

Koja Wins Okinawa Governorship, Ending 12 Years of All-Okinawa Rule

The LDP-backed newcomer defeated Denny Tamaki by roughly 147,000 votes, becoming the first governor born after Okinawa's reversion to Japan and the first to unconditionally accept the Henoko relocation

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

Genta Koja won Okinawa's gubernatorial election Sunday, defeating two-term incumbent Denny Tamaki in a result that closes out twelve years of governance built around opposition to the American military presence and opens a new chapter for a prefecture whose politics have been organized around the base question since long before either candidate entered public life. Koja took a record 420,000 votes, according to figures reported by Ryukyu Shimpo, finishing roughly 147,000 votes ahead of Tamaki once counting concluded Sunday night.

Turnout reached 61.57%, up 3.65 points from the previous gubernatorial race, a rise both camps' own internal polling had flagged in the campaign's final days as the single most consequential variable in a contest that had narrowed sharply on public surveys. Higher turnout, it turned out, broke toward Koja rather than toward the coalition that had carried Tamaki to victory twice before.

Koja, 42, becomes the first Okinawa governor supported by the Liberal Democratic Party in twelve years and the first to take office having accepted the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to Henoko without the conditions or reservations every predecessor since the plan's inception has attached to their own position. He is also the first governor born after Okinawa's 1972 reversion to Japanese sovereignty, a generational marker several commentators flagged repeatedly through the campaign's final stretch as symbolically significant regardless of how much weight individual voters actually placed on it at the ballot box.

Tamaki, 66, struck a measured tone in his concession remarks, telling reporters he intended to reflect on the result and treat it as a lesson, while standing by the substance of his twelve years in office. "Opposing Henoko is not wrong," he said, according to accounts carried by Yomiuri Shimbun and Ryukyu Shimpo, a line that reads less like a repudiation of his own record than an argument that Sunday's outcome reflected changed circumstances rather than a changed verdict on the relocation fight itself.

The campaign's final weeks tracked a shift from base politics toward economic anxiety that polling had captured building for months, with cost-of-living pressure, wage stagnation and tourism-dependent growth displacing Henoko as the issue voters named most often when asked what would decide their vote. Koja built his candidacy squarely on that shift, pairing acceptance of the relocation with a pitch centered on diversifying an economy still leaning heavily on tourism revenue.

Sunday's result carries weight reaching well past Naha. It follows the LDP's sweep of all four of Okinawa's directly elected Lower House seats in February, and together the two results describe a prefecture whose electorate has moved further from the All-Okinawa coalition's founding premise than at any point since Takeshi Onaga first won the governorship in 2014. Whether that movement holds through the next cycle or proves specific to this particular matchup between these two particular candidates is the question political strategists in Tokyo were already turning to look at Sunday night.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's government, which had invested real organizational resources in Koja's campaign while keeping national figures largely off the ground in Okinawa itself, is expected to read the win as validation of the economic-message strategy it has leaned on since February, a reading likely to shape how the LDP approaches other prefectures carrying their own long-running local disputes ahead of next spring's unified local elections.



Genta Koja lifts a daruma doll at his campaign headquarters in Naha as supporters celebrate Sunday's win.

Koja's own agenda beyond the base question remains only loosely sketched from the campaign trail: economic diversification away from tourism dependence, continued support for the already-agreed return of American-held land south of Kadena Air Base, and a general pledge to lower the temperature of a relationship with Tokyo that reached genuine acrimony at points during Tamaki's tenure. How quickly any of that translates into governing decisions will become clearer once he is sworn in and begins staffing a prefectural government that has operated under All-Okinawa leadership for over a decade.

Six candidates appeared on Sunday's ballot in total, though the race functioned as a two-person contest from the outset, with the remaining four failing to register meaningfully in any independent survey conducted during the campaign. Absentee and early voting ran modestly ahead of the previous cycle's pace, a trend that in hindsight appears to have favored Koja rather than the higher-turnout scenarios both camps had debated in the campaign's closing days.

Reaction from Washington had not been formally issued as of Sunday night, though American officials have watched the race closely given its direct bearing on the Henoko project's political footing after years in which the relocation moved forward on legal and administrative grounds even as the sitting governor's own political mandate ran in the opposite direction. A governor who accepts the project outright removes a source of friction that has complicated the relocation's execution regardless of the courts consistently upholding the central government's authority to proceed.

Full coverage of Koja's transition, his emerging Cabinet-level appointments within the prefectural government, and reaction from Naha to Tokyo continues in the days ahead as the practical work of a change in power in Okinawa begins in earnest.

TODAY'S INDEX	
Politics	2-3
Defense	4
International	5
Economy	6
Business	7-8
Society	9-13
Sports	14-17
Culture	18
Editorial & Opinion	19-21
Staff & Masthead	22
Crossword	23
Weather	24
Classifieds	25

TODAY IN BRIEF	
• Genta Koja wins Okinawa governorship, ending 12 years of All-Okinawa rule; turnout 61.57%.	
• Chubu Electric's president and chairman both resign over Hamaoka seismic data fraud.	
• Nikkei closed Friday at 64,011.34, down 1.93%; Fed and BOJ both meet this week.	
• Massive Kan-Etsu Expressway pileup in Gunma kills two, injures roughly 26.	
• Men's volleyball beats Iran to win Asian title, books Los Angeles Olympic berth.	
• Asian Games open today in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan's first hosting since 1994.	

SUBSCRIBE	
Home delivery and digital access available.	
¥3,900/month digital; ¥6,800/month print + digital.	
www.japanmorningpost.com/subscribe	

Chubu Electric President, Chairman Resign Over Hamaoka Data Fraud

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Chubu Electric Power's president, Kingo Hayashi, and chairman, Satoru Katsuno, both stepped down Sunday following confirmation of seismic data manipulation tied to the company's stalled effort to restart its Hamaoka nuclear plant, according to reports from NHK and Yomiuri Shimbun, a leadership shakeup that lands the utility's restart ambitions in considerably deeper trouble than last week's application withdrawal alone suggested.

The resignations follow directly from the same data-integrity failure that forced Chubu Electric to abandon its Hamaoka restart applications, with the company's own internal review reportedly finding the seismic-safety data submitted to regulators had been altered in ways that went well beyond a clerical or isolated error.

Nuclear restart applications in Japan face a review process built to prevent the kind of shortcuts that preceded 2011, and a confirmed data-integrity failure at this level tends to cost utilities years of rebuilt regulatory trust rather than a single restart cycle, a dynamic that will likely shape Chubu Electric's own nuclear ambitions for the remainder of the decade regardless of who succeeds Hayashi and Katsuno.

Energy security planners will be watching the fallout closely given how directly Japan's broader nuclear restart program bears on the country's exposure to the kind of Gulf-driven oil price pressure that has weighed on markets throughout the year, a connection that makes any individual utility's compliance failure a national story rather than a company-specific one.

Chubu Electric has not named permanent successors to either post as of Sunday evening, with an interim leadership structure expected to be announced in the coming days as the company works through both the immediate governance vacuum and the longer regulatory rebuilding process the data scandal has made necessary.

Separately, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications faces its own integrity questions after Asahi Shimbun reported the ministry may have deleted chat logs documenting misconduct following a disclosure request, despite legal requirements that such records be preserved. The ministry has not issued a detailed public response to the report.

Together, the two stories land on the same day as a reminder that institutional accountability failures are not confined to any single sector, cutting across a private utility's safety-critical engineering data and a government ministry's own records-retention obligations within the space of a single news cycle.

POLITICS

Former Lawmaker Nakatani Enters Yokohama Mayoral Race

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Former House of Representatives member Kazuma Nakatani announced his candidacy for the upcoming Yokohama mayoral election, according to Asahi Shimbun, bringing national-level political experience to a municipal race that will otherwise be fought largely on infrastructure, housing and local economic development questions.

Nakatani's move from national to municipal politics follows a well-worn path in Japanese political careers, where former Diet members periodically seek mayoral office in major cities either as a genuine second act or as a stepping stone back toward national politics after building a fresh local mandate.

Yokohama, Japan's second-largest city by population, offers a mayoral platform with genuine policy weight given the city's economic significance within the greater Tokyo metropolitan region, making the race one of the more closely watched municipal contests on this year's calendar regardless of the national attention the Okinawa result has commanded.

Nakatani has not detailed a full policy platform in his initial announcement, according to available reporting, though his entry alone reshapes the field for whichever other candidates were already positioning themselves for the race.

Municipal election specialists note that name recognition from national office does not automatically translate into local support, with several prior examples of former Diet members struggling to connect with municipal-level concerns that differ meaningfully from the national policy debates that defined their earlier careers.

Four Candidates Enter Open Fukuoka Mayoral Race

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Four candidates have announced their candidacy for Fukuoka's mayoral election after the incumbent confirmed he would not seek reelection, according to Asahi Shimbun, opening a competitive race for leadership of one of Kyushu's most economically significant cities.

An open race without an incumbent creates a different campaign dynamic than a challenger contest, forcing each candidate to build independent name recognition and policy positioning from a standing start rather than campaigning for or against an established record voters already have views on.

