and school supply costs, continuing to rise at a pace that has, for many households, offset a meaningful share of the food-cost relief rice price declines have provided.

Eldercare costs remain a persistent, largely unaddressed pressure point for many Japanese households, according to family-budget researchers this newspaper consulted, with the same demographic pressures driving Japan's broader labor shortage across agriculture, construction and other sectors also constraining the availability and affordability of professional eldercare services precisely as the population requiring such care continues to grow.

This week's back-to-back Federal Reserve and Bank of Japan decisions carry direct household relevance beyond the abstract market-moving significance this newspaper's business pages have covered extensively, given how directly any Bank of Japan rate increase affects mortgage costs for Japanese households, a meaningful share of whom hold variable-rate home loans directly exposed to the central bank's policy rate.

Household financial advisors this newspaper consulted describe the current environment as genuinely unusual in combining several simultaneously improving and worsening trends — falling food costs, rising wages, but also a likely mortgage-rate increase and continued currency volatility — making generic household financial advice considerably less useful this year than in more stable periods, with advisors increasingly recommending individualized consultation over generic budgeting guidance.

Consumer confidence surveys this newspaper has reviewed show a genuinely divided national mood, with households reporting improved sentiment about current food and grocery costs specifically, even as broader economic anxiety, tied substantially to currency volatility and geopolitical uncertainty from the Gulf conflict, continues to weigh on overall confidence readings.

This newspaper's Life & Family desk will continue tracking household budget conditions closely through the autumn, particularly once this week's central bank decisions clarify the mortgage-rate environment families will need to navigate through the remainder of the year.

Whether this autumn's combination of easing food costs and rising wages ultimately produces a genuine, sustained improvement in household financial sentiment, or proves to be offset by rising borrowing costs and continued currency uncertainty, remains, family-budget researchers say, likely to become clearer only once this week's central bank decisions and their household effects become apparent in the weeks ahead.

Japanese households are showing cautious signs of budget improvement heading into autumn.

EDITORIAL & OPINION



The Climate Changes. The Politics Never Do.

Today's cartoon draws a hard line between the physical record and the policy theater built on top of it. Japan, a country that has already lived through what real climate adaptation costs, has particular standing to insist on that distinction

By Samantha Ortiz | Editorial Page Editor

Today's cartoon, drawn by our own Taro Suzuki, is crowded in the way only a genuinely angry piece of editorial art earns the right to be. A banner reading "The Science Is Settled" arches over a legislative chamber where officials in sashes marked Climate Envoy and Climate Justice stand at a podium stacked with successive, unmet Net Zero pledges — 2050, then 2050 again, then 2050 once more, the date itself apparently as durable as the promise behind it. A family huddles by a small space heater beneath a Green Transition Levy bill reading £1,842.67 for the quarter. A scale weighs trillions in subsidies against an observed effect of 0.013 degrees per decade. A row of filing drawers, labeled 1930s, 1970s and 1990s, shows old front pages about dust storms, coming ice ages and record floods, filed under a single placard: weather has always been news. And in the frame's upper right, a COP summit's private jet lounge sits beside offshored smokestacks and a booth selling carbon indulgences by the tier — bronze at ten thousand pounds, platinum at one million. The caption underneath the whole crowded scene is a single flat sentence: the climate changes, the politics never do.

This newspaper wants to spend today's editorial explaining why we think that sentence is largely right, why Japan in particular has earned the standing to say so, and where — because a serious newspaper owes its readers precision rather than a cartoon's satisfying flatness — we think the cartoon's own compression risks losing something a Japan-first paper cannot afford to lose: an accurate accounting of what a warmer world actually costs a nation that depends, as ours does, on typhoon-exposed coastlines, imported energy, and a food supply chain running through some of the most climate-exposed farmland on Earth.

Start with what the cartoon gets right, because it is considerably more than the fashionable dismissal with which some readers will be tempted to file it. The thermometer at the composition's center carries a real, sourced number: 1880 to 2024, plus 1.1 degrees Celsius, gradual. That figure is not a cartoonist's invention. It sits within the range the world's major meteorological services have published for well over a decade, and it describes, honestly, a process that has been measured in tenths of a degree per decade rather than the sudden, cinematic lurches the phrase "climate emergency" tends to conjure in a viewer's mind. A newspaper committed to accuracy — and this one, given the editorial line under which it operates, treats accuracy as close to a survival requirement — has no business pretending that gradual and emergency describe the same phenomenon merely because one framing raises more money and wins more elections than the other.

The cartoon's second target, the gap between policy cost and observed effect, is where its argument does its most serious work and where this newspaper's own reporting over the past year gives us independent grounds to take the charge seriously rather than treat it as mere cartoonist's license. Japan's own Green Transformation levy, passed to fund the country's decarbonization investment, has added a measurable line item to household energy bills at precisely the moment this newspaper's business pages have spent months documenting a currency crisis, a wage squeeze, and a cost-of-living strain serious enough to reorder an Okinawa gubernatorial election most observers expected to turn on American bases rather than the price of groceries — a race this newspaper's front page covers in full today. A policy apparatus that asks a Saitama household already stretched thin by yen weakness and import-price inflation to fund a subsidy program whose measurable planetary effect is a small fraction of a degree per decade is not obviously a policy apparatus optimized for the people paying for it, whatever the intentions of the officials who designed it.

TODAY'S CARTOON

"The climate changes. The politics never do." — Taro Suzuki

READING THE PANEL

Suzuki's composition moves left to right from faith to cost: a family rationing heat under a subsidy bill, a scale weighing trillions against a hundredth of a degree, and a summit lounge where the people setting the rules fly past the people paying for them. The filing-cabinet panel is the sharpest visual argument — not that the thermometer is lying, but that alarmed coverage of weather is older than the current movement claims. Read our full response below, which agrees with the cartoon's cost argument while pushing back on how far the historical-skepticism panel can honestly be stretched.

The cartoon's sharpest and, we think, most durable image is the carbon-indulgence booth, selling tiered forgiveness — bronze, silver, gold, platinum — to institutions and individuals who wish to keep flying private jets to summits convened to discuss the moral urgency of not flying private jets. This newspaper does not need to relitigate the specific attendance logs of any particular COP summit to make the underlying point stand on its own: a movement that asks ordinary households to accept a real, measured reduction in living standards while its own most visible spokespeople purchase continued exemption for themselves has a legitimacy problem no amount of settled science resolves, because the objection was never actually about the science. It was about whether the sacrifice is evenly distributed, and on the available evidence, gathered from years of attendance manifests and emissions disclosures that climate-accountability journalists across the political spectrum have documented in detail, it plainly is not.

The historical filing-cabinet panel — 1930s dust storms, 1970s cooling fears, 1990s flood warnings, all filed under weather has always been news — deserves the most careful handling of any single image in today's cartoon, because it is also the image most vulnerable to being pushed further than the honest version of its argument will bear. We want to be precise about what the panel legitimately establishes and what it does not. It legitimately establishes that alarmed weather coverage is not a novel invention of the current climate movement — newspapers, including outlets considerably more sober than the tabloid press, ran genuinely apocalyptic coverage of Dust Bowl drought in the 1930s and speculative cooling scenarios in the 1970s, both eventually superseded by developments the contemporary coverage did not anticipate. That pattern is real, and a reader with any sense of journalism's own history should hold it in mind before accepting this decade's specific framing uncritically.

What the panel does not establish, and what this newspaper will not pretend it establishes merely because the cartoon's visual logic invites the inference, is that the current scientific consensus on anthropogenic warming rests on the same evidentiary footing as 1970s cooling speculation. The two are not comparable cases dressed in different decades' clothing. The 1970s cooling hypothesis was a minority position within the contemporary climate-science literature even at the time, amplified disproportionately by a handful of popular-press accounts relative to its actual standing among specialists, and it was abandoned by the scientific community itself once the underlying data — principally the accelerating measured warming trend and a clearer understanding of aerosol cooling's temporary, self-limiting effect — pointed the other way. The current warming consensus, whatever one makes of the policy conclusions various governments and activists have drawn from it, rests on a multi-decade accumulation of direct atmospheric and ocean-temperature measurement, ice-core and tree-ring proxy reconstruction, and physical greenhouse-gas theory dating to the nineteenth century, cross-checked by research institutions across dozens of countries with genuinely divergent political incentives to reach a particular conclusion. Treating that evidentiary base as equivalent to a single decade's press cycle is not the sober historical skepticism the panel's other three drawers earn. It is a different, weaker claim smuggled in under cover of the first three.

Continued on Page 11

EDITORIAL & OPINION

The Climate Changes. The Politics Never Do. — Continued from Page 10

This distinction matters for a specifically Japanese reason this newspaper considers under-discussed in a debate too often imported wholesale from London and Washington. Japan is not a hypothetical bystander to whatever the warming trend's real magnitude turns out to be. It is a densely populated island nation whose coastal cities sit exposed to a typhoon season this newspaper's own weather desk has described, without any climate-activist framing whatsoever, as running measurably more intense in recent years than the historical baseline; whose agricultural base, concentrated on limited arable land, remains acutely sensitive to the same heat and rainfall variability the current warming trend is expected to intensify; and whose entire energy security posture, still recovering from the post-Fukushima retreat from nuclear power this newspaper's business pages have covered at length, depends on imported fossil fuels priced, this month specifically, by a Gulf conflict entering its eighth month. A Japan-first newspaper does not get to wave away the physical warming trend as a media invention merely because the international policy response to it has been captured, in significant part, by precisely the kind of unaccountable, jet-setting, indulgence-selling apparatus today's cartoon depicts so effectively. The trend and the racket built on top of it are two different objects, and a serious paper keeps them separately in view even when a single sharp cartoon, for entirely legitimate satirical reasons, compresses them into one image.

We think this distinction — real trend, captured policy response — actually strengthens rather than weakens the cartoon's underlying case, once it is stated plainly rather than left to the reader's inference. If the warming trend were fictional, the appropriate response to today's cartoon would be straightforward dismissal: point to the data, note the exaggeration, move on. But if the trend is real and gradual, as the thermometer's own sourced figure indicates, then the specific complaint the cartoon levels — that the policy apparatus built in response has become disconnected from the actual physical stakes, captured by rent-seeking subsidy recipients, indulgence-selling financial intermediaries, and a political class more interested in performing urgency than in delivering cost-effective adaptation — becomes considerably more serious, not less, because it means real resources that a genuinely serious response could have spent on the concrete, boring work of adaptation have instead been spent on the kind of theater the cartoon's every panel documents.

What would a Japan-first climate policy that took the physical trend seriously without indulging the theater actually look like, and how does it differ from the current Green Transformation apparatus this newspaper's business pages have covered as a straightforward cost-of-living burden? We think the honest answer starts with sequencing: energy security first, through the nuclear restart program this newspaper has covered extensively and which remains stalled as often by domestic regulatory timidity and isolated compliance failures — Chubu Electric's own recent restart abandonment, reported in this newspaper's business pages last week, being only the latest example — as by any genuine safety obstacle; coastal and agricultural adaptation second, funded at a level commensurate with Japan's actual, measurable exposure to intensifying typhoons and heat stress rather than at a level calibrated to match other countries' more performative climate commitments; and only third, if resources remain, the kind of subsidized transition spending that currently tops the Green Transformation levy's own bill, spending whose actual emissions-reduction return, on the cartoon's own sourced figure of 0.013 degrees per decade globally, is vanishingly small relative to its household cost.