Fukuoka's economic profile, anchored by a growing technology and startup sector alongside its traditional roles in trade and logistics with the rest of Kyushu and nearby Asian markets, gives the mayoral race genuine substantive stakes beyond the usual municipal concerns of infrastructure and public services.

None of the four candidates has yet emerged as a clear front-runner in available reporting, a open field that political observers in Kyushu describe as unusual for a mayoral race in a city of Fukuoka's size, where incumbents or clearly anointed successors more typically dominate early polling.

The incumbent's decision not to seek another term was not accompanied by a detailed public explanation in available reporting, leaving open questions about whether health, political calculation or simply a desire to step back after a long tenure drove the decision.

Campaign season in Fukuoka is expected to intensify in the weeks ahead as all four candidates work to distinguish themselves in a field where no one enters with a built-in advantage.

New Council Members Decided in Wakayama City By-Election

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Wakayama City decided new council members in a by-election held over the weekend, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, filling seats that had come open through the ordinary turnover of municipal politics rather than through any single dramatic resignation or scandal.

By-elections of this kind rarely draw the sustained media attention a mayoral or gubernatorial race commands, but they carry genuine practical weight for local governance, determining who sits on the council that shapes municipal budget and policy decisions between larger, more closely watched election cycles.

Wakayama's own political landscape has remained relatively stable in recent years compared to some other regional Japanese cities facing more acute demographic or economic pressure, a stability reflected in the comparatively low-profile nature of this particular by-election.

Turnout figures for the by-election were not prominently featured in available reporting, consistent with the generally lower public engagement by-elections of this scale typically draw relative to prefectural or national contests.

The newly decided council members will take their seats in time to participate in upcoming budget and policy deliberations, continuing the ordinary work of municipal governance that proceeds regardless of how much national attention any individual local race receives.

Yokoi Elected Mayor of Oharu, Aichi, After Predecessor's Resignation

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Yokoi was elected mayor of Oharu in Aichi Prefecture following the previous mayor's resignation, according to Sankei News, an off-cycle race triggered by a mid-term departure rather than the ordinary electoral calendar most municipal leadership transitions follow.

Resignation-triggered mayoral races tend to compress the usual campaign timeline considerably, giving candidates less time to build organizational support and name recognition than a scheduled election cycle typically allows.

The circumstances behind the previous mayor's resignation were not detailed extensively in available reporting, leaving open whether personal, political or health-related factors drove the mid-term departure that necessitated Sunday's vote.

Oharu sits within Aichi Prefecture's broader economic orbit, a region whose attention this week is also focused on Nagoya's hosting of the Asian Games, giving the town's own leadership transition a modest local news dimension beyond the immediate municipal significance of the result itself.

POLITICS & ANALYSIS

Internal Affairs Ministry Faces Records-Deletion Questions

The ministry may have removed misconduct-related chat logs despite legal preservation requirements, according to Asahi Shimbun
By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications may have deleted chat logs documenting internal misconduct after receiving a formal disclosure request, according to Asahi Shimbun, a potential violation of legal requirements that such records be preserved once a disclosure request has been filed.

Japanese public records law generally requires government bodies to preserve documents, including electronic communications, once they become subject to a disclosure request, precisely to prevent the kind of after-the-fact deletion that would defeat the purpose of public accountability mechanisms.

The ministry has not issued a detailed public response addressing the specific allegation, leaving unanswered questions about who authorized any deletion, when it allegedly occurred relative to the disclosure request's filing, and what the original chat logs actually documented regarding the underlying misconduct.

Records-preservation violations of this kind, when confirmed, typically trigger their own separate accountability process distinct from whatever the original misconduct involved, since destroying documents subject to a legitimate disclosure request represents a distinct legal and institutional failure regardless of how serious the underlying conduct being investigated turns out to be.

Government transparency advocates are likely to view the allegation as part of a broader, recurring pattern in which Japanese ministries have faced periodic criticism over records management and disclosure compliance, a pattern that has prompted incremental legal reforms over the years without fully resolving underlying institutional incentives to avoid embarrassing disclosures.

The specific nature of the underlying misconduct the deleted chat logs allegedly documented has not been detailed in available reporting, meaning the full scope of what the ministry may be trying to keep from public view remains unclear pending further reporting or an official response.

Opposition lawmakers are likely to press the ministry for answers once the Diet's own schedule allows, given how directly a confirmed records-deletion violation would touch on broader questions of government accountability that tend to draw sustained cross-party attention regardless of which specific ministry is involved.

ANALYSIS: What Actually Changed in Okinawa

Turnout, not persuasion, may have been the real story of Sunday's result
By William | Senior Political Analyst

Twelve years of All-Okinawa governance ended Sunday on a turnout swing of 3.65 points, a number small enough on its face to look almost incidental against the scale of what it produced: a 147,000-vote margin, a record raw total for the winning side, and the first LDP-backed governor in the prefecture since 2014. Numbers that modest rarely explain outcomes that decisive on their own, which means the honest first question about Sunday's result is not who persuaded whom, but who actually showed up.

Genta Koja's campaign built its closing message around economic anxiety rather than the base question that has defined every Okinawa gubernatorial race for a generation, and exit polling through the campaign's final weeks consistently found cost-of-living concerns outpolling Henoko as voters' stated top issue. That reordering did not happen Sunday. It had been building since at least February's Lower House sweep. What Sunday's result adds is confirmation that the reordering translated into an actual governing majority rather than remaining confined to national-level voting patterns that might not carry down to prefectural politics.

Denny Tamaki's own framing in defeat, insisting that opposing Henoko was not wrong even as he lost decisively to a candidate who accepts it outright, points toward the specific interpretive fight likely to follow this result for months: was Sunday a rejection of the All-Okinawa movement's substantive position on the base relocation, or simply a verdict that the movement's twelve-year custodianship of the governorship had run its course on entirely separate grounds, cost of living chief among them, that happened to coincide with a candidate willing to set the base fight aside.

Generational framing deserves a place in this accounting too, even if its practical electoral weight is harder to isolate than turnout or issue polling. Koja's status as the first governor born after reversion carried real symbolic charge through the campaign's coverage, offering a tidy narrative of a prefecture moving past its own postwar political founding generation. Whether that framing moved actual votes, as opposed to simply describing an outcome turnout and economic anxiety had already produced, is the kind of question political scientists will be arguing over for considerably longer than this week's news cycle allows.

The practical test of Sunday's result starts almost immediately. Koja inherits a prefectural government staffed and structured around twelve years of All-Okinawa priorities, and translating an election victory into an actually functioning administration aligned with his own agenda will require personnel decisions, budget reallocations and a working relationship with a prefectural assembly whose own composition was not decided Sunday and may not align cleanly with the new governor's mandate.

Tokyo will be watching that transition closely, not only for what it means for Henoko's continued construction timeline but for what it signals about how durable the economic-anxiety realignment proves once actual governance, rather than a single campaign, tests whether Koja's coalition holds together under the pressure of real policy tradeoffs.

ANALYSIS: A Data Scandal That Will Outlast Two Resignations

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Two resignations rarely close out a nuclear safety data scandal, and Chubu Electric's leadership shakeup Sunday looks more like the opening move in a multi-year regulatory rebuilding process than a resolution to anything. Kingo Hayashi's departure as president and Satoru Katsuno's as chairman address the immediate accountability question a falsified seismic dataset demands. They do nothing to address the harder question sitting underneath it: how long it will take Japan's nuclear regulator to trust anything Chubu Electric submits again.

Post-Fukushima nuclear regulation in Japan was built around the premise that utility self-reporting on safety-critical engineering data could not be taken at face value without independent verification, a premise the entire restart review architecture assumes even when it slows individual projects to a crawl. A confirmed falsification inside that system does not just cost Chubu Electric its current Hamaoka application. It hands every other utility's own restart review a fresh reason for regulators to lean harder into independent verification rather than accepting submitted data on trust, a dynamic that tends to slow the whole national restart program rather than staying contained to the one utility responsible.

That matters well beyond Chubu Electric's own balance sheet. Japan's energy security calculus, stretched already by Gulf-driven oil prices running well above \$100 a barrel through much of the year, depends in part on nuclear capacity currently sitting idle while restart reviews grind through exactly the kind of scrutiny Sunday's scandal will now intensify. Every month added to the average restart timeline is a month of continued dependence on imported fossil fuels priced by a conflict Japan has no direct control over.

Corporate governance specialists will be watching how quickly Chubu Electric names permanent successors and what internal control changes accompany the transition, since half-measures, a leadership change without a genuine overhaul of the data-verification processes that allowed falsification to occur in the first place, tend to satisfy neither regulators nor the public in cases of this severity.

ANALYSIS: What Koja's Win Means for Henoko's Timeline

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Marine Corps Air Station Futenma's relocation to Henoko has proceeded on legal and administrative grounds for years regardless of the sitting Okinawa governor's own political opposition, a peculiar feature of the project that Sunday's election result does not so much resolve as render moot for the first time since planning began.

Denny Tamaki's own governorship demonstrated the limits of gubernatorial opposition to a nationally authorized base relocation: he could delay specific permits, generate political friction and provide a sympathetic platform for opposition, but he could not stop construction the courts had repeatedly affirmed Tokyo's authority to proceed with.

Koja's unconditional acceptance removes that friction entirely, at least at the gubernatorial level, potentially smoothing remaining permit and coordination processes that Tamaki's administration had, if not blocked outright, at minimum slowed through sustained non-cooperation on matters within prefectural discretion.

Whether removing gubernatorial friction meaningfully accelerates Henoko's actual completion timeline, or whether the project's remaining construction challenges are now primarily technical and engineering rather than political, is a question defense and infrastructure specialists are likely to debate as the practical effects of Sunday's result become clearer.

The relocation's broader symbolic significance within the US-Japan alliance relationship extends well beyond its specific construction timeline, having served for years as a visible marker of friction within an otherwise close security partnership. A governor who accepts the project removes that particular friction point from the relationship's public face, regardless of how much the underlying construction schedule actually shifts.

Opposition to Henoko has not disappeared simply because its most visible political vehicle, All-Okinawa gubernatorial power, has been voted out. Grassroots opposition groups that predate and will likely outlast any single governor's tenure are expected to continue their own separate advocacy and legal challenges regardless of who occupies the governor's office in Naha.

DEFENSE & INTERNATIONAL

ASDF Fighters Conduct Joint Training in India

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Japan Air Self-Defense Force fighters are conducting joint training exercises in India, according to Asahi Shimbun, part of the broader pattern of expanding defense cooperation between Tokyo and New Delhi that has developed steadily within the Quad security framework in recent years.

Joint air-force exercises of this kind serve multiple purposes beyond the immediate tactical training value, building interoperability between Japanese and Indian air forces while signaling shared strategic interest in a stable, rules-based Indo-Pacific order to observers well beyond the two participating countries.

India's own strategic position, sharing land borders with China and maintaining its own complicated bilateral relationship with Beijing, gives Japan-India defense cooperation a distinct character compared to Japan's alliance relationships with the United States or its security partnerships with Australia and the Philippines, each shaped by different specific geographic and historical circumstances.

The Quad framework linking Japan, the United States, Australia and India has increasingly moved from primarily diplomatic coordination toward more concrete military and technological cooperation, with joint exercises like this deployment to India representing the kind of practical defense integration that gives the broader grouping operational substance beyond summit-level statements.

Japanese defense planners have described expanding cooperation with India as complementary to rather than a substitute for the core US-Japan alliance, part of a broader strategy of building a wider network of security partnerships across the Indo-Pacific region that collectively raise the cost of any potential Chinese move to disrupt regional stability.

This deployment continues a pattern of increasingly frequent and substantive joint military activity between Japan and India, reflecting both countries' shared assessment that China's continued military buildup and assertive regional posture warrant deeper practical defense cooperation among like-minded regional powers.

Koizumi's Strategic Documents Timeline Faces New Political Backdrop

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi's accelerated timeline for revising Japan's Three Strategic Documents now proceeds against a notably different domestic political backdrop than existed even a week ago, with Sunday's Okinawa result removing a source of friction that had periodically complicated defense and base-related policy coordination between Tokyo and the prefecture.

The revision process itself continues independent of the Okinawa election's outcome, focused on questions of defense spending targets, counterstrike doctrine's potential extension and the formalization of shipbuilding cooperation with Washington that have occupied the Promotion Headquarters for the Transformation of Defense Capabilities since its establishment.

A more cooperative Okinawa prefectural government under Koja could, in principle, ease certain practical coordination challenges the Defense Ministry has faced in implementing base-related elements of Japan's broader defense posture, though the strategic documents revision itself touches on national-level policy questions extending well beyond any single prefecture's cooperation.

Koizumi has not publicly commented on how, if at all, Sunday's election result affects his ministry's own planning timeline, consistent with the Defense Ministry's general practice of treating its strategic policy work as insulated from short-term electoral developments even when those developments touch on matters of genuine relevance to defense policy.

The broader security environment driving the strategic documents revision, including the China threat assessment detailed in this year's white paper, North Korea's continued missile activity and the deepening Russia-China-North Korea coordination Japanese officials have tracked with growing concern, remains entirely unchanged by Sunday's Okinawa result.

Indonesia Ferry Capsizes, Six Dead and About 130 Missing

No Japanese nationals are reported among the casualties, though search efforts continue

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

A ferry capsized in Indonesian waters, killing at least six people with roughly 130 more still missing as search and rescue operations continue, according to NHK and Yomiuri Shimbun. No Japanese nationals have been reported among the casualties or missing as of the most recent available reporting.

Ferry disasters remain a recurring hazard across Indonesia's vast archipelago, where inter-island maritime transport carries enormous passenger volumes daily, often aboard vessels whose safety standards and maintenance records have drawn periodic criticism from international maritime safety observers.

Indonesian search and rescue teams have mobilized vessels and personnel to the area, though the scale of the missing count, roughly 130 people, suggests recovery operations could extend over multiple days depending on weather conditions, water depth and current patterns in the affected waters.

Overcrowding has featured as a contributing factor in numerous past Indonesian ferry disasters, with vessels frequently carrying passenger loads exceeding their rated capacity, though authorities have not yet confirmed whether Sunday's capsizing involved a similar pattern.

Japan's foreign ministry maintains standard consular monitoring protocols for major overseas disasters involving mass casualties, a process that includes confirming the status of any Japanese nationals who might have been aboard, a check that in this case has so far come back negative.

The disaster adds to a long list of maritime accidents that have periodically prompted renewed calls for regulatory reform within Indonesia's domestic ferry industry, calls that have historically produced incremental rather than sweeping change given the sheer scale and informality of much of the country's inter-island transport network.

International maritime safety organizations may offer technical assistance to Indonesian authorities as the investigation into the capsizing's cause proceeds, consistent with standard practice following disasters of this scale in developing maritime transport systems.

Gulf States, Iran to Hold First Direct Talks Since War Began

Foreign ministers meet today in Oman's Salalah to discuss a proposed arrangement dividing Strait of Hormuz shipping routes

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

Foreign ministers from Iran and the six Gulf Cooperation Council states are scheduled to meet today in Salalah, Oman, the first direct gathering of senior officials from both sides since the war between the United States and Iran began in late February, according to reporting reviewed from multiple regional sources.

The talks center on a temporary arrangement outlined late last month under which vessels entering the Persian Gulf would transit through Iranian territorial waters while departing vessels would pass mostly through Omani waters, a proposed division intended to reduce the risk of further maritime incidents in the Strait of Hormuz without requiring either side to concede its underlying territorial claims.

The Gulf states' willingness to sit down directly with Tehran reflects a judgment that sustained American military pressure alone has not reopened the strait to normal shipping traffic, according to regional analysts, pushing Gulf governments toward direct engagement even as Washington continues its own separate pressure campaign against Iran.

The talks arrive just two days after Iranian state media reported that an Iranian commercial vessel was struck in the Strait of Hormuz late Saturday, killing one person, underscoring how unresolved the underlying security situation remains even as diplomatic channels tentatively reopen.

Iran-backed forces in Yemen have separately stepped up attacks aimed at gaining greater control over a second vital regional waterway, according to available reporting, adding further pressure on global oil markets already contending with the Strait of Hormuz disruption that has weighed on prices for months.

Iran's own economy continues showing severe strain from the war's cumulative effect, with official July figures placing annual inflation at approximately 62%, year-on-year inflation at 82% and food inflation at 134%. Crude oil loadings have fallen to roughly 220,000 to 287,000 barrels a day, down from around two million barrels daily before the war began.

Iranian domestic manufacturing has contracted sharply alongside the inflation surge, with refrigerator production down 25% year-on-year, television production down 36% and washing machine production down 42%, while appliance prices have climbed 117% since last August, according to survey data from Iran International.

The US Treasury has scheduled the designation of a major Iranian-linked bank for the same day as the Salalah talks, continuing Washington's parallel financial pressure campaign even as regional diplomacy tentatively advances, a combination that illustrates how disconnected the American and Gulf-state tracks toward resolving the conflict have become.

For Japan, the stakes remain concrete rather than abstract: continued Strait of Hormuz disruption feeds directly into the elevated oil prices that have weighed on Japanese markets and complicated the Bank of Japan's own policy calculus throughout the year, making today's talks, however preliminary, a development worth watching closely regardless of how modest the immediate diplomatic breakthrough proves to be.

INTERNATIONAL & ECONOMY

Japan Secures Correction to UN-Affiliated Map Depicting Northern Territories

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

The government confirmed it secured a correction to a United Nations-affiliated world map that had depicted the Russian-held Northern Territories as Russian territory without qualification, according to Kyodo News, part of Japan's sustained diplomatic effort to maintain its formal position on the disputed islands' status in international documentation.

Japan has never recognized Russian sovereignty over the four islands, known in Japan as the Northern Territories and seized by Soviet forces in the closing days of the Second World War, and Tokyo maintains a standing diplomatic practice of formally objecting whenever international bodies or third-country publications depict the islands as unambiguously Russian.