This ordering is not indifference to the warming trend. It is precisely what taking the trend seriously, on its own physical terms rather than on the terms set by an international activist and diplomatic apparatus with its own separate institutional incentives, would actually require of a country in Japan's specific geographic and energy-security position. Nuclear restarts reduce genuine emissions at genuine scale, immediately, using capacity Japan has already built and is currently paying to keep idle. Seawall and agricultural adaptation protect Japanese lives and Japanese food security regardless of what the rest of the world does with its own emissions trajectory, since Japan's own output is a small enough share of the global total that Japanese mitigation alone cannot meaningfully alter the physical trend the country will need to adapt to either way. A subsidy apparatus that funds neither of these things at the level Japan's own exposure justifies, while funding the kind of transition spending that shows up on a Saitama household's energy bill without a correspondingly large effect on the thermometer, has its priorities backward — not because the thermometer is lying, but because the policy apparatus has stopped actually optimizing for what the thermometer says matters most for a country in Japan's position.

We anticipate the objection, and think it deserves a direct answer rather than a rhetorical dodge: doesn't emphasizing adaptation over mitigation simply accept a warmer world as inevitable, ceding the harder political fight over reducing emissions globally? Our answer is that Japan's own emissions, whatever their trajectory, were never going to be the variable that determined the global outcome — the physics of a shared atmosphere means Japan's fate depends overwhelmingly on decisions made in Beijing, Washington and New Delhi, decisions well outside any Japanese government's control regardless of how aggressively Tokyo taxes its own households in the name of leading by example. A Japan-first policy that spent its limited political and fiscal capital on protecting Japanese coastlines, Japanese farms and Japanese energy security, rather than on symbolic leadership gestures aimed at an international audience that has shown limited willingness to reciprocate, would not be abandoning the climate fight. It would be fighting the only part of that fight actually within Japan's control, while declining to bankroll the indulgence-selling theater today's cartoon depicts with such evident, and in this newspaper's assessment substantially earned, contempt.

There is a further dimension to the cartoon's indulgence-booth panel worth drawing out explicitly, because it bears directly on how this newspaper thinks Japanese policymakers should weigh international climate diplomacy against domestic priorities in the years ahead. The carbon-offset and ESG-credit market the cartoon depicts as a tiered indulgence system has, on the available evidence this newspaper's business desk has reviewed over the past two years, developed exactly the structural problems a market built on self-certified, difficult-to-verify claims of prevented emissions would be expected to develop: persistent findings of offset credits sold against forest-preservation projects that were never genuinely at risk of deforestation, credits issued for renewable capacity that would have been built regardless of the credit revenue, and a verification industry with a structural incentive to certify generously rather than rigorously, since offset developers choose and pay their own verifiers. None of this is a uniquely Japanese observation — investigative reporting across multiple countries has documented the same pattern repeatedly — but it matters specifically for Japan because Japanese firms, under both voluntary corporate sustainability commitments and formal compliance obligations tied to the country's own emissions-trading framework, have purchased these credits in meaningful volume, effectively exporting real Japanese corporate capital to fund a verification apparatus this newspaper considers, on the current evidence, to have failed at its most basic task.

Compare this to how a genuinely Japan-first energy strategy would deploy the same capital. Every yen a Japanese trading house or manufacturer spends on an offset credit of uncertain provenance is a yen not spent on the concrete, measurable, domestically controlled alternative: accelerating the specific nuclear restarts this newspaper has tracked stalling case by case, plant by plant, for reasons ranging from genuine post-Fukushima safety caution to the kind of isolated compliance and data-handling failures that sank Chubu Electric's own restart bid. Nuclear generation displaces fossil-fuel generation on Japan's own grid, verifiably, immediately, without requiring trust in a third-party verifier's judgment about deforestation risk on another continent. A policy establishment genuinely optimizing for Japan's own emissions and energy-security position simultaneously would be pouring political capital into faster, more consistent nuclear regulatory review, not into expanding Japanese participation in an international offset market this newspaper's own reporting suggests functions, in significant part, as the indulgence system today's cartoon depicts.

International comparison is instructive here, and we do not think Japan is alone in having drifted from a defensible climate policy into a captured one. Britain's own net-zero-by-2050 commitment, restated and restated again in the cartoon's own visual joke about goalposts that never actually move despite the date apparently requiring perpetual reaffirmation, has coincided with among the highest household energy costs in the developed world, a combination that has produced its own domestic political backlash and that several British commentators across the political spectrum have now openly linked to the same subsidy-and-offset architecture this newspaper is describing in a Japanese context. Germany's own more dramatic experience — an accelerated nuclear phase-out followed by a scramble back toward coal and imported liquefied natural gas once the physical limits of intermittent renewable generation met a continental energy crisis — offers an even starker cautionary case of what happens when climate policy sequencing gets the physics backward, prioritizing the internationally visible gesture of nuclear closure over the boring, domestically controlled reliability nuclear generation actually provides. Japan, whose own post-Fukushima nuclear retreat already cost the country dearly in exactly the energy-security terms Germany's experience illustrates, has less room than either country to repeat the same sequencing error, not more.

None of this should be read as an argument that Japan ought to disengage from international climate diplomacy altogether, a position this newspaper does not hold and does not think the cartoon itself endorses either, whatever a less careful reading might infer from its evident scorn for the COP circuit specifically. Japan has genuine interests in influencing how any international framework treats nuclear power's classification, how border carbon adjustments affecting Japanese exporters are designed, and how technology-transfer rules affect Japanese firms competing against Chinese state-subsidized manufacturers in solar, battery and next-generation nuclear components alike. Withdrawing from the diplomacy entirely would cede exactly these questions to competitors with every incentive to write the rules against Japanese interests. The distinction this newspaper is drawing is between engaging in that diplomacy clear-eyed about its participants' mixed incentives, and treating attendance at it, or fidelity to its favored policy instruments, as a moral obligation that should override Japan's own more pressing, more immediately controllable energy-security and household-cost priorities.

Today's cartoon ends, as it began, on a single hard sentence: the climate changes, the politics never do. We would add only this, in the spirit of the accuracy this newspaper treats as non-negotiable regardless of which political direction a given day's argument runs: the climate changing is not, itself, the scandal. The scandal is a policy apparatus that has spent two and a half decades building an increasingly elaborate, increasingly self-serving structure on top of that genuine physical fact — one that asks a Saitama family to eat the cost of a subsidy program with a barely measurable planetary effect, while the apparatus's own most visible representatives fly private jets to summits convened to discuss everyone else's sacrifice. Japan can accept the thermometer's honest reading and still refuse, on Japan-first grounds alone, to keep funding that particular racket. Today's cartoon, for all its crowded fury, is making exactly that argument, and this newspaper's editorial page is glad to make it alongside our own cartoonist, in words rather than ink, on the page directly beneath his.

ANALYSIS & COURTS

ANALYSIS: Managing Washington Without Flattering It

A former Self-Defense Forces officer argues Japan's alliance strategy requires clear-eyed burden-sharing arguments, not reflexive deference to American demands

By a Former Self-Defense Forces Officer, Special to This Newspaper

Japan's alliance with the United States has entered a phase that requires more candor from Tokyo than the relationship has historically demanded, and this newspaper's own reporting this week — on the accelerated Three Strategic Documents revision, on the shipbuilding cooperation this newspaper has tracked extensively, on the currency and trade friction running through recent months — illustrates exactly why. The alliance remains, as this newspaper's editorial line correctly insists, the foundation of Japan's deterrence rather than a humiliation to be managed quietly. But foundation does not mean blank check, and Japan's own interests are not served by treating every American demand as self-evidently aligned with Japanese security.

Consider the specific defense-spending pressure examined in this newspaper's defense pages today. Washington's push for allies to spend more on their own defense is not wrong in its basic premise — a wealthy, technologically advanced country facing the threat environment this year's white paper documents should not expect American taxpayers to subsidize its security indefinitely. But the specific spending target itself, and the timeline attached to it, are American preferences, not laws of physics, and Japan's own defense establishment should say so plainly when American pressure for a faster or larger increase collides with Japan's own fiscal constraints and the currency and cost-of-living pressures this newspaper's economics pages have covered extensively this year.

The distinction matters because conflating alliance management with reflexive American deference produces bad policy on both sides of the Pacific. When Japanese officials accept an American spending target without pressing hard on its underlying assumptions — about threat timelines, about burden-sharing formulas, about what specific capabilities the spending should buy — Japan ends up purchasing whatever configuration of ships, aircraft and munitions best serves the immediate political optics of the number itself, rather than the configuration Japanese defense planners, working from Japan's own geography and threat assessment, would independently choose.

This newspaper's coverage of the shipbuilding and munitions-production cooperation with Washington illustrates the more successful version of alliance management: a genuine convergence of interest, in which American shipyards facing their own capacity constraints and Japanese industrial capacity looking for expanded defense-sector work found a mutually beneficial arrangement neither side needed to be talked into. That is what functioning burden-sharing looks like — not Japan accepting an externally imposed number, but Japan and the United States each bringing genuine capability to a problem both recognize as shared.

The currency story running through this newspaper's business pages offers a more cautionary parallel. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's public confidence in the yen's trajectory, and his more recently reported role in AI diplomacy with China, illustrate an American economic-policy apparatus increasingly comfortable projecting itself into what Japan has traditionally treated as its own sovereign monetary and technology-policy territory. Japanese officials have managed this specific episode reasonably well, coordinating with Washington without ceding independent Bank of Japan decision-making to American preference. That balance — coordination without subordination — is the model Japan's broader alliance management should aspire to across every domain, not merely currency policy.

None of this argues for distancing Japan from Washington, a position this newspaper's editorial line correctly rejects as both strategically foolish and historically ignorant of what the alternative — a Japan facing China, Russia and North Korea without the American security guarantee — would actually mean for Japanese sovereignty and prosperity. The argument is narrower and, I would suggest, more useful: Japan serves its own alliance interests best by bringing its own clearly articulated positions to every negotiation, rather than treating American preference as the default position Japan must either accept or awkwardly resist.

Japan's own defense-industrial base, still recovering from decades of underinvestment this newspaper has documented extensively, needs sustained, predictable investment more than it needs a headline spending target calibrated to satisfy American political messaging cycles. A Japan that builds its defense posture around its own threat assessment — the white paper's own China analysis, the Taiwan contingency planning this newspaper covers today, the Nansei Islands buildup already underway — while coordinating that posture closely with Washington, will end up with a more coherent, more sustainable defense capability than a Japan that simply matches whatever number Washington's own domestic politics currently favors.

Supreme Court Upholds 10-Year Sentence for 2023 Kishida Attack

The Third Petty Bench's dismissal closes the final appeal in a case that tested how Japanese courts weigh attacks on sitting political leaders

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

Japan's Supreme Court has upheld the 10-year prison sentence handed to Ryuji Kimura, now 27, for detonating an explosive device near then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during a 2023 election campaign event in Wakayama, closing off the final avenue of appeal in a case this newspaper has followed since the attack itself raised urgent questions about security protocols for sitting political leaders.

The Third Petty Bench, presided over by Justice Kimihiro Ishikane, dismissed Kimura's appeal, affirming findings from both the Wakayama District Court and the Osaka High Court that the original 10-year sentence was appropriate and contained no factual errors warranting further review.

The Wakayama District Court's original February 2025 ruling found that Kimura did not care whether people died in the attack, and that he was motivated by a belief that detonating an explosive device near the sitting prime minister would attract public attention to his grievances about Japan's electoral system — a motive the court characterized as failing to justify or mitigate the attack's severity in any meaningful way.

The district court's sentencing rationale placed particular weight on the attack's target rather than solely on the physical harm caused, holding that an attack against a sitting prime minister generates a distinct and serious harm to public order and social stability beyond whatever physical injury results from the specific device used, a legal reasoning this newspaper's court analysts describe as consistent with how Japanese courts have historically treated attacks on senior political figures.