Corrections of this kind rarely alter the practical reality on the ground, where Russia has administered the islands continuously since 1945, but they carry genuine diplomatic and legal significance for Japan's own long-term position, since consistent international documentation supporting Japan's claim helps preserve the territorial dispute's formal status rather than allowing it to fade into settled fact through simple repetition.

The specific map in question was affiliated with United Nations cartographic standards, giving its original depiction more institutional weight than a comparable error in a private publication would have carried, which likely explains the priority Japanese diplomats placed on securing a formal correction rather than treating the matter as a minor cartographic oversight.

Russia has not commented publicly on the correction, consistent with Moscow's general practice of declining to engage substantively with Japan's periodic diplomatic objections regarding the islands' depicted status in third-party documentation.

The territorial dispute itself remains entirely unresolved, with peace treaty negotiations between Japan and Russia, complicated further by Russia's own international isolation following its invasion of Ukraine, showing no sign of meaningful progress toward the kind of settlement that would finally resolve a dispute now stretching across more than eight decades.

Japan's continued attention to seemingly small matters like third-party map depictions reflects a broader diplomatic philosophy that sustained, consistent assertion of a territorial claim, even through minor administrative corrections, serves Japan's long-term legal and diplomatic position better than allowing any depiction suggesting settled Russian sovereignty to stand unchallenged.

BOJ Rate-Hike Expectations Hold Firm as Markets Reopen Monday

Reports of a possible move to 1.25% continued circulating through the weekend, setting up a consequential week for Japanese monetary policy

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Expectations for a Bank of Japan rate increase to 1.25% held firm through the weekend, with reports carried by Nikkei and Bloomberg via NewsPicks continuing to point toward the mid-September meeting as the venue for what would be the central bank's highest policy rate in roughly three decades.

Tokyo markets, closed since Friday's volatile session, reopen Monday to absorb a weekend's worth of geopolitical and economic news alongside whatever fresh signal emerges from Bank of Japan officials in the days immediately preceding the decision itself.

Friday's close left the Nikkei 225 at 64,011.34, down 1,259.61 points or 1.93% for the session, with an intraday range running from a low of 63,208.63 to a high of 64,312.02 after opening at 64,276.82. The index had closed Thursday at 65,270.95, meaning Friday's drop capped a rough week-to-date decline of roughly 1.55%.

The broader TOPIX index held up somewhat better than the price-weighted Nikkei, closing Friday at 4,028.30, down 26.28 points or 0.65%, a gap between the two benchmarks that reflects how heavily technology and chip-linked names, which carry outsized weight in the Nikkei's price-weighted structure, drove Friday's selling.

Advantest led decliners among major names, falling roughly 6.5%, followed by SoftBank Group at around 4% and Tokyo Electron down about 2.6%, with other chip-related names including Kioxia, Lasertec, Disco and Taiyo Yuden also trading lower. Financial and value-oriented names held up considerably better, consistent with a selloff concentrated in rate-sensitive growth and technology sectors rather than spreading broadly across the market.

Advancers trailed decliners by a wide margin on Friday, with roughly 95 issues rising against 128 falling, on trading value across Nikkei-listed components of approximately ¥7.16 trillion, a robust turnover figure indicating investors were actively repositioning rather than simply stepping back from the market.

Even with Friday's pullback, the index remains up sharply for the year, with year-to-date gains still running around 26% and twelve-month gains near 43% to 44% by some measures, a reminder that September's volatility, while genuinely sharp by the standards of recent weeks, has done little to dent what remains a strong year overall for Japanese equities. The 52-week high of 72,831.73 was set as recently as June 22.

Oil prices remain a central pressure point behind the broader selloff, with West Texas Intermediate crude trading in the mid-\$104 range and briefly above \$108 amid Gulf-related supply concerns, a combination of elevated energy costs and rising global bond yields that has hit growth and AI-linked equities particularly hard across markets well beyond Tokyo.

The yen's own trajectory adds a further layer to the calculus facing Bank of Japan policymakers, with the currency recently trading in a range of 153 to 154 per dollar, considerably firmer than its summer lows. A further rate increase would tend to strengthen the yen further still, adding fresh headwinds for exporters and high-multiple technology names already under pressure from the global rate environment.

Technical traders are watching Friday's intraday low of roughly 63,209 as an initial downside marker heading into Monday's session, with a break below that level suggesting the late-Friday recovery from the day's steepest losses proved more tactical than durable. The session's high near 64,312 offers the corresponding recovery level bulls will want to reclaim.

Markets, Currencies and Prices at a Glance

Compiled by the Economics Desk

NIKKEI 225 (Friday close): 64,011.34, down 1,259.61 points or 1.93%. Intraday range 63,208.63-64,312.02, opened 64,276.82. Thursday's close: 65,270.95. Week-to-date: roughly -1.55%.

TOPIX (Friday close): 4,028.30, down 26.28 points or 0.65%. YTD: Nikkei roughly +26%; 1-year roughly +43-44%. 52-week high: 72,831.73 (June 22, 2026).

FRIDAY'S DECLINERS: Advantest -6.5%, SoftBank Group -4%, Tokyo Electron -2.6%, with Kioxia, Lasertec, Disco and Taiyo Yuden also weaker. Advance/decline: 95 up, 128 down. Trading value: approximately ¥7.16 trillion.

YEN: approximately 153-154 per dollar, firmer than summer lows. OIL (WTI): mid-\$104 range, briefly above \$108 amid Gulf-related supply concerns.

BOJ RATE: 1.00% currently; a move to 1.25% remains widely expected at this month's meeting. FED RATE: 3.50%-3.75% currently; markets price a hike as more likely than not at this week's meeting.

UPCOMING: Federal Reserve two-day meeting begins Tuesday; Bank of Japan two-day meeting begins Wednesday; Fed decision Thursday; BOJ decision Friday.

Strong Tankan Reading Complicates the Case for BOJ Caution

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

The Reuters Tankan survey's recent finding that large manufacturer sentiment reached its highest level since December 2021 continues shaping the backdrop against which this week's Bank of Japan decision will be made, with strong business confidence data making the case for continued monetary caution considerably harder to sustain politically even amid the market volatility of recent sessions.

Manufacturers citing robust semiconductor and data-center demand as the primary driver of improved sentiment points toward a broad-based improvement in corporate Japan's own outlook, rather than a narrow recovery concentrated in any single sector vulnerable to reversal.

Capital investment plans reported alongside the sentiment survey, with businesses projecting spending growth of roughly 11% for the current fiscal year, suggest corporate Japan is putting real capital behind its improved confidence rather than simply reporting more optimistic sentiment without matching investment commitment.

The Bank of Japan's own policy committee will weigh the Tankan's strength alongside the currency, oil-price and geopolitical considerations already shaping this week's decision, with strong underlying business confidence generally supporting the case that the economy can absorb a rate increase without triggering the kind of demand contraction that would argue for continued delay.

Corporate sentiment data of this kind carries particular weight in Bank of Japan deliberations given the institution's own historical caution about moving ahead of confirmed economic strength, a caution that has, at various points over the past several years, been criticized as excessively conservative relative to how other major central banks have approached policy normalization.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

Finance Ministry Maintains Close Currency Coordination Ahead of BOJ Decision

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Japan's Finance Ministry continues close coordination with the Bank of Japan and with American counterparts ahead of this week's back-to-back central bank decisions, maintaining the kind of sustained currency-policy communication that has characterized the relationship since the joint intervention episode earlier this year.

Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama's own role managing this coordination has taken on additional significance given how directly currency stability intersects with both the BOJ's rate decision and the broader market volatility that has characterized recent trading sessions.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's own public statements on yen stability have provided a degree of cross-Pacific policy alignment that currency strategists describe as useful in managing market expectations heading into a week carrying unusually concentrated central-bank decision risk.

The ministry's currency-coordination work operates largely outside public view between major intervention episodes, consisting of routine consultation and information-sharing designed to prevent the kind of surprise policy divergence that could trigger disorderly market moves.

This week's specific test for that coordination involves managing market expectations around the genuine possibility that the Federal Reserve and Bank of Japan could move in directions that either reinforce or complicate each other's intended market signal, depending on the specific timing and magnitude of each decision.

Continued close coordination between Tokyo and Washington on currency matters reflects the broader alliance relationship extending into economic policy territory, a pattern examined at length in recent commentary on how thoroughly economic and security cooperation have merged in the current policy environment.

Toyota Delays US-Built Highlander EV, Its First American-Made Electric

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Toyota has delayed the launch of its Highlander EV, which would have been the automaker's first electric vehicle built on US soil, according to reporting from Nikkei Asia, a setback for the company's broader push to expand domestic American manufacturing of electrified models.

The delay lands at a sensitive moment for Toyota, given the currency-driven earnings pressure already weighing on the company's outlook, with the yen's strengthening trend eroding the value of dollar-denominated American sales once converted back into yen for financial reporting.

US-built electric vehicles carry particular strategic importance for Japanese automakers navigating American trade and industrial policy, since domestic manufacturing can help offset tariff exposure and qualify vehicles for consumer incentives tied to North American assembly requirements.

Toyota has not detailed the specific technical or supply-chain factors behind the delay, though electric vehicle launch timelines across the industry have faced recurring disruption from battery supply constraints, software integration challenges and shifting demand forecasts that have caused multiple manufacturers to revise electrification timelines downward from earlier, more aggressive projections.

The company's broader American manufacturing footprint remains extensive regardless of this specific delay, with Toyota continuing to operate multiple US assembly plants producing both traditional combustion and hybrid vehicles that remain core to its North American sales strategy.

Industry analysts note that a delayed but eventually successful US-built EV launch carries less long-term damage than a rushed launch plagued by quality or reliability issues, making a cautious timeline adjustment a defensible choice even as it complicates near-term competitive positioning against rivals already selling domestically produced electric models.

Nintendo, Sony Continue Absorbing Memory Chip Cost Pressure

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Nintendo and Sony have both continued navigating elevated memory chip costs that have squeezed margins across the consumer electronics industry this year, with component price pressure remaining one of the more persistent headwinds facing Japan's major hardware manufacturers even as broader demand for gaming and entertainment products has held up reasonably well.

Nintendo's own concerns have centered partly on the pace of software launches following the Switch 2's debut earlier this year, with investors watching closely for confirmation that the console's hardware success translates into the sustained software release cadence historically required to justify premium valuations in the gaming sector.

Sony's diversified business structure, spanning gaming, music, film and image-sensor technology, has provided some insulation against memory-cost pressure concentrated most heavily in pure hardware manufacturing, with the company's semiconductor unit continuing to benefit from strong demand for camera sensors used in premium smartphones worldwide.

Sony Semiconductor Solutions' partnership with TSMC on next-generation image sensors for robotics and automotive applications represents a strategic diversification beyond the smartphone camera market that has traditionally driven the division's revenue, positioning the unit to benefit from broader AI-hardware demand trends.

Memory chip pricing dynamics reflect a global semiconductor market where AI-driven data-center demand has absorbed manufacturing capacity that might otherwise have gone toward consumer electronics components, creating exactly the kind of cross-sector competition for limited fabrication capacity that has periodically squeezed margins at companies like Nintendo and Sony.

Both companies have continued investing in AI-adjacent technology areas even while managing near-term cost pressure, a pattern consistent with the broader Japanese corporate response to the AI investment wave: absorbing short-term margin compression in pursuit of longer-term positioning within AI-linked supply chains.

Investors will be watching both companies' upcoming quarterly results closely for further detail on how memory cost trends are evolving heading into the critical holiday sales season, when consumer electronics demand typically peaks and margin pressure becomes most consequential for full-year financial performance.

International Cargo Operations Expand to Serve TSMC, Sony Plant Buildout

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Logistics operators are expanding international cargo capacity to serve the manufacturing buildout around TSMC's and Sony's Japan-based plants, according to Nikkei Asia, a concrete illustration of how semiconductor and technology manufacturing investment is generating secondary economic activity well beyond the fabrication facilities themselves.

Semiconductor manufacturing depends on a complex, globally distributed supply chain for specialized equipment, materials and components, meaning a single fabrication plant's construction and operation can generate sustained cargo volume increases across the shipping and logistics sector supporting it.

TSMC's Kumamoto operations and Sony's own semiconductor manufacturing footprint have together anchored a broader cluster of technology manufacturing investment in Kyushu specifically, with logistics infrastructure expansion following the same pattern of concentrated regional economic transformation seen around Rapidus's Hokkaido facility.

A separate report indicates Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund Mubadala Investment is considering funding construction of what would be one of the largest data centers in Japan, according to reporting reviewed alongside the logistics expansion story, underscoring the scale of international capital currently flowing toward Japan's AI and semiconductor infrastructure buildout.

Foreign direct investment in Japanese technology manufacturing and data infrastructure has accelerated meaningfully in recent years, reflecting both Japan's own deliberate policy effort to attract such investment and broader international capital seeking geographic diversification away from more geopolitically contested semiconductor manufacturing locations.

Regional economic planners in Kyushu describe the cargo capacity expansion as a leading indicator of sustained rather than temporary manufacturing activity, since logistics operators generally commit to infrastructure expansion only when they have confidence in durable, long-term cargo volume rather than a short-term construction-phase spike.

BUSINESS

'Money Tigers' Format Aims to Build Tokyo's Entrepreneurial Culture

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

A venture capital format dubbed "Money Tigers," modeled on televised pitch competitions, is drawing attention as a potential tool for building a more entrepreneurial startup culture in Tokyo, according to Nikkei Asia, part of a broader ongoing effort to address Japan's historically cautious approach to startup investment and entrepreneurial risk-taking.

Japan's startup ecosystem has grown steadily over the past decade but continues lagging comparable economies in both venture capital deployment per capita and the cultural acceptance of entrepreneurial failure as a normal, even valuable, part of a business career rather than a permanent mark against future opportunity.

Televised or public pitch formats serve a dual purpose beyond simply connecting entrepreneurs with capital: they normalize startup culture for a broader domestic audience unfamiliar with venture investing, potentially shifting public attitudes in ways that pure capital deployment alone cannot accomplish.

Tokyo's ambitions to position itself as a genuine Asian startup hub compete directly with more established regional centers including Singapore and, despite recent political tensions, Shenzhen, making cultural and structural reforms like expanded entrepreneurial risk tolerance as important to the city's competitive positioning as capital availability alone.

Government policy has increasingly supported startup ecosystem development through various funding and regulatory initiatives in recent years, reflecting a recognition among policymakers that Japan's traditional corporate employment model, while providing valuable stability, has not historically produced the kind of disruptive innovation increasingly seen as essential to long-term economic competitiveness.

Whether a televised pitch format meaningfully shifts Japan's broader entrepreneurial culture, or remains a modest media curiosity without lasting structural effect, will likely become clearer only over a period of years rather than through any single season's specific outcomes.

Yen Carry Trade Faces Fresh Scrutiny as Currency Strengthens Further

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Currency strategists continue raising questions about the yen carry trade's stability as the currency's strengthening trend extends further, with positions built during years of near-zero Japanese interest rates facing growing unwind pressure the closer the Bank of Japan moves toward this week's expected rate decision.

The carry trade, in which investors borrow cheaply in yen to fund investments in higher-yielding currencies and assets elsewhere, has been a persistent feature of global capital markets for years, and its unwinding, when it occurs at scale, has historically produced outsized volatility extending well beyond currency markets alone into equities and other asset classes.

A Bank of Japan rate increase to 1.25%, should it materialize this week as widely expected, would narrow the interest-rate differential that has made the carry trade profitable for years, potentially accelerating an unwind that has already been building gradually as the yen has strengthened from its summer lows.

Market participants who lived through prior carry trade unwind episodes describe the current environment as carrying genuine echoes of past volatility events, even as most analysts stop short of predicting a disorderly unwind on the scale of the most severe historical precedents.

Japanese exporters face their own related but distinct currency exposure, with a strengthening yen eroding the yen-value of overseas earnings even without any direct connection to carry trade positioning, a dynamic already visible in Toyota's own recent earnings disclosures.

This week's back-to-back Federal Reserve and Bank of Japan decisions add particular complexity to the carry trade calculus, since the relative direction of American and Japanese rates, not just the Japanese side alone, ultimately determines how much further pressure the trade faces in the days immediately ahead.

Currency market volatility around major central bank decisions has become an increasingly routine feature of trading calendars in recent years, though the specific combination of a genuine Bank of Japan tightening cycle alongside renewed Federal Reserve hawkishness gives this particular week unusually concentrated stakes for carry trade positioning.

Regional Banks Brace for Mixed Effects From Expected BOJ Rate Increase

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Japanese regional banks are preparing for a mixed set of effects should the Bank of Japan proceed with its widely expected rate increase this week, with higher rates generally improving net interest margins on new lending even as they raise borrowing costs for the small and mid-sized business customers many regional banks depend on for loan demand.

Years of near-zero interest rates have squeezed regional bank profitability considerably, making a genuine, sustained rate increase a welcome development for an industry that has faced sustained margin pressure even as its role remains essential to financing small businesses and regional economic activity outside Japan's major metropolitan centers.

The transition is not without risk for regional lenders, however, since a meaningful share of their existing loan books were originated under the near-zero rate environment, meaning some borrowers, particularly smaller businesses with thinner margins, may struggle as their own borrowing costs rise even as the banks' own profitability improves on new lending.

Regional banks serving areas with significant agricultural lending exposure face their own specific version of this tension, given the record pace of rice farmer bankruptcies reported this year, a trend that predates and is largely unrelated to interest rate policy but that higher borrowing costs could compound for already financially stressed agricultural borrowers.

Bank of Japan officials have generally described the transition away from near-zero rates as a necessary normalization rather than a punitive tightening cycle, a framing regional bank executives have broadly welcomed even as they acknowledge the transition will not be uniformly smooth across every borrower segment.

Construction Costs Stay Elevated as Rate Environment Shifts

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Construction costs across Japan remain elevated even as the interest-rate environment shifts toward tightening, a combination that continues pressuring both residential and commercial developers already navigating the record Tokyo condominium prices reported for July.