The Osaka High Court's September 2025 dismissal of Kimura's initial appeal affirmed this reasoning without modification, setting up the final Supreme Court review that concluded with Friday's dismissal, a three-tier judicial process that took just under three years from the original 2023 attack to this final resolution.

This newspaper's editorial line has consistently argued that attacks on political leaders represent a distinct category of threat to state capacity and order, deserving of exactly the kind of serious, sustained sentencing consideration this case received across all three levels of Japan's court system, rather than being treated as an ordinary criminal matter subject to the sentencing discounts that might apply to comparable violence against a private individual.

The case followed the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, an attack that prompted a broad national reassessment of security protocols for political figures and that this newspaper's own coverage at the time linked directly to heightened public and institutional anxiety about political violence, an anxiety the 2023 Kishida attack, occurring less than a year later, only intensified.

Security protocols for Japanese political leaders have been revised substantially in the years since both attacks, according to National Police Agency officials this newspaper consulted, though officials declined to detail specific protective measures publicly, citing the same operational security concerns that govern comparable disclosure decisions in other democracies.

Legal scholars this newspaper consulted describe the case's final resolution as providing a clear, now-settled precedent for how Japanese courts will weigh comparable attacks on political figures going forward, a precedent this newspaper's editorial line considers appropriately serious given the stakes such attacks pose to the basic functioning of democratic political competition.

This newspaper's courts desk will continue tracking Japan's broader approach to political violence and its judicial consequences, a standing beat this newspaper considers directly relevant to the state capacity and order this editorial line treats as a core national priority alongside external defense and economic questions.

Japan's Supreme Court has upheld the 10-year prison sentence handed to Ryuji Kimura.

SPORTS

SoftBank Nears Pennant as Central League Race Tightens Further

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Fukuoka SoftBank moved a step closer to clinching the Pacific League pennant outright Saturday, extending a lead built substantially on right-hander Yugo Maeda's perfect 12-0 season, while Central League leader Hanshin's cushion over surging Yomiuri narrowed further in a stretch run this newspaper's sports desk now considers the tightest top-of-table race either league has produced in several seasons.

SoftBank's continued dominance has left the Hawks needing only a handful of additional wins or Nippon-Ham losses to formally secure the pennant, a outcome that would allow the club to shift its remaining regular-season focus toward postseason rotation planning well before the Sept. 27 close of Aki Basho and the Oct. 31 close of the NPB regular season this year.

Yomiuri's own sustained stretch-run form has cut what was once a comfortable multi-game Hanshin lead down to a margin measured in single games, according to standings this newspaper has reviewed, setting up a Central League finish that several NPB commentators now describe as the most competitive since Hanshin's own 2023 championship run, when the Tigers similarly weathered a late Giants surge before ultimately prevailing.

Saturday's slate saw continued strong performances across both leagues, with several clubs fighting for the remaining Climax Series positions below each league's respective leader, a race this newspaper's sports desk will track closely through the season's final weeks given how much postseason seeding remains genuinely undecided outside the two league-leading clubs themselves.

Yokohama DeNA has continued its productive recent offensive stretch, remaining the Central League's most realistic fourth Climax Series contender given the growing gap behind the BayStars in the standings, while the Pacific League's second-place battle between Saitama Seibu and Hokkaido Nippon-Ham has remained separated by a margin of a game or two for much of the past month.

Individual milestone watches continue occupying much of NPB's late-season storyline space, with Maeda's pursuit of a perfect won-loss season through the year's remaining starts now drawing comparisons to some of the league's most celebrated pitching seasons in recent memory, a run this newspaper's sports desk has tracked closely since the pattern first became apparent earlier this summer.

This newspaper's sports desk notes that today's Okinawa election and Aki Basho opening will likely draw significant national attention away from NPB's own stretch-run drama, even as the pennant races themselves have arguably never been more genuinely competitive at this late point in the season.

Full box scores and standings from Saturday's complete slate appear in this edition's sports utility block, alongside Sunday's MLB results compiled from Friday's most recently completed American slate, an unavoidable one-day lag given time-zone differences between American and Japanese publication schedules.

Fukuoka SoftBank moved a step closer to clinching the Pacific League pennant outright Saturday.

NPB Standings and Results

Compiled by the Sports Desk

CENTRAL LEAGUE — Hanshin Tigers lead Yomiuri Giants by a single game heading into the season's final seven weeks, with Yokohama DeNA holding the most realistic claim on the fourth and final Climax Series position. Tokyo Yakult, Hiroshima and Chunichi round out the standings with no realistic postseason path remaining at this stage of the season.

PACIFIC LEAGUE — Fukuoka SoftBank's pennant is not yet mathematically clinched but is considered a formality by NPB observers, with the Hawks' magic number now in the single digits. Saitama Seibu and Hokkaido Nippon-Ham remain separated by roughly a game and a half in the race for second place and the accompanying Climax Series bye. Chiba Lotte, Orix and Tohoku Rakuten occupy the remaining positions.

INDIVIDUAL WATCH — SoftBank right-hander Yugo Maeda remains unbeaten at 12-0 through his most recent start, the Pacific League's most closely followed individual storyline heading into the season's final weeks.

UPCOMING — NPB regular season runs through Oct. 31, followed by the Climax Series and Japan Series. Aki Basho sumo tournament runs today through Sept. 27 at Ryogoku Kokugikan.

CLIMAX SERIES FORMAT NOTE — Each league's second- and third-place finishers meet in a best-of-three First Stage, with the winner advancing to face the pennant winner in a best-of-six Final Stage carrying a one-game handicap in the pennant winner's favor, a structural advantage NPB introduced specifically to reward the regular-season champion for a 143-game body of work.

HISTORICAL NOTE — SoftBank's current pennant run, should it hold, would mark the franchise's latest addition to what is already the most decorated run in modern Pacific League history, a period of sustained dominance this newspaper's sports desk has tracked closely across multiple seasons.

This newspaper's sports desk compiles standings nightly from official NPB sources and will continue providing complete daily updates through the remainder of both pennant races and into the postseason.

UPCOMING — NPB regular season runs through Oct. 31, followed by the Climax Series and Japan Series.

MLB Roundup: Dodgers Continue Playoff Push as Ohtani Manages Hitting-Only Role

Results from Friday, September 11 (US date), the most recent completed slate available given publication timing

Compiled by the Sports Desk

The Los Angeles Dodgers continued their push toward a third consecutive World Series appearance in Friday's action, with the club's pitching rotation — built around Yoshinobu Yamamoto, Blake Snell, Tyler Glasnow and Tarik Skubal — continuing to prepare for a postseason run that does not require any contribution from Shohei Ohtani on the mound, given his continued hitting-only role down the stretch.

Ohtani's own 2026 season numbers remain formidable despite the accumulated missed time from various injuries across his career, with a batting average near .280, roughly 30 home runs, and an OPS ranking among the American League's leaders heading into the season's final weeks, figures that have kept him in the National League Most Valuable Player conversation even in a season defined partly by absence.

Japanese broadcasters continue reporting some of the season's strongest domestic viewership figures specifically for Dodgers games, a pattern that has held consistently throughout the year regardless of the team's day-to-day results or Ohtani's own specific statistical output in any given contest.

Several other American League and National League postseason races remain genuinely competitive heading into the final weeks of the regular season, with wild-card positioning in both leagues still unsettled among a cluster of clubs separated by only a handful of games, according to standings this newspaper has reviewed.

This newspaper's sports desk compiles MLB results nightly from the most recently completed American slate, a one-day lag from Japan's own publication schedule that reflects the time-zone difference between American and Japanese game times rather than any delay in this newspaper's own reporting process.

Full individual game results from Friday's complete American slate are available through this newspaper's digital edition, with tomorrow's print edition to include Saturday's results as they become available ahead of print deadline.

The American League playoff picture remains particularly unsettled in its wild-card positioning, with several clubs separated by margins thin enough that a single week's results could meaningfully reshuffle seeding heading into October, according to standings this newspaper has reviewed.

Japanese players beyond Ohtani continue drawing sustained domestic attention as the season winds toward its close, with several other Japanese-born major leaguers posting notable individual seasons this newspaper's sports desk has tracked throughout the year alongside its primary Ohtani and Dodgers coverage.

This newspaper's sports desk will continue providing MLB coverage through the postseason, tracking both the Dodgers' continued championship push and the broader playoff picture across both leagues as October approaches.

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SPORTS

Aonishiki Opens Title Defense as Aki Basho Begins Today

The Ukrainian-born wrestler enters the tournament fresh off his third career championship, chasing a fourth in front of a sold-out Ryogoku Kokugikan

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Sumo's third and final Tokyo tournament of the year begins today at Ryogoku Kokugikan, with all fifteen days sold out well in advance of the opening bout and Ukrainian-born Aonishiki entering as the wrestler every rival must beat after claiming his third career championship at July's Nagoya tournament.

Aonishiki's rapid ascent through sumo's ranking system over the past two years has become one of the sport's most closely followed storylines both domestically and internationally, a rise Japan Sumo Association officials have repeatedly credited with contributing meaningfully to the current tourism-driven attendance boom this newspaper's culture desk has covered extensively in recent editions.

Two reigning yokozuna, Onosato and Hoshoryu, headline the rest of the field, with sumo journalists this newspaper consulted describing this September's banzuke as unusually deep in realistic championship contenders even before accounting for Aonishiki's own status as the tournament's clear favorite entering Day 1.

Today's schedule follows sumo's standard format: lower-division bouts beginning around 8 a.m., building through the day toward the top-division makuuchi matches and their accompanying ring-entering ceremonies in the mid-afternoon, with the day's final bouts concluding by early evening.

Ticket demand for this tournament sold out faster than any recent Aki Basho, according to Japan Sumo Association officials, with even weekday sessions that in past years remained available through a tournament's opening days selling out within hours of the initial release in early August.

The tourism-driven demand has produced measurable economic 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 one of the best-attended tournaments in the venue's recent history.

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

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 specifically.

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 through active marketing investment.

This newspaper's sports desk will be on hand throughout today's opening ceremonies and will provide full daily coverage of results and standings throughout the tournament's fifteen-day run, beginning with tomorrow's account of today's complete card.

Sumo's third and final Tokyo tournament of the year begins today at Ryogoku Kokugikan.

Key Bouts to Watch as Aki Basho's Opening Day Unfolds

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Today's Aki Basho opening card at Ryogoku Kokugikan features several matchups sumo journalists this newspaper consulted describe as worth particular attention, beginning with Aonishiki's own Day 1 bout, in which the reigning champion's title defense formally begins against an opponent the banzuke committee's rankings placed him against as part of the tournament's carefully calibrated early-round scheduling.

Yokozuna Onosato and Hoshoryu both face their own Day 1 tests lower in the card's hierarchy than Aonishiki's headline bout, with sumo tradition dictating that the tournament's highest-ranked wrestlers face progressively tougher opposition as the fifteen-day tournament advances toward its decisive final weekend, rather than facing their most dangerous rivals immediately on Day 1.

The tournament's deep field of realistic championship contenders, a quality sumo commentators have specifically praised this September relative to some recent tournaments, means Day 1's results, while never determinative of the eventual championship, carry more genuine early signal this year than in tournaments where a single dominant favorite has made the outcome feel more predetermined.

Lower-ranked divisions begin the day's action as early as 8 a.m., providing what sumo traditionalists describe as some of the tournament's most genuinely unpredictable competition, given how frequently young, up-and-coming wrestlers in these divisions produce the kind of surprising results that eventually become the career-launching moments retrospectively cited once a wrestler rises to sumo's higher ranks.

Today's opening ceremonies, including the traditional dohyo-iri ring-entering ceremony performed separately by East and West division wrestlers, and the more elaborate yokozuna-specific ceremony performed individually by each of the tournament's two reigning yokozuna, represent some of sumo's most photographed and internationally recognized ceremonial traditions, according to Japan Sumo Association officials who describe international visitor interest in the ceremonies specifically as a significant driver of this year's tourism-fueled attendance boom.

This newspaper's sports desk notes that today's card arrives amid the same national attention Okinawa's gubernatorial election is separately drawing, giving Japan's Sunday news cycle an unusually full slate of major stories competing for both media and public attention simultaneously.

Betting and prediction markets tracking sumo outcomes, though operating in a considerably more limited and culturally distinct fashion than comparable markets for baseball or soccer, have priced Aonishiki as the clear favorite to successfully defend his title, according to market data this newspaper has reviewed, reflecting the broad consensus among sumo commentators regarding his current form relative to the rest of the field.

This newspaper's sports desk will provide full results from today's complete card in tomorrow's edition, along with continued daily coverage throughout the tournament's fifteen-day run through the Sept. 27 finale.

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SPORTS

Unbeaten Obic Seagulls Lead X League Premier's Fall Series Return

The Aug. 29-30 slate opened the new format's second half with Obic at 4-0 and the rest of the field tightly bunched behind them
By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

The X League Premier, Japan's newly restructured top American football competition, returned from its two-month summer break on Aug. 29-30 with a five-game slate that opened the season's second half, and the unbeaten Obic Seagulls, at 4-0, remain the clear pace-setter in a field this newspaper's sports desk otherwise describes as unusually tightly bunched heading into the fall stretch.

This year's restructuring, branded the X League Premier, consolidated the competition into an 11-team elite conference playing an extended, year-round, 11-round regular season, a deliberate departure from the league's traditional shorter format intended to raise both competitive intensity and public visibility for a sport that has historically operated well outside the media attention baseball, sumo and increasingly soccer command in Japan.

The season opened May 3 with a doubleheader at Tokyo Dome, headlined by a rematch of the prior Rice Bowl national championship between Obic and defending champion Panasonic Impulse, before the league completed its first four rounds and entered a two-month summer break in early July, a scheduling structure organizers say was designed to avoid direct competition with NPB's own peak summer season for both media attention and stadium availability.

Obic's perfect record through the spring portion of the season has been built on a defense that has yet to allow an opposing team to establish sustained offensive rhythm, according to league statistics this newspaper has reviewed, with the team's fall-series opener against Elecom Kobe Finies drawing particular attention given Kobe's own quarterback change: David Pindell is no longer on the fall roster, with rookie Exevier Block now handling snaps against the league's stiffest defensive test.

IBM Big Blue enters the fall series on a two-game winning streak and playing their first hometown game of the second half in Chiba City, doing so without quarterback Jaya Wright, with the team turning to a reshaped offense that has added Austrian tight end Bernhard Seikovits as a new receiving option while leaning on linebacker AJ Wentland to anchor a defense that has kept Big Blue competitive through the roster turnover.

The Fujitsu Frontiers, whose three-game winning streak was snapped by Obic just before the summer break, enter the fall series looking to reestablish the form that has made the franchise one of the league's most consistently successful programs historically, with nine Japan X Bowl titles across the team's history representing the deepest championship pedigree of any club in the current Premier format.

Defending champion Panasonic Impulse opened the spring portion of the season at 0-2 before recovering to win their final two games before the break, a turnaround the team's coaching staff credits to a deepened backfield rotation led by running back Victor Mitchell, giving the Impulse a 2-2 record heading into the fall series that leaves the defending champions with real work to do to reach the postseason field the expanded 11-round format now provides.

Elsewhere in the fall-opening slate, Fujifilm Ebina Minerva faces its own quarterback transition, with Chevin Cordero off the fall roster and Jameson Wang now leading the offense, while the All Mitsubishi Lions and SEKISUI Challengers, both off difficult spring campaigns, each need a fast start to remain in postseason contention under the new format's expanded structure.

This newspaper's sports desk considers the X League Premier's restructuring, and the genuinely competitive field it has produced through the season's first four rounds, a significant and welcome development for a sport that has historically struggled to sustain consistent public attention in Japan outside of its annual Japan X Bowl and Rice Bowl championship games.

This newspaper will provide continued weekly X League Premier coverage through the fall series and into the expanded playoff format the new structure introduces, tracking both Obic's pursuit of an unbeaten season and the tightly bunched competition for the remaining postseason positions.

Japan's newly restructured top American football competition.

University Rugby Season Opens as League One Enters Its Off-Season

With the professional league dormant until December, the Kanto university circuit carries Japan's rugby calendar through the autumn
By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Japan's university rugby season begins its autumn slate later this month, with marquee Kanto collegiate fixtures including Waseda University against Rikkyo University and Nippon Sport Science University against Meiji University scheduled for Sept. 27, carrying the country's rugby calendar through a period in which the professional Japan Rugby League One sits in its extended off-season.

League One's 2025-26 season, the fifth since the competition's rebranding from the old Top League, concluded in June with Kobe Steelers claiming their second championship, defeating Kubota Spears in the final after a season that saw Tokyo Sungoliath's Cheslin Kolbe finish as the competition's leading point-scorer and Kobe's own Brodie Retallick lead all players in tries.

The professional league's structure — running from mid-December through early June — leaves a genuine gap in Japan's rugby calendar through the summer and early autumn months, a gap the university game, with its own long, independent history predating the professional league's 2022 launch by decades, has traditionally filled for Japanese rugby followers.

Waseda University's rugby program carries particular historical weight within Japanese collegiate rugby, having produced numerous players who went on to represent Japan's national team and, in the professional era, to play in League One itself, a pipeline this newspaper's sports desk notes has helped sustain strong public interest in marquee university fixtures even as the professional league has grown around it.

This autumn's Kanto university fixture list, which this newspaper has reviewed in full, includes matches through late October among the traditional powers of Japanese collegiate rugby, with Keio, Teikyo, Tsukuba and Aoyama Gakuin among the programs featured alongside Waseda, Meiji, Rikkyo and Nippon Sport Science University in a round-robin format that has changed little in its basic structure across decades.

Japan Rugby League One itself is expected to announce specific 2026-27 season details in the coming months, according to league officials, with the competition's governing body having already confirmed partial amendments to player registration categories for the coming season, changes officials describe as aimed at providing clubs additional roster flexibility rather than any fundamental restructuring of the competition itself.

Rugby's overall position within Japan's sporting landscape remains considerably more modest than baseball, sumo or soccer, this newspaper's sports desk notes, even following the sustained boost in public interest the country's hosting of the 2019 Rugby World Cup provided, a boost that has proven durable enough to sustain a genuine professional league but has not fundamentally altered rugby's position relative to Japan's most dominant spectator sports.

This newspaper's sports desk will provide coverage of the university rugby season's marquee fixtures as they occur this autumn, alongside continued tracking of League One's own preparations for its December return, treating both levels of Japanese rugby as part of a single continuous story rather than entirely separate competitions.

University rugby's continued vitality during the professional league's off-season illustrates a pattern common across several Japanese sports this newspaper has covered this week, in which amateur and collegiate competition structures, often predating their professional counterparts by decades, continue serving distinct and valuable roles within the broader sporting ecosystem rather than being rendered obsolete by professionalization.

Japan's university rugby season begins its autumn slate later this month.

CULTURE & REGIONAL

Sumo's Tourism Boom Reshapes Ryogoku Ahead of Sold-Out Aki Basho

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

The tourism-driven demand surrounding today's Aki Basho opening has produced visible, measurable change in Ryogoku, the historic Tokyo district surrounding the Ryogoku 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 one of the best-attended tournaments in the venue's recent history.

Chanko-nabe restaurants, the hearty stew traditionally associated with sumo stables' communal diet, have become an especially visible beneficiary of the tourism surge, with several long-established Ryogoku establishments reporting that international visitors now account for a majority of their business during tournament periods, a shift restaurant owners describe as requiring genuine operational adaptation, including expanded English-language menus and, in some cases, dedicated staff specifically trained to explain the dish's cultural significance to visitors encountering it for the first time.

Local business associations describe the current boom as qualitatively different from prior periods of strong sumo attendance, attributing the difference substantially to social media-driven international awareness of the sport rather than to any single dominant Japanese-born star of the kind that historically drove comparable attendance surges in past decades.

Souvenir retailers report particularly strong demand for items connected to Aonishiki specifically, the Ukrainian-born wrestler whose rapid rise through the ranks has drawn outsized international media attention, with several shop owners describing a genuinely new customer base — international visitors with limited prior sumo knowledge specifically drawn by his story — that differs meaningfully from the sport's traditional domestic fan base.

The Japan Sumo Association's own 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 through active marketing investment of the kind other Japanese sports and cultural institutions have pursued more aggressively.

Hotel occupancy in the broader Sumida ward area has climbed noticeably ahead of today's opening, according to local tourism officials, with several properties reporting near-capacity bookings for the tournament's opening weekend specifically, a pattern consistent with the broader tourism-driven attendance boom this newspaper's culture desk has tracked throughout the current sumo season.

Some longtime sumo observers have expressed measured concern that rising ticket prices, driven partly by tourism-fueled demand, risk gradually pricing out the multi-generational domestic fan base whose loyalty carried the sport through leaner attendance years before the current boom began, a tension the Japan Sumo Association has not yet addressed through any specific domestic-fan-focused ticket allocation policy.

Autumn Shrine Festival Season Opens Across Japan This Weekend

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Shinto shrines across Japan are entering the autumn festival season this weekend, with regional matsuri celebrations marking the harvest and the changing season drawing both domestic participants maintaining generations-old local traditions and a growing number of international visitors specifically timing trips around the seasonal calendar.

This newspaper's editorial line treats these festivals, alongside shrine visits and regional craft traditions, as a standing cultural beat worth sustained coverage in their own right, distinct from the more transactional tourism-economy framing that dominates coverage of Japan's biggest single attractions, on the view that these smaller, community-rooted celebrations represent a form of cultural continuity deserving of a national newspaper's attention regardless of their tourism revenue.

Regional variation in autumn festival traditions remains substantial across Japan's prefectures, with harvest-themed celebrations, portable shrine processions, and traditional performing arts each reflecting distinct local histories that predate, in many cases, the modern prefectural boundaries within which they are now organized.

Festival organizers in several regions report continued challenges maintaining traditional participation levels amid rural depopulation, a pattern this newspaper's real estate and regional desks have covered extensively in other contexts, with some smaller communities increasingly relying on former residents returning specifically for festival weekends to sustain traditions that once drew entirely from a larger resident population.

Tokyo's own autumn festival calendar, concentrated substantially in neighborhoods with long-established shrine communities, continues drawing strong local participation even amid the capital's own demographic churn, with several shrine associations describing sustained, if evolving, community engagement despite the transient nature of much of Tokyo's contemporary residential population.

This newspaper's culture desk considers the autumn festival season a useful annual opportunity to document how Japan's traditional cultural practices are adapting, community by community, to the same demographic pressures reshaping the country's economy and politics, without treating that adaptation as either simple decline or simple resilience.

Coverage of specific regional festivals will continue throughout the autumn season in this newspaper's culture pages, part of our standing commitment to representing Japan's cultural traditions with the same sustained attention this newspaper devotes to security, economic and political coverage.

Shinto shrines across Japan are entering the autumn festival season this weekend.

Kyushu Municipalities Review Disaster Preparedness Following Kumamoto Lessons

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Municipalities across Kyushu are reviewing their own disaster preparedness plans in light of lessons from Kumamoto Prefecture's ongoing dual-track earthquake and flood recovery, according to regional disaster-management officials this newspaper consulted, with particular attention to the compounded-disaster scenario this newspaper's society desk has covered extensively this month.