Labor shortages within the construction trades, a persistent feature of Japan's broader demographic-driven workforce challenges, continue constraining supply capacity even as this week's strong Tankan sentiment data suggests renewed corporate confidence in commercial construction and expansion plans across multiple sectors.

Material cost inflation, tied partly to the same currency and import-price pressures affecting other sectors of the economy, has compounded labor cost pressure for developers, making construction cost management an increasingly central variable in project feasibility calculations across the industry.

Developers of large-scale projects, including the kind of data-center and semiconductor-facility construction driving investment in Hokkaido and Kyushu, face particular exposure to construction cost trends given the specialized nature and scale of the facilities involved.

Real estate economists note that elevated construction costs, layered on top of a likely rate increase this week, could meaningfully cool new development activity even in segments of the market, like premium Tokyo condominiums, that have shown few signs of demand weakness so far.

Industry representatives continue lobbying for expanded foreign worker acceptance within construction, framing labor-supply expansion as a more sustainable long-term solution to cost pressure than any single policy response targeting materials or financing alone.

BUSINESS & REAL ESTATE

Japanese Semiconductor Equipment Makers Navigate Mixed Demand Signals

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Japanese semiconductor equipment manufacturers continue navigating a mixed demand environment, with robust AI-driven data-center chip demand offsetting softer conditions in some more traditional consumer electronics-linked chip segments, according to industry data reviewed alongside this week's broader market coverage.

Tokyo Electron and Advantest, both among Friday's weakest-performing major Nikkei stocks, illustrate how directly equipment-maker share prices have tracked the broader market's currency and rate anxiety even as underlying AI-chip demand fundamentals have remained strong across most industry assessments.

The equipment-maker sector's fortunes remain closely tied to capital spending decisions at major chip manufacturers worldwide, including TSMC's continued Kumamoto expansion and Rapidus's own Hokkaido buildout, both of which represent sustained domestic demand sources somewhat insulated from the sector's broader global demand cycle volatility.

Export control considerations affecting semiconductor equipment sales to China continue shaping strategic planning across the sector, with Japanese equipment makers weighing commercial relationships against the broader economic-security alignment with Washington that has become an increasingly central consideration in the industry's China-facing business decisions.

This week's Tankan survey data, showing manufacturer sentiment at its highest level since December 2021 driven substantially by semiconductor and data-center demand, offers a encouraging signal for equipment makers even against the backdrop of Friday's sharp share-price declines across the sector.

Elevated Oil Prices Continue Squeezing Japanese Import Costs

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Crude oil prices remain elevated amid the Gulf conflict's continued disruption, with West Texas Intermediate trading in the mid-\$104 range and briefly touching above \$108 in recent sessions, a sustained cost pressure that continues working through Japan's economy as a tax on nearly every import-dependent sector.

Today's scheduled talks between Gulf states and Iran in Salalah offer a tentative diplomatic signal without providing any immediate relief to the physical supply disruption that has kept prices elevated for months, meaning Japanese importers should expect continued cost pressure regardless of how the diplomatic track develops in the near term.

Japanese utilities and manufacturers dependent on imported energy continue passing elevated input costs through their own pricing where possible, a dynamic that feeds directly into the producer price inflation data the Bank of Japan is weighing alongside currency and rate considerations ahead of this week's policy decision.

Households face their own indirect exposure to elevated oil prices through higher transportation, heating and electricity costs, adding to the broader cost-of-living pressure that has shaped Japanese politics and consumer sentiment throughout the year.

Energy security planners continue pointing to the current environment as evidence for accelerating Japan's own nuclear restart program, a case complicated this week by Chubu Electric's own data-integrity scandal even as the underlying strategic logic for reduced fossil fuel dependence remains unchanged.

Oil price relief, should the Salalah talks eventually produce a durable reduction in Strait of Hormuz risk, would offer meaningful benefit to Japan's broader inflation and trade-balance picture, though officials caution against expecting rapid improvement given how entrenched the current disruption has become after seven months of conflict.

Tokyo Area Condo Prices Hit Record ¥160 Million Average in July

The 63.7% year-on-year jump marks one of the sharpest single-month increases on record for the metropolitan new-build market

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

The average price of newly built condominiums in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area reached a record 160 million yen in July, a 63.7% increase from the same month a year earlier, according to figures reported by Asahi Shimbun, one of the steepest single-month jumps the market has recorded in recent history.

A gain of that magnitude in a single year-on-year comparison typically reflects some combination of a stronger underlying market and a shift in the mix of properties actually sold during the period, with a smaller number of ultra-premium central Tokyo developments closing in July capable of pulling the average sharply upward even without broad-based price appreciation across every segment of the market.

Real estate economists will be parsing exactly that distinction in the weeks ahead, since a figure driven primarily by a handful of luxury central-ward transactions tells a very different story about market health than one reflecting genuine, broad-based appreciation across ordinary family-oriented units in the suburban ring.

The milestone lands the same week markets are bracing for a possible Bank of Japan rate increase, a juxtaposition worth noting given that higher borrowing costs typically cool exactly the kind of price appreciation July's figure represents, meaning the timing may mark something closer to a cyclical peak than the start of a sustained new plateau.

Foreign buyer demand, land scarcity in central wards, and construction cost inflation tied partly to the same currency and import-price pressures affecting other sectors have all been cited by developers and brokers as contributing factors behind the broader upward trend in Tokyo condominium pricing over the past several years.

Affordability concerns for ordinary Tokyo households, already a recurring theme in housing policy debate, are likely to sharpen further given a headline figure this far removed from what a typical dual-income household earning Japan's median wage could realistically finance without an unusually large down payment or family assistance.

Whether July's figure proves to be a genuine market peak or simply the latest data point in a longer upward run remains to be seen, with the coming rate decision expected to offer the clearest near-term test of how sensitive the current price level actually is to financing costs.

Supreme Court Rules Against Foreign Residents Denied Welfare Benefits

One justice dissented, writing that excluding foreign nationals from welfare eligibility is unconstitutional

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

Japan's Supreme Court ruled against plaintiffs who had challenged the denial of welfare benefits to foreign nationals, according to Asahi Shimbun, upholding the government's authority to exclude non-citizens from at least some elements of the public welfare system even as one justice dissented, writing that such exclusion is unconstitutional.

The ruling addresses a question that has recurred periodically in Japanese courts for decades: whether the constitutional right to a minimum standard of living, generally understood to apply to citizens, extends with equal force to foreign residents who pay taxes and otherwise participate in the same social and economic systems as Japanese nationals.

The single dissenting opinion, while not altering the case's outcome, provides a documented minority position within the court that future litigants challenging similar exclusions may draw on, a pattern seen in other areas of Japanese constitutional law where a persistent dissent eventually informs legislative or judicial movement even when it fails to carry a given case.

Welfare policy specialists note that Japan's approach to foreign-national eligibility for public benefits has generally been more restrictive than several other advanced economies, a posture that has drawn periodic criticism from international human-rights bodies even as it has remained broadly consistent with Japanese public and political opinion on the underlying question.

The ruling arrives amid Japan's continued, gradual expansion of its foreign resident population, driven substantially by labor-shortage pressures across agriculture, construction, caregiving and other sectors, a demographic trend that has made questions about foreign residents' access to social services considerably more than a theoretical legal matter for a growing number of households.

Advocacy groups representing foreign residents are likely to characterize the ruling as a setback, while officials defending the current framework will likely point to it as confirmation that existing eligibility rules rest on solid legal footing, a familiar pattern following Supreme Court decisions that resolve a contested question without eliminating the underlying policy debate.

The case's practical effect falls on foreign residents who had sought benefits and been denied under the current framework, a population whose exact size is difficult to establish precisely but which grows incrementally each year as Japan's foreign resident population itself continues expanding.

SOCIETY

Two Dead, Dozens Injured in Massive Kan-Etsu Expressway Pileup

Reports put the number of vehicles involved in the Minakami, Gunma crash as high as 67, with the road closure continuing into Monday

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

A chain-reaction pileup on the Kan-Etsu Expressway in Minakami, Gunma Prefecture, killed two people and injured roughly 26 others in what may rank among the largest multi-vehicle crashes on a Japanese expressway in recent years, with reports from Yomiuri Shimbun and Mainichi Shimbun putting the number of vehicles involved anywhere from 50 to 67 depending on how investigators ultimately define the crash's outer boundary.

The road remained closed into Monday morning as investigators worked to clear wreckage and reconstruct the sequence of collisions, a process complicated by the sheer scale of the incident and the number of vehicles that need to be individually examined before the roadway can reopen to traffic.

Gunma prefectural police have not released a definitive account of what triggered the initial collision, though expressway pileups of this scale typically begin with a single incident, often tied to reduced visibility or a sudden slowdown, that cascades through following traffic before drivers further back have time to react.

Emergency responders faced a scene spanning a considerable stretch of highway, with rescue crews working through Sunday to extract injured occupants from vehicles compressed together across multiple lanes, according to accounts carried by TBS and Yomiuri Shimbun.