Regional disaster planners describe Kumamoto's experience — a severe earthquake followed within weeks by significant flooding affecting overlapping geographic areas — as a genuinely instructive case study for a form of compounded disaster risk that most existing Japanese municipal disaster planning has not historically treated as a primary planning scenario, having instead generally assumed sequential rather than overlapping disaster response.

Several Kyushu municipalities have begun reviewing their own emergency shelter capacity and administrative surge-staffing plans specifically with an eye toward whether current resources could sustain two simultaneous disaster responses of the kind Kumamoto has now managed for ten weeks, according to prefectural disaster-management officials this newspaper consulted.

The Digital Agency's AI-assisted damage-assessment tool, deployed in Kumamoto under an extended emergency authorization this newspaper has covered in prior editions, has drawn interest from other Kyushu prefectures as a potential model for their own disaster-response technology investment, though no other prefecture has yet formally adopted a comparable system.

This newspaper's editorial line treats disaster resilience as a core component of state capacity and national order, alongside external defense and economic security, on the view that a nation's ability to protect its own population from natural disaster is as fundamental a security function as its ability to deter external military threats.

Regional economic planners note that Kyushu's own earthquake risk profile, shaped by the same fault systems that produced the July Kumamoto earthquake, means the compounded-disaster planning lessons emerging from Kumamoto's recovery carry direct relevance well beyond the specific prefecture currently managing the recovery.

This newspaper's regional desk will continue tracking disaster-preparedness policy developments across Kyushu and nationally, treating Kumamoto's ongoing recovery as an instructive case study for disaster planning well beyond the immediate humanitarian and administrative response this newspaper has covered extensively in its own right.

Regional disaster planners describe Kumamoto's experience.

SPORTS & SOCIETY

Brave Blossoms Rout USA 63-14, Book Home Final Against Fiji

Japan's national team advanced to the Pacific Nations Cup final in Tokyo with a dominant semifinal win Saturday in Osaka
By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Japan's national rugby team, the Brave Blossoms, routed the United States 63-14 in Saturday's Asahi Super Dry Pacific Nations Cup semifinal at Hanazono Rugby Stadium in Higashiosaka, Osaka, booking a home final against defending champions Fiji and extending Japan's winning streak against the Americans to five consecutive matches.

Saturday's result far exceeded the margin either side's recent form suggested was likely, according to rugby analysts this newspaper consulted, with world rankings separating the two teams by only four places — Japan at 12th, the United States at 16th — heading into a match many previewed as a genuinely open contest given the Eagles' unbeaten run through their July fixtures under head coach Scott Lawrence.

Centre Dylan Riley scored among Japan's tries in a performance head coach Eddie Jones will point to as validation of the youthful, transitioning squad he has built through this year's Pacific Nations Cup campaign, with the scoreline representing one of the most emphatic results in the modern history of the fixture between the two nations.

The match drew a capacity crowd to Hanazono Rugby Stadium under cloudy, humid conditions, with kickoff at 19:05 local time, and was played under a broader spotlight given the fixture's standing as a genuine litmus test for Japan's rugby program's health five years removed from the country's celebrated run to the quarterfinals as 2019 Rugby World Cup hosts.

Saturday's win sets up a home final in Tokyo, where Japan will face defending Pacific Nations Cup champions Fiji, contingent on Fiji's own semifinal result, at the Prince Chichibu Memorial Rugby Ground, giving Japanese rugby followers a genuine, high-stakes championship match on home soil to close out this year's tournament.

This newspaper's sports desk acknowledges that our earlier coverage this week of Japanese rugby, focused on the professional Japan Rugby League One club competition's off-season and the university circuit filling the autumn calendar, did not include this national-team result, an omission that reflected a research scope focused specifically on the domestic club league rather than the separate international Test and Pacific Nations Cup calendar the national team competes under. We are correcting that gap directly with this report and will ensure future editions cover both competition tracks together.

The Pacific Nations Cup itself has grown in stature as a genuine annual championship since its most recent restructuring, drawing Japan, the United States, Canada, Fiji, Samoa and Tonga into a format culminating in a knockout final, distinct from the historically less competitive incarnations of Pacific rugby competition that preceded the current structure.

Japan's rugby program has invested heavily in youth development and squad transition since the 2019 World Cup high-water mark, with Saturday's dominant performance offering genuine evidence that head coach Eddie Jones's rebuilding project, built substantially around less experienced players than the World Cup-era squad, is producing results at the international level rather than merely accumulating developmental experience without matching on-field success.

American rugby's own development remains a genuine growth story despite Saturday's lopsided result, with the United States program continuing to build depth and international competitiveness that, on the balance of this year's earlier fixtures, suggested a considerably closer contest than Saturday's final score ultimately produced.

This newspaper's sports desk will provide full coverage of the Pacific Nations Cup final once Fiji's own semifinal result confirms Japan's opponent, treating the tournament's conclusion as a significant sporting event deserving coverage comparable to the domestic sumo, baseball and other competitions this newspaper has covered extensively this week.

Ticket demand for the Tokyo final is expected to be strong, according to Japan Rugby Football Union officials, building on the sustained public interest in national team rugby this newspaper's sports desk notes has remained more durable than some skeptics predicted in the years following the 2019 World Cup's conclusion.

Japan's Autumn Leaf Season Begins in Hokkaido This Week, Peak Elsewhere Weeks Away

The Japan Meteorological Corporation's first 2026 forecast, released Sept. 2, predicts a slightly later season nationwide after another long, hot summer
By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Japan's autumn foliage season, known as koyo, is beginning this week in Hokkaido's high-elevation Daisetsuzan National Park, where colors typically peak between Sept. 15 and 25, marking the traditional first frontier of a color change that will progress steadily southward over the following ten weeks according to the Japan Meteorological Corporation's first 2026 forecast, released Sept. 2.

The JMC, considered the most authoritative source for foliage timing predictions, has estimated peak viewing dates for red maple and yellow ginkgo leaves at approximately 700 locations nationwide, from Hokkaido to Kagoshima, along with altitude-specific projections for roughly 3,000 mountains, with a second, more precise forecast update expected in early October as the season's actual progression becomes clearer.

This year's forecast points to a slightly later season than average across most of the country, a pattern the JMC attributes to another long, hot summer whose lingering warmth has delayed the temperature drop that triggers the color-changing process, with Tokyo's own forecast now pointing to yellow leaves peaking around Nov. 26 and red leaves around Nov. 29, several days behind the historical average.

The koyo front's south-and-downward progression runs opposite to spring's famous cherry blossom front, which moves north as temperatures rise; autumn color change instead follows falling temperatures southward and downward in elevation, beginning in Hokkaido's mountains in mid-September and not reaching Kyushu until early December, a two-and-a-half-month span that gives different regions of Japan dramatically different optimal visiting windows.

Among the country's most celebrated viewing destinations, Kyoto, Nikko, Hakone and the Japanese Alps are expected to reach peak color in the traditional late-October-to-mid-November window, according to the current forecast, with Mount Hiei specifically, straddling the Kyoto-Shiga prefectural border, offering panoramic views combining red maple foliage with Lake Biwa, Japan's largest lake, from an observation point reachable by ropeway from Hieizan Sakamoto Station.

Tokyo's own koyo season, while less internationally celebrated than Kyoto's temple-framed foliage, offers numerous accessible viewing locations within the capital itself, with Mount Mitake, roughly two hours from central Tokyo by train, providing a popular hiking-based alternative to the city's more crowded park-based viewing spots for visitors willing to travel slightly further for a quieter experience.

Nikko, roughly two hours north of Tokyo by rail and already a UNESCO World Heritage destination for its shrine and temple complexes, is expected to see Lake Chuzenji's surrounding foliage peak in late November, according to current forecasts, offering visitors a combination of natural scenery and historic architecture that has made the destination one of the most consistently popular koyo viewing locations for both domestic and international travelers.

This newspaper's society desk notes the important cultural distinction between koyo, the physical phenomenon of changing leaf color, and momijigari, the specific cultural tradition of deliberately traveling to view and appreciate the changing leaves, a practice with documented roots extending back to Japan's Heian period between the eighth and twelfth centuries, underscoring how deeply embedded seasonal leaf-viewing remains in Japanese cultural practice more than a millennium after its earliest recorded origins.

Domestic and inbound tourism operators are already reporting strong advance interest in autumn foliage travel packages, according to travel industry sources this newspaper consulted, a demand pattern consistent with the broader tourism strength this newspaper's culture desk has documented across sumo, seasonal festivals and other cultural draws throughout this year's later summer and early autumn period.

This newspaper's society desk will provide continued koyo coverage as the JMC's early-October updated forecast refines the specific peak-viewing windows for major destinations, helping readers plan travel around what remains one of Japan's most anticipated annual natural spectacles alongside spring's cherry blossom season.

Regional transportation and accommodation providers in popular foliage destinations typically see their heaviest annual demand during peak koyo weeks, according to tourism officials, with early booking strongly recommended for the most celebrated locations including Kyoto's temple gardens and Nikko's Lake Chuzenji area, both of which have historically sold out accommodation well in advance of their respective peak weekends.

We are correcting that gap directly with this report and will ensure future editions cover both competition tracks together.

SOCIETY

Rural Municipalities Consolidate Public Services as Population Decline Accelerates

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Rural municipalities across Japan continue consolidating public services, including school districts, medical clinics and administrative offices, as population decline accelerates beyond what many regional planning documents anticipated even five years ago, according to local government officials this newspaper consulted, adding a further concrete dimension to the demographic pressures running through this newspaper's coverage of agriculture, housing and labor markets this week.

School consolidation has emerged as one of the most visible and emotionally fraught dimensions of this broader trend, with several rural prefectures closing or merging elementary schools that in some cases have served their communities for over a century, decisions local officials describe as financially unavoidable given enrollment numbers that no longer support independent school operation in the smallest communities.

Medical service consolidation carries its own distinct urgency, given Japan's aging population's disproportionate healthcare needs, with several rural municipalities this newspaper consulted describing mobile clinic services and telemedicine partnerships as increasingly necessary stopgaps for communities that can no longer support a permanently staffed local clinic.

This newspaper's editorial line treats sustained rural public service provision as a genuine component of national social cohesion worth serious policy attention, distinct from the more narrowly economic framing that dominates much coverage of rural depopulation, on the view that abandoning rural communities to service consolidation without adequate transitional support risks a more serious erosion of national social fabric than the immediate fiscal savings justify.

Local governments have pursued varying strategies to manage the transition, from consolidated administrative "hub" municipalities serving several surrounding communities to more radical proposals for organized relocation assistance encouraging residents of the most severely depopulating areas to move to more sustainable regional centers, proposals that remain politically sensitive given the cultural and historical attachment many residents feel toward ancestral communities.

This newspaper's regional desk has covered the akiya vacant-housing crisis, agricultural bankruptcy trends and now public-service consolidation as three distinct but deeply interconnected dimensions of the same underlying demographic transformation, a transformation this newspaper considers among the most significant slow-moving stories in contemporary Japan regardless of how much daily news attention any single dimension of it receives in a given week.

Central government transfer payments to rural municipalities have increased in recent budget cycles specifically to help offset service consolidation costs, according to Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications officials this newspaper consulted, though local officials describe the increases as insufficient to fully offset the compounding fiscal pressure of a shrinking tax base combined with an aging population's disproportionate service needs.

Tsukimi Moon-Viewing Festival Traditions Continue Amid Modern Adaptations

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Tsukimi, the traditional Japanese autumn moon-viewing festival observed around the harvest moon, continues drawing both traditional observance and modern commercial adaptation this September, with the practice's ancient roots in agricultural harvest celebration persisting alongside contemporary expressions ranging from seasonal food products to commercial promotional tie-ins.