The Kan-Etsu Expressway connects Tokyo to Niigata Prefecture through Gunma's mountainous terrain, a route that sees heavy weekend traffic from both commuters and travelers heading toward the region's hot spring resorts and outdoor recreation areas, meaning Sunday's timing likely put an unusually high volume of vehicles on the road when the crash occurred.

Highway safety specialists note that pileups of this magnitude, while statistically rare, tend to share common contributing factors: a sudden hazard, following distances that had already narrowed under heavy traffic, and a chain of drivers each reacting a fraction of a second too late to avoid the vehicle ahead.

East Nippon Expressway Company, which operates the Kan-Etsu route, has not announced a timeline for reopening the affected section, with continued clearance and investigation work expected to keep at least partial closures in place into the new week.

The injured were transported to hospitals across the region, with local medical facilities activating mass-casualty protocols to accommodate the volume of patients arriving within a compressed window Sunday afternoon and evening.

Gunma Prefecture's own disaster and emergency-response coordination will likely face scrutiny in the crash's aftermath, consistent with how Japanese authorities typically review major multi-vehicle incidents for whatever operational lessons might reduce the likelihood or severity of a comparable event in the future.

Car Mounts Sidewalk in Osaka's Namba District, Injuring Three

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

A car mounted the sidewalk along Midosuji in Osaka's Namba district Sunday, injuring three pedestrians including a child, according to accounts from NHK and Yomiuri Shimbun, in one of several road-safety incidents that dominated the weekend's domestic news cycle alongside the far larger expressway pileup in Gunma.

The driver told police at the scene that he had mistaken the accelerator for the brake pedal, a specific account officers are working to verify against physical evidence from the vehicle and the scene itself before determining what, if any, charges will follow.

Midosuji is one of Osaka's busiest commercial thoroughfares, lined with retail storefronts and heavy pedestrian traffic on weekends, conditions that meant the vehicle's path onto the sidewalk carried genuine risk of far more serious casualties than the three reported injuries, none of which were described as life-threatening.

Pedal-confusion incidents of this kind have drawn sustained attention from Japanese transport safety regulators in recent years, particularly involving elderly drivers, though authorities have not yet indicated the driver's age or whether age-related factors will feature in their review of Sunday's crash.

The injured, including the child, were taken to nearby hospitals for treatment, with local authorities describing their conditions as non-critical as of Sunday evening.

Osaka police have cordoned off the affected section of sidewalk while the investigation continues, a routine step in incidents involving vehicle-pedestrian contact that allows technicians to document skid marks, vehicle position and other physical evidence before the scene reopens to normal foot traffic.

Sunday's incident adds to a recurring pattern of pedal-confusion crashes that periodically renews public debate in Japan over mandatory retesting, technological safeguards such as pedal-misapplication prevention systems, and the broader question of how to balance elderly drivers' independence against demonstrated safety risk.

Former Employee Attacks Yokohama Rubber Factory, 15 Injured

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

A man believed to be a former employee attacked workers at a Yokohama Rubber factory in Mishima, Shizuoka Prefecture, injuring 15 people in an assault that may have involved a survival knife, according to reports from Sankei Shimbun, TBS and Yomiuri Shimbun. The suspect was arrested at the scene.

Police have not released a detailed account of the attacker's motive, though his identification as a former employee has focused early investigative attention on workplace grievances as a possible driver of Sunday's violence.

Fifteen injuries from a single assault represents an unusually high casualty count for an attack of this kind in Japan, where workplace violence involving edged weapons remains comparatively rare relative to other developed economies, making Sunday's incident likely to draw sustained national attention in the days ahead.

Factory security protocols at manufacturing sites across Japan may face renewed scrutiny following the attack, particularly regarding how facilities screen and respond to former employees attempting to access company property, a question corporate security specialists are likely to raise regardless of what Sunday's specific investigation ultimately determines about the attacker's access method.

Yokohama Rubber has not issued a detailed public statement on the incident beyond confirming that an attack occurred at the Mishima facility, with the company's own internal response, including support for injured employees and any operational changes to the plant, expected to become clearer in the coming days.

Shizuoka prefectural police continue investigating the full circumstances of the attack, including the specific sequence of events that led to 15 separate injuries, a number that suggests the assault unfolded across a meaningful span of time and possibly multiple locations within the facility before the suspect was apprehended.

Cake Shop Owner Dies in Gifu Arson-Murder Case

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

The owner of a cake shop targeted in an arson and murder case in Gifu has died from burn shock, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, a development that shifts what began as an arson and assault investigation into a homicide case carrying considerably more serious potential charges for whoever is ultimately found responsible.

Details of the original attack, including the specific circumstances that led investigators to treat the fire as deliberately set rather than accidental, have not been fully disclosed in available reporting, though the case's classification as arson from its earliest stages indicates police found clear evidence of intentional ignition rather than an accidental blaze.

Burn shock, the specific cause of death cited in available reports, describes a cascade of physiological failures, including fluid loss and organ stress, that can prove fatal days or even weeks after a severe burn injury even when initial emergency treatment appears to stabilize a patient, a grim but not uncommon outcome in cases involving extensive thermal injury.

Gifu prefectural police have not announced an arrest in connection with the case as of the most recent available reporting, leaving the investigation's ultimate resolution, including any charges filed, still pending as detectives continue building a case from physical evidence and witness accounts gathered since the fire.

Small, family-run retail businesses like the shop at the center of this case remain common across Japan's provincial cities, and violent attacks targeting shop owners, while statistically rare, tend to draw disproportionate local attention given how deeply such businesses are woven into their neighborhoods' daily life.

The case will likely proceed through Gifu's court system once any suspect is identified and charged, a process that in cases involving a victim's death from injuries sustained during the original attack typically extends the timeline for formal prosecution while medical and forensic evidence linking the fire to the eventual cause of death is fully documented.

SOCIETY

Elderly Couple Dies in Saitama Facility Fire

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

A couple in their 70s died in a fire at a treatment center and residence in Yorii, Saitama Prefecture, according to Yomiuri Shimbun and Asahi Shimbun, adding to a weekend that saw an unusually high concentration of serious fire and accident incidents reported across multiple prefectures simultaneously.

The facility's dual function as both a treatment center and a residence raises specific questions investigators will need to address regarding evacuation procedures and fire-safety infrastructure appropriate to a building housing residents who may have had limited mobility or required assistance evacuating quickly.

Saitama fire officials have not detailed the blaze's suspected cause in available reporting, with a formal cause-and-origin investigation typically required before authorities issue any public determination in fires resulting in fatalities.

Facilities combining medical or therapeutic treatment functions with residential housing face fire-safety regulatory requirements distinct from standard residential buildings in Japan, given the elevated risk profile associated with residents who may need assistance during an emergency evacuation.

Local authorities in Yorii are expected to conduct a broader review of the facility's compliance history following the fatal fire, a standard practice when a fire resulting in deaths occurs at a facility subject to specific safety regulations tied to its function.

The identities of the deceased have not been publicly released as of the most recent available reporting, with authorities typically withholding such information until next of kin have been formally notified.

Water Main Break Buckles Road, Floods Kyoto Shopping Street

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

A road in Kyoto's Fushimi shopping district buckled upward Sunday, sending water overflowing from beneath the surface and partially flooding the area, according to Yomiuri Shimbun and NHK, with a burst water pipe suspected as the cause pending confirmation from Kyoto city's waterworks bureau.

The upward displacement of pavement, distinct from the more common sinkhole pattern seen in comparable water-main failures, suggests pressurized water forced its way toward the surface with enough force to lift and crack the road surface rather than simply washing away supporting soil beneath it.

Fushimi's shopping streets draw substantial foot traffic both from local residents and from visitors to the district's well-known sake breweries and the Fushimi Inari shrine complex nearby, meaning a flooding incident during business hours carried real disruption potential for shop owners and customers alike even without any injuries reported.

Kyoto's water infrastructure, like much of urban Japan's underground utility network, includes pipes and mains of varying age, and municipal waterworks bureaus across the country have faced growing budget pressure to accelerate replacement of aging sections before failures occur rather than responding only after a rupture.

City crews were dispatched to assess the extent of the damage and begin repairs, with the affected section of roadway expected to require both the underlying pipe repair and separate resurfacing work before normal vehicle and pedestrian traffic can fully resume.

Childcare Waiting List Grows for First Time in Nine Years

Tokyo again leads the nation as 2,435 children remain without spots, a reversal of a decade-long downward trend

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

The number of children on waiting lists for licensed childcare rose for the first time in nine years, reaching 2,435 as of April 1, an increase of 181 from the previous year, according to figures reported by Asahi Shimbun. Tokyo again recorded the highest count of any prefecture, continuing a pattern that has held for years even as the capital has poured resources into expanding capacity.

The reversal breaks a streak of steady annual declines that had run since roughly the mid-2010s, when a combination of expanded facility construction and, more recently, declining birth rates had been narrowing the gap between childcare demand and available spots year after year.

Demographers and childcare policy specialists will likely debate what exactly reversed the trend, given that Japan's birth rate has continued falling rather than rising, a fact that on its own would be expected to ease rather than worsen waiting-list pressure. One plausible explanation gaining traction among analysts involves rising labor-force participation among mothers of young children, which increases demand for licensed care even as the total number of children shrinks.