The festival's traditional observance centers on displaying seasonal offerings, including tsukimi dango rice dumplings and susuki pampas grass, while viewing the full moon from an unobstructed vantage point, a practice with documented roots extending back over a thousand years to aristocratic moon-viewing parties during the Heian period, predating even the momijigari autumn leaf-viewing tradition this newspaper's society pages cover elsewhere in today's edition.

Modern commercial adaptations of the tsukimi tradition have proliferated substantially in recent decades, with seasonal tsukimi-themed products, including specially prepared foods featuring egg yolks styled to resemble the full moon, becoming a recognizable seasonal marketing category across Japanese convenience stores and restaurants each autumn.

This newspaper's culture desk considers the tsukimi tradition's continued vitality, even in heavily commercialized modern form, a useful counterpoint to concerns this newspaper's other coverage has raised about traditional Japanese cultural practices facing generational decline, illustrating how some traditions successfully adapt to contemporary commercial culture without entirely losing their original observational core.

Regional variations in tsukimi observance persist across Japan, with some communities maintaining more elaborate traditional ceremonies involving shrine visits and formal seasonal poetry recitation, while urban observance has generally simplified toward the more accessible dango-and-viewing format most contemporary Japanese households practice, if they observe the tradition at all beyond casual awareness of its seasonal products.

This newspaper's culture desk will continue documenting Japan's full calendar of traditional seasonal observances throughout the year, treating festivals like tsukimi, alongside the shrine festivals and koyo leaf-viewing traditions covered elsewhere in this edition, as a standing beat worthy of the same sustained attention this newspaper devotes to security, economic and political coverage.

Astronomical observatories and planetariums across Japan have reported increased public interest in moon-viewing events timed to coincide with the traditional tsukimi period, according to facility operators this newspaper consulted, suggesting the tradition continues attracting genuine public engagement beyond its commercial food-product manifestations.

The festival's traditional observance centers on displaying seasonal offerings.

Japan Monitors Western Pacific as Typhoon Season Continues Above-Average Pace

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Japanese meteorological officials continue monitoring the western Pacific for tropical development as this year's typhoon season maintains an above-average pace, according to Japan Meteorological Agency officials this newspaper consulted, even as no system currently poses a near-term threat to Japan, consistent with this edition's own weather forecast page.

This year's elevated typhoon activity follows a summer that already produced the severe rain event affecting Kumamoto Prefecture this newspaper has covered extensively, with disaster-preparedness officials describing sustained vigilance through the remainder of the season as essential given how directly a single additional severe storm could compound the region's already-strained dual-track earthquake and flood recovery.

National and prefectural disaster-response agencies have maintained elevated readiness postures throughout the season, according to Cabinet Office disaster management officials, with the Digital Agency's AI-assisted damage-assessment tools, deployed in Kumamoto under extended emergency authorization, representing one of several technological adaptations this newspaper's coverage has tracked as part of Japan's evolving disaster-response capability.

This newspaper's editorial line treats sustained typhoon and broader natural disaster preparedness as a core component of state capacity and national order, a framing this newspaper applies consistently across its coverage of external defense threats and domestic disaster response alike, on the view that a nation's ability to protect its population from both external aggression and natural disaster represents the same fundamental sovereign obligation.

Regional disaster preparedness reviews prompted by Kumamoto's own dual-disaster experience, covered elsewhere in this newspaper's regional pages today, continue extending to other prefectures assessing their own capacity to manage compounded or overlapping disaster scenarios rather than the more traditional single-disaster response model most existing planning has assumed.

This newspaper's society desk will continue providing typhoon season coverage throughout the remainder of the season, which historically extends into October and occasionally November, treating any developing system with the same sustained attention this newspaper has applied to Kumamoto's recovery and other disaster-related coverage this year.

National and prefectural disaster-response agencies have maintained elevated readiness postures throughout the season.



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NEWS IN BRIEF

North Korea launches projectile salvo

North Korea fired an unidentified projectile salvo toward the Sea of Japan Saturday, shortly after the conclusion of joint US-South Korea-Japan military drills, according to Kyodo News. No damage to Japanese territory or shipping was reported.

Volcanic alert raised for Mt. Tokachi

The Japan Meteorological Agency raised its alert level for Hokkaido's Mount Tokachi to Level 3, restricting entry, citing increased seismic activity. Local authorities have closed hiking trails within the restricted zone.

Actor Reo Morimoto dies at 83

Veteran actor and narrator Reo Morimoto has died at 83, according to Japanese media reports, closing a decades-long career in film, television and narration work.

Marriage intentions fall below 80%

The share of unmarried Japanese who say they intend to marry has fallen below 80% for both men and women for the first time on record, a government survey reported by Jiji Press found.

Kore-eda film wins three Venice prizes

Director Hirokazu Kore-eda's "Look Back" won three independent prizes at the Venice Film Festival, extending the director's sustained international recognition.

Ohtani placed on 15-day injured list

Shohei Ohtani has been placed on Major League Baseball's 15-day injured list with a right bicep issue, according to Kyodo News, a development this newspaper's sports desk will monitor closely.

ABOUT THE JAPAN MORNING POST

The Japan Morning Post was founded in 1887 as a small English-language sheet serving Tokyo's foreign business community, publishing shipping notices and treaty-port commercial news alongside translated dispatches from the domestic Japanese press.

The paper closed during the difficult years surrounding the Pacific War and was relaunched under its current ownership structure in the postwar period, rebuilding its readership around the same core mission: giving English-language readers, in Japan and abroad, serious, sourced coverage of Japanese politics, security, business and culture.

Today's edition is produced under WPM Productions, with editorial control resting with the Managing Editor rather than the ownership group, a separation this newspaper's masthead states explicitly and enforces through the sourcing and disclosure practices detailed below.

The Japan Morning Post is distributed in print across the greater Tokyo metropolitan area and nationally through digital and PDF subscription, with archived editions available to subscribers through the newspaper's own digital archive dating to the current ownership's relaunch.

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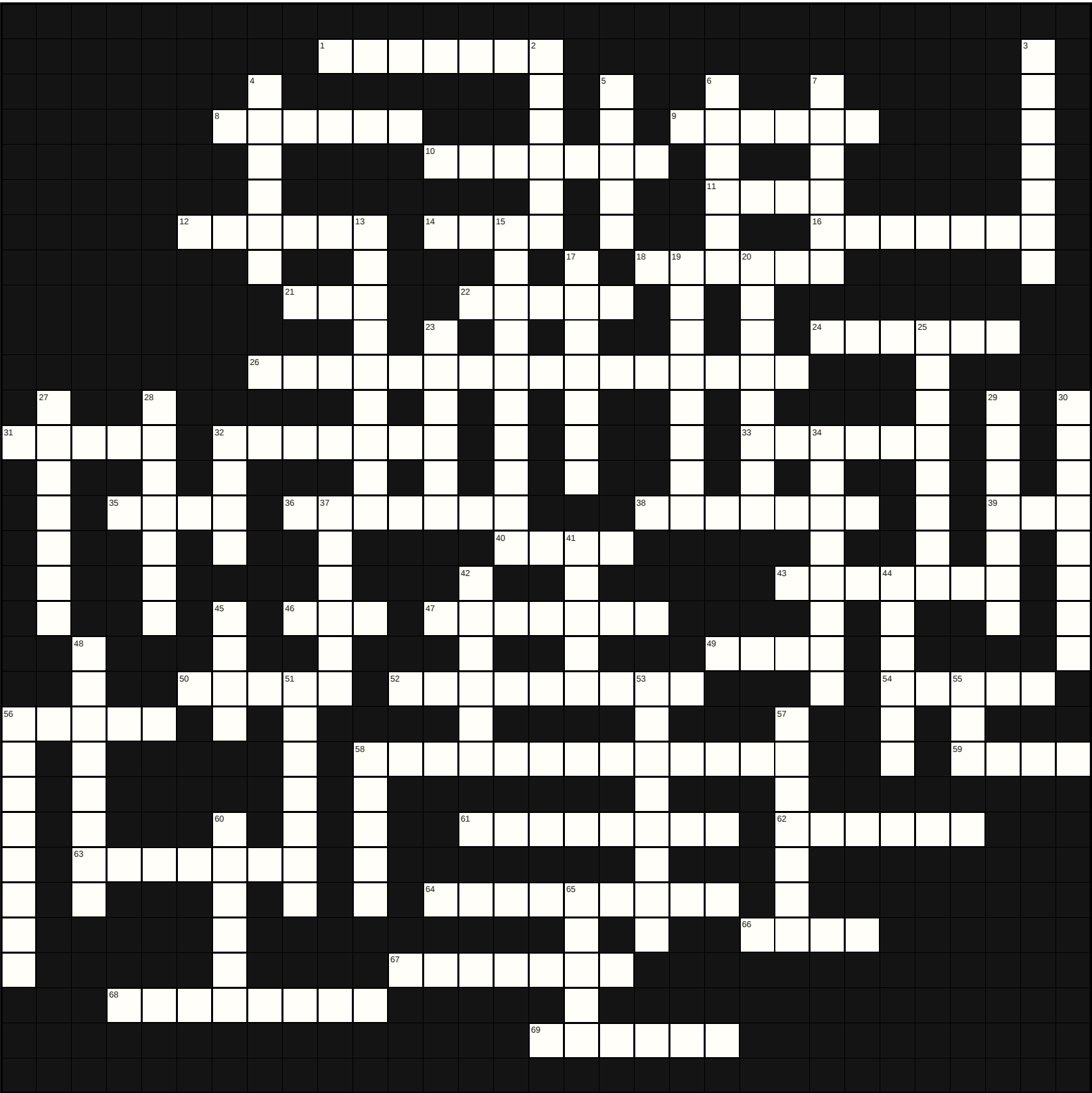
The Japan Morning Post is edited and produced independently of WPM Productions' ownership. News reporting and editorial opinion are kept separate: articles appearing under the Editorial & Opinion banner reflect the newspaper's institutional view or that of a named columnist; all other reporting is written to be free of the writer's personal opinion.

Sourcing: this newspaper attributes information to named officials, published data and identified organizations wherever possible, and uses "people familiar with the matter" only when a source has requested anonymity for a specific, stated reason. We do not use anonymous sourcing for editorial convenience.