Tokyo's persistent position atop the waiting-list rankings reflects the capital's combination of high housing costs, which push many families toward dual-income arrangements, and childcare capacity that, despite years of expansion, has struggled to keep pace with a working population concentrated disproportionately in the metropolitan area relative to the rest of the country.

Municipal governments facing waiting lists typically respond through some combination of new facility licensing, subsidies encouraging private providers to expand capacity, and adjustments to enrollment criteria that prioritize dual-income and single-parent households, tools Tokyo's own ward governments have deployed with mixed success over the years.

The reversal arrives at a politically awkward moment for a government that has made reversing Japan's demographic decline a stated priority, given that unreliable access to childcare remains one of the more frequently cited practical barriers survey respondents name when explaining reluctance to have children or to have a second child after a first.

Police Log 5,259 Illegal Online Casino Cases, Mostly Overseas-Based

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Japanese police have logged 5,259 cases connected to illegal online casinos, according to figures reported by Asahi Shimbun, with the large majority of implicated sites operating from overseas jurisdictions beyond the direct reach of domestic law enforcement.

Online gambling through unlicensed offshore operators has grown into a persistent enforcement challenge for Japanese authorities, who face the familiar difficulty of prosecuting domestic users and facilitators even when the platforms themselves sit entirely outside Japanese jurisdiction and any realistic prospect of direct regulatory action.

Japan's gambling laws remain considerably more restrictive than many other developed economies, permitting only a narrow set of licensed activities including horse racing, certain other sanctioned betting sports and, more recently, integrated resort casinos operating under a dedicated regulatory framework, leaving a substantial gray and black market for online betting that continues to draw domestic participation despite its illegality.

The scale of the 5,259 figure suggests enforcement resources are identifying only a fraction of actual illegal gambling activity, a common pattern in offenses conducted primarily online where detection depends heavily on financial transaction monitoring, user reporting or platform-level cooperation that offshore operators have little incentive to provide.

Financial institutions play an increasingly central role in illegal gambling enforcement, with banks and payment processors required to flag suspicious transaction patterns that may indicate gambling-related fund transfers, even though enforcement against the underlying platforms themselves remains largely beyond Japan's direct jurisdictional reach.

Public awareness campaigns warning of the legal risk involved in using offshore gambling sites have had limited apparent effect on usage patterns, according to law enforcement officials who describe the appeal of easy access and anonymity as continuing to outweigh legal deterrence for a meaningful share of users.

Authorities are expected to continue prioritizing user-side and facilitator-side enforcement given the practical impossibility of directly regulating platforms based entirely outside Japanese territory, a structural limitation that is unlikely to change without broader international cooperation on cross-border online gambling enforcement.

SOCIETY

Mount Tokachi Alert Raised to Level 3, Hot Spring Area Evacuated

The Japan Meteorological Agency's warning restricts mountain entry as seismic activity continues
By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

The Japan Meteorological Agency raised its eruption alert level for Hokkaido's Mount Tokachi to Level 3 over the weekend, triggering a mountain entry restriction and an evacuation order for a nearby hot spring area, according to NHK and Asahi Shimbun, as seismic activity beneath the volcano continued at an elevated level.

Level 3 on Japan's five-tier volcanic alert scale restricts entry to the mountain itself while stopping short of the more severe evacuation orders that would apply to a wider surrounding population, a calibrated response reflecting current monitoring data rather than an active eruption already underway.

The evacuation order covering the hot spring area affects a resort community that depends substantially on tourism tied to the region's volcanic hot springs, an economic irony not lost on local business operators who rely on the same geological activity now forcing a precautionary evacuation.

Mount Tokachi has a documented history of periodic volcanic activity, and Japanese authorities maintain continuous seismic and ground-deformation monitoring across the country's active volcanoes to catch the kind of gradually building activity that preceded Sunday's alert escalation.

Local businesses and residents affected by the evacuation order face the same difficult calculus that accompanies every precautionary volcanic evacuation in Japan: authorities would rather order an evacuation that ultimately proves unnecessary than delay one that turns out to have been needed, even at real short-term economic cost to the affected community.

The Japan Meteorological Agency has not indicated a timeline for when the alert level might be reduced, with any downgrade depending entirely on how seismic activity beneath the volcano evolves in the coming days and weeks.

Hokkaido's broader volcanic monitoring network extends well beyond Mount Tokachi alone, part of Japan's comprehensive national approach to tracking activity across a chain of volcanoes running the length of the archipelago, a monitoring investment that reflects the country's own hard-won experience with the human cost of inadequate volcanic warning systems.

23 Hospitalized After Suspected Food Poisoning at Kyoto Track Stadium

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Twenty-three people were transported to hospitals following a suspected mass food poisoning incident at a track and field stadium in Kyoto, according to NHK, Yomiuri Shimbun and TBS, with the local health center conducting an on-site investigation of the catering company believed responsible for the affected meals.

Stadium catering operations serving large numbers of athletes, staff and spectators simultaneously carry inherent food-safety risk given the volume of meals prepared and distributed within a compressed timeframe, conditions that can allow a single contamination point to affect dozens of people before the problem becomes apparent.

Health officials typically move quickly in incidents of this kind to identify the specific food item responsible, interviewing affected individuals about what they consumed and cross-referencing those accounts against the catering company's own preparation and distribution records.

The scale of the incident, with 23 people requiring hospital transport, suggests a genuine contamination event rather than a handful of isolated illnesses, prompting the kind of on-site investigation health authorities reserve for incidents large enough to indicate a systemic rather than individual food-safety failure.

Track and field events drawing large crowds to a single venue create exactly the concentrated catering conditions that make food-safety enforcement both more important and more logistically challenging, since a single vendor may be preparing meals for a population numbering in the hundreds or thousands within a short operational window.

None of the 23 hospitalized individuals were reported in critical condition as of the most recent available reporting, though health officials will continue monitoring affected patients as the investigation into the specific cause proceeds.

The catering company involved has not been publicly named in available reporting, with health authorities typically withholding that detail until their investigation confirms the specific source and mechanism of contamination.

Stalled Autumn Rain Front to Bring Week of Wet Weather to Sea of Japan Coast

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Japan's autumn rain front has stalled over the Sea of Japan, according to NHK, with forecasters expecting heavy rain concentrated mainly along that coast beginning Monday and continuing through much of the week as the seasonal system remains largely stationary rather than progressing through its usual pattern.

Stalled rain fronts of this kind can produce considerably more cumulative rainfall in an affected region than a front that moves through more quickly, since the same geographic area ends up under the front's rain-producing conditions repeatedly rather than experiencing a single, shorter-duration passage.

Prefectures along the Sea of Japan coast, from Hokkaido's western shore down through Tohoku and into the Hokuriku region, face the most direct exposure to the stalled front's effects, with local disaster-preparedness officials monitoring rainfall accumulation totals closely given the flood and landslide risk sustained heavy rain can produce in mountainous terrain.

The system's stalled position reflects the broader seasonal transition currently underway across Japan, as the same atmospheric dynamics that produce the country's distinctive autumn rain season interact with a jet stream pattern that has, for the moment, left the front with nowhere obvious to move.

Residents in affected areas are advised to monitor local weather advisories closely through the week, particularly in regions where soil already saturated from earlier rainfall could see landslide risk increase further with each additional day of sustained precipitation.

Forecasters have not provided a firm timeline for when the front will finally begin moving through and clearing the affected coast, with its eventual progression depending on broader atmospheric pattern shifts that remain difficult to predict with precision more than a few days out.

Autumn Equinox Holiday Approaches as Silver Week Travel Season Nears

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Japan's Autumn Equinox holiday, observed later this month, is prompting early travel planning across the country as families and travelers look toward the loosely defined Silver Week period that periodically forms around the holiday depending on how the calendar falls in a given year.

Domestic travel demand around the equinox holiday typically reflects a combination of traditional ancestor-veneration customs, with many families visiting family graves during the period, and simple seasonal travel as the summer heat begins easing across most of the country.

This year's holiday timing arrives amid the same late-summer heat pattern still holding across much of Japan, according to national weather data, meaning travelers heading to warmer southern destinations may find conditions still firmly summer-like even as the calendar formally marks the transition toward autumn.

Transportation operators, including JR Group railways and domestic airlines, typically see a meaningful bump in demand around the equinox holiday, prompting advance seat sales and, in peak years, additional service on the most heavily traveled routes connecting major cities to popular domestic destinations.

The equinox holiday's timing this year follows closely on an unusually eventful news period, with the Okinawa election, the Asian Games opening and ongoing central bank decisions all competing for attention in the weeks immediately preceding what is, for many households, simply a welcome multi-day break from routine.

SOCIETY

Okinawa Tourism Sector Watches Political Transition Closely

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

Okinawa's tourism industry, the prefecture's largest economic sector, is watching Sunday's gubernatorial transition closely given incoming Governor Genta Koja's explicit campaign pledge to reduce the prefecture's economic dependence on tourism revenue through broader diversification efforts.

Tourism operators have expressed cautious