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 — 72 Words



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

ACROSS

1. Chip venture building a Hokkaido fab (7)
8. Miniature potted tree (6)
9. Self-governing island central to regional contingency planning (6)
10. Giants, closing the gap on the Central League lead (7)
11. Helicopter carrier modified for F-35B operations (4)
12. Tiered ceremonial tower (6)
14. Staple crop whose farmers face record bankruptcies (4)
16. Defense minister overseeing the strategic documents revision (7)
18. Dodgers star in a hitting-only role this season (6)
21. Currency near a seven-month high (3)
22. Seventeen-syllable poem (5)
24. Strait vital to oil shipments (6)
26. Strategic arc from Japan through Taiwan (16)
31. Russian president (5)
32. Hokkaido city on today's weather map (7)
33. Tokyo's benchmark stock index (6)
35. United States Forces Japan, abbreviated (4)
36. Hokkaido area transformed by chip investment (7)
38. Marine Corps air station facing relocation (7)
39. Chinese military, abbreviated (3)
40. What both the Fed and BOJ may raise this week (4)
43. Japan's ceremonial head of state (7)
46. Central bank expected to raise rates this week (3)
47. Feudal Japanese warrior (7)
49. Japan's national legislature (4)
50. Grand sumo tournament, opening today (5)
52. Tokyo's sumo arena, sold out today (9)
54. Japanese hot spring (5)
56. Return on a bond, near a multi-decade high (5)
58. Doctrine allowing Japan to hit enemy missile sites (13)
59. Stealth fighter operating from Japanese carriers (4)
61. Japan's prime minister (8)
62. Striking martial art (6)
63. Art of paper folding (7)
64. Officeholder seeking re-election (9)
66. Conflict region entering its eighth month (4)
67. Body of ministers Takaichi will soon reshuffle (7)
68. Hawks nearing the Pacific League pennant (8)
69. Classical Japanese drama form (6)

DOWN

2. Sacred Shinto site (6)
3. Ocean bordering Japan's east coast (7)
4. Japan's foreign minister (6)
5. New chair of the US Federal Reserve (5)
6. Where stocks are traded (6)
7. Incumbent Okinawa governor seeking a third term (6)
13. Ukrainian-born sumo champion defending his title today (9)
15. Candidate seeking to unseat an incumbent (10)
17. Prefecture voting for governor today (7)
19. The other reigning yokozuna (8)
20. US-Japan security partnership (8)
23. Traditional Japanese robe (6)
25. Cabinet-level official (8)
27. Share of eligible voters who cast a ballot (7)
28. One of two reigning yokozuna (7)
29. Hokkaido's largest city (7)
30. Finance minister overseeing currency policy (8)
32. Genta ____, LDP-backed Okinawa challenger (4)
34. Prefecture recovering from earthquake and floods (8)
37. Site of the Futenma relocation project (6)
41. Gate marking a Shinto shrine (5)
42. Japan's closely watched business sentiment survey (6)
44. Goods sent abroad, squeezed by the yen (6)
45. Grouping of Japan, US, Australia and India (4)
48. Democratic vote, as in Okinawa, today (8)
51. Tigers, narrowly leading the Central League (7)
53. Constitutional clause renouncing force (8)
55. Japan's military, abbreviated (3)
56. Sumo's highest rank (8)
57. Disputed islands administered by Japan (7)
58. Rice dish tracked as a household cost barometer (5)
60. Voting slip (6)
65. Yugo ____, SoftBank's unbeaten pitcher (5)

Asian Games Open in Aichi-Nagoya Monday

Japan enters the region's largest multi-sport event with medal ambitions across basketball, swimming and athletics

The Asian Games open Monday, Sept. 14, in Aichi and Nagoya, with competition in several sports beginning ahead of the formal opening ceremony, a scheduling pattern common to the Games given the sheer number of events the roughly two-week competition must accommodate across dozens of sports.

Japan's basketball team opens group play against Indonesia, one of several early-round fixtures this newspaper's sports desk will cover as part of the Games' opening days, with the national federation describing this year's squad as a genuine medal contender in a competition China has historically dominated.

The Japan Sport Council has unveiled a dedicated athlete support base for the Games, providing recovery, nutrition and logistical services intended to give Japanese competitors an edge across the roughly overlapping venues spread across the host region.

This year's Games mark Japan's first hosting role since the 1994 Hiroshima Games, a three-decade gap organizers have used to argue for renewed domestic investment in the multi-sport event's infrastructure and broadcast presentation specifically for this edition.

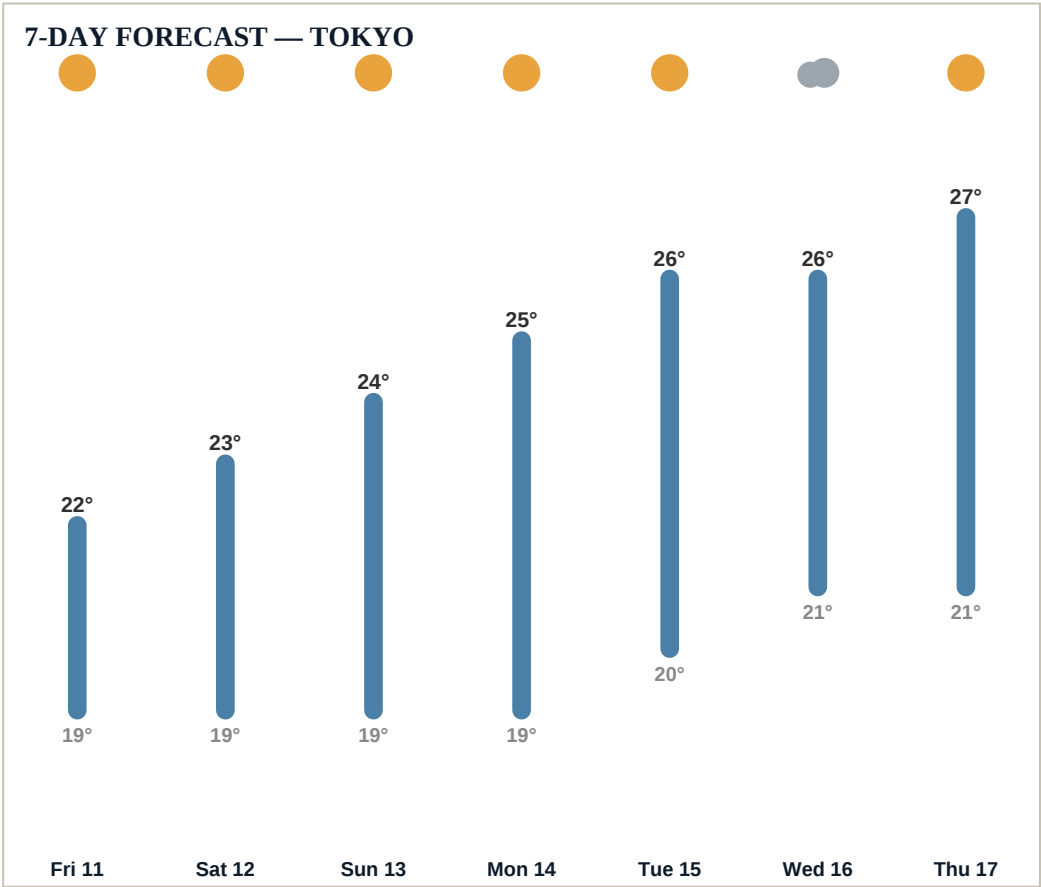
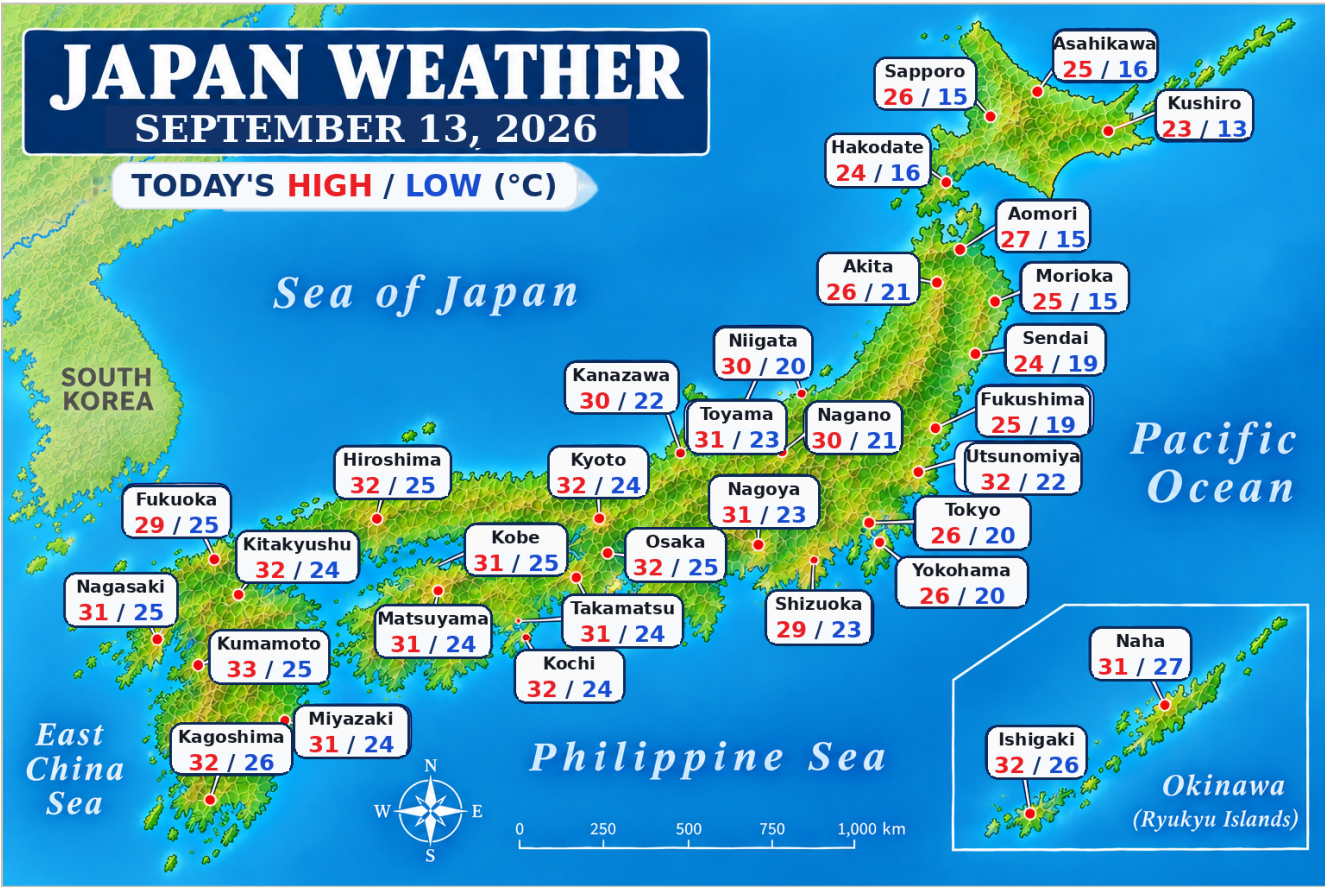
China enters as the overwhelming favorite in the overall medal count, consistent with the country's dominance of recent editions, though Japanese officials have set specific, sport-by-sport medal targets they consider realistic in swimming, judo, gymnastics and athletics.

This newspaper's sports desk will provide continuing coverage throughout the Games' roughly two-week run, tracking Japanese medal performances alongside the broader regional sporting context the competition provides.

WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

22°C

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



TOKYO METROPOLITAN AREA — Sunday, September 13, 2026

Morning: Mild, 20°C, with clear skies favoring both today's Okinawa election turnout and the Aki Basho's opening crowds. Sunrise 5:21 a.m.

Afternoon: Warm, high near 26°C, comfortable conditions for outdoor activity across the capital.

Evening: Clear, cooling toward 22°C by 9 p.m. Sunset 5:52 p.m. Favorable conditions continue into the evening for vote counting and the Kokugikan's departing crowds alike.

Overnight: Clear, low near 20°C.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Today's national weather map shows a broad return to late-summer warmth across nearly the entire country, with Kanto's high of 26°C in Tokyo joined by solidly hot conditions from Kansai through Kyushu, where highs in the low-to-mid 30s are common. Kumamoto reaches 33°C, Osaka and Kyoto both 32°C, and Naha in Okinawa 31°C — conditions election officials describe as favorable for turnout across the prefecture voting today, removing weather as a variable in a race decided by an unusually narrow margin.

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 26/15, Asahikawa 25/16, Kushiro 23/13, Hakodate 24/16: mild and consistent across the island.

Tohoku — Aomori 27/15, Morioka 25/15, Akita 26/21, Sendai 24/19, Fukushima 25/19: a warm day across the region, with Akita's overnight low notably mild for mid-September.

Chubu & Hokuriku — Niigata 30/20, Toyama 31/23, Kanazawa 30/22, Nagano 30/21, Nagoya 31/23: consistently warm, with Toyama the region's high for the day.

Kanto — Utsunomiya 32/22, Tokyo 26/20, Yokohama 26/20, Shizuoka 29/23: Utsunomiya running well above the capital today, a reminder of how much microclimate variation the Kanto plain produces even on a broadly warm day.

Kansai — Kyoto 32/24, Kobe 31/25, Osaka 32/25: firmly in late-summer heat.

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

Chugoku & Kyushu — Hiroshima 32/25, Kitakyushu 32/24, Fukuoka 29/25, Nagasaki 31/25, Kumamoto 33/25, Miyazaki 31/24, Kagoshima 32/26: Kumamoto the warmest reading on the main islands, with recovery work in the earthquake- and rain-affected areas continuing under clear skies.

Okinawa — Naha 31/27, Ishigaki 32/26: warm, humid and dry — the conditions election administrators had hoped for heading into today's vote, with no weather-related disruption expected at any of the prefecture's polling stations.

SEVEN-DAY EXTENDED FORECAST FOR TOKYO

Monday, Sept. 14: High 27°C, low 20°C. Mostly sunny.

Tuesday, Sept. 15: High 27°C, low 21°C. Mostly sunny. US Federal Reserve's two-day policy meeting begins today.

Wednesday, Sept. 16: High 28°C, low 21°C. Partly cloudy. Bank of Japan's two-day policy meeting begins today.

Thursday, Sept. 17: High 28°C, low 22°C. Mostly sunny. Federal Reserve policy decision expected today.

Friday, Sept. 18: High 27°C, low 21°C. Partly cloudy. Bank of Japan policy decision expected today.

Saturday, Sept. 19: High 27°C, low 21°C. Mostly sunny.

Sunday, Sept. 20: High 26°C, low 20°C. Partly cloudy.

EXTENDED OUTLOOK (September 14-20)

Warm, late-summer conditions are expected to persist through the coming week across most of the country, with only gradual cooling anticipated as the autumnal equinox approaches later this month. 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 the Aki Basho's full fifteen-day run and for the Diet's expected extraordinary session convening once the Cabinet reshuffle concludes.

TYPHOON SEASON CONTEXT

This year's western Pacific typhoon season has produced an above-average number of named storms through mid-September, according to Japan Meteorological Agency data, though the specific systems that have formed have largely tracked away from the Japanese archipelago rather than making direct landfall. Disaster-preparedness officials caution that the season's statistical peak typically falls in the weeks immediately ahead, meaning today's clear skies should not be read as evidence the season's risk has passed. Kumamoto Prefecture's ongoing dual-track earthquake and flood recovery, covered elsewhere in this edition, makes continued typhoon vigilance particularly consequential for that specific region, where administrative and shelter capacity remains stretched by the existing recovery effort.

AUTUMN TRANSITION NOTE

Today's national weather map, showing late-summer heat persisting from Kansai through Kyushu even as Hokkaido settles into a milder autumn pattern, illustrates the country's typically gradual, south-to-north-delayed transition into autumn proper. This same north-to-south lag governs the koyo autumn foliage season this newspaper's society pages examine today, with color change already underway in Hokkaido's highest elevations while the rest of the country remains, for now, still firmly in late-summer conditions.

ALMANAC

Today's sunrise: 5:21 a.m. Today's sunset: 5:52 p.m. Day length: 12 hours, 31 minutes, continuing to shorten by roughly two minutes daily as the autumnal equinox approaches later this month. Moon phase: Waxing crescent. Tokyo Bay tide times: high tide 10:12 a.m. and 10:41 p.m.; low tide 4:08 p.m. Barometric pressure: 1015 hPa and steady.

CLASSIFIEDS & NOTICES

CLASSIFIEDS, LEGAL NOTICES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

TANAKA & ASSOCIATES: Corporate tax advisory for foreign-affiliated firms operating in Japan. inquiries@tanaka-tax.jp

OTEMACHI TRANSLATION BUREAU: Certified legal and financial document translation, Japanese-English-Mandarin. orders@otemachitranslation.jp

MERIDIAN RELOCATION SERVICES: Full-service relocation support for incoming executives and families. info@meridianrelo.jp

KANDA ACCOUNTING GROUP: Bookkeeping, payroll and statutory filing for small and mid-sized foreign subsidiaries. contact@kandaaccounting.jp

MARUNOUCHI INTERNATIONAL LAW PARTNERS: Cross-border commercial contracts and regulatory compliance. info@marunouchilaw.jp

LEGAL & PUBLIC NOTICES

ELECTION NOTICE: Okinawa Prefecture polling stations open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. today. Results expected this evening.

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

ADDITIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

DEFENSE MINISTER ON NUCLEAR SUBMARINES: Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said this week that Japan is not ruling out nuclear-powered submarines as a future option for the Maritime Self-Defense Force, according to Japan Times reporting, a notable statement given Japan's historical reliance on conventionally powered submarines and the political sensitivity nuclear propulsion carries domestically.

CHINA THREAT SHAPES OKINAWA MOOD: Japan Times reporting ahead of today's vote describes rising concern about China's military posture as a factor tempering some Okinawan voters' historical anger over the American base presence, part of the same economic-and-security-anxiety reordering this newspaper's front page examines in today's lead.

AI-GENERATED SMEAR POSTS TARGET CANDIDATES: Asahi Shimbun has reported AI-generated disinformation posts targeting candidates ahead of today's Okinawa election, a development this newspaper's editorial line considers directly relevant to the election-law equal-space and anti-disinformation standards this newspaper holds itself to in campaign coverage.

CYBERATTACK EDITORIAL: The Japan News has published an editorial calling for measures to prevent recurrence of a recent cyberattack on a government network, underscoring the cybersecurity dimension of state capacity this newspaper's editorial line treats as inseparable from more traditional defense readiness.

ASDF TRAINS IN INDIA: Japan Air Self-Defense Force fighters are conducting joint training in India, according to Asahi Shimbun, part of the broader pattern of expanding defense cooperation with Quad partners this newspaper's defense desk has covered throughout the year.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

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MORE BUSINESS NOTES

FUJITSU TO EXPORT AI CHIPS: Fujitsu plans to export AI chips built on domestic supercomputer technology to the United States and other Asian markets, according to Nikkei Asia, adding a further data point to the semiconductor and AI-hardware competitiveness story this newspaper's business and technology desks have covered extensively.

SUMITOMO METAL OPENS BATTERY RECYCLING PLANT: Sumitomo Metal Mining has launched Japan's first dedicated electric-vehicle battery recycling plant, according to Nikkei Asia, a development relevant to both the EV supply chain and the critical-minerals security this newspaper's business coverage has tracked.

NIPPON STEEL'S \$2 BILLION BET: Nippon Steel is making a \$2 billion investment in Japan's domestic automotive steel market, according to Nikkei Asia, a sizable commitment this newspaper's business desk reads as a vote of confidence in continued domestic auto production capacity.

AUTOMAKERS TO REVAMP FACTORY CALENDARS: Japanese automakers plan to revamp factory work calendars starting fiscal 2027 specifically to help attract workers, according to Kyodo News, a labor-market response consistent with the demographic and workforce pressures this newspaper's business and society desks have covered extensively this year.

BONDS AND STOCKS PAUSE AS OIL RETREATS: Japanese bond and stock market selling paused as oil prices retreated modestly, according to Asahi Shimbun, offering a small measure of relief after the volatile week this newspaper's economics pages cover in detail.

POST-3/11 REACTOR NEARS COMPLETION: A nuclear reactor restart project begun after the 2011 Fukushima disaster has moved a further step toward completion, according to Asahi Shimbun, part of the incremental nuclear restart progress this newspaper's editorial page has argued deserves more political urgency.

ADDITIONAL PROPERTY LISTINGS

AZABU: Renovated 3-bedroom townhouse, 142 sq m, private garden. Reference AZ-2026-08.

CHITOSE, HOKKAIDO: New-build 2LDK near the Rapidus development corridor. Reference CTS-114.

YOKOHAMA MINATO MIRAI: Waterfront 2LDK with bay views, 88 sq m. Reference YMM-331.

SETAGAYA: Family house, 4LDK, 168 sq m, near international school. Reference STG-813.

PUBLIC NOTICES

TRANSPORT ADVISORY: Ferry and air services to Okinawa's outer islands remain on normal schedules for election day.

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

SOCIETY AND CULTURE NOTES

INVASIVE BEETLE ERADICATION: The government has adopted systematic measures to eradicate an invasive longhorn beetle species, according to Japan Times, an agricultural biosecurity measure aimed at protecting domestic tree stocks from a spreading pest.

GPS TRACKING PILOT FOR PAROLED SEX OFFENDERS: The Justice Ministry will test GPS tracking of consenting sex offenders on parole starting fiscal 2027, according to Japan Times, a measured pilot program rather than a mandatory nationwide policy at this stage.

MOUNT FUJI CLIMBING SEASON DEATH TOLL RISES: The death toll for this year's Mount Fuji summer climbing season has risen to six, according to Asahi Shimbun, prompting renewed attention to mountain safety guidance ahead of the season's close.

FOREIGN RESIDENTS DESCRIBE FEELING UNWANTED: Long-term foreign residents describe feeling increasingly unwanted under tightened residency rules, according to Asahi Shimbun reporting, a sentiment this newspaper's society desk notes sits in tension with Japan's own continued dependence on foreign labor across agriculture, construction and other sectors.

SAPPORO SNOW FESTIVAL REBRANDS: Organizers of the Sapporo Snow Festival are rebranding the event amid dwindling natural snowfall, according to SCMP, an adaptation this newspaper's culture desk reads as a small but telling illustration of how Japanese seasonal tourism traditions are adjusting to changing winter conditions.

FOOD POISONING INCIDENTS REPORTED: Twenty-eight people fell ill after stadium lunches in Kyoto in a suspected food poisoning incident, according to Kyodo News, while separately a woman in her 90s in Tokushima suffered food poisoning after eating a poisonous mushroom from her home garden, according to The Japan News.

TRADE MINISTER ON FUTURE US INVESTMENT: Japan's trade minister said future Japanese investment in the United States will focus on the power sector, including possible next-generation nuclear technology, according to Nikkei Asia, a statement this newspaper's business desk reads alongside the broader US-Japan economic security coordination covered elsewhere this week.

NARITA EXPLOSIVES-DETECTION DOGS: Nikkei Asia reports on the continued use of detection dogs to sniff out explosives at Narita Airport, a routine but essential layer of the aviation security infrastructure this newspaper's coverage of state capacity treats as worth periodic attention even absent any specific incident.

TOYOTA RELEASES BUDGET RACING KART: Toyota has released a budget-priced racing kart aimed at both children and adult hobbyists, according to Asahi Shimbun, a modest but notable consumer product move for a company whose news coverage this week has centered on currency-driven earnings pressure.

TECHNO-POP GROUP PERFUME ANNOUNCES HIATUS: Japanese techno-pop group Perfume will go on hiatus in 2026, according to Kyodo News, a significant development for fans of one of Japan's most internationally recognized electronic pop acts.

TAMIYA RELEASES FIRST NEW DINOSAUR KIT SINCE 1994: Model manufacturer Tamiya has released its first new dinosaur model kit since 1994, a Fukuiraptor, according to The Japan News, a notable event within Japan's dedicated hobbyist model-kit community.

9/11 MEMORIAL: The father of a Japanese victim of the September 11, 2001 attacks attended this year's New York memorial ceremony for what he has said will be his last time making the trip, according to The Japan News, a poignant coda to this newspaper's own extended coverage of the attacks' 25th anniversary earlier this month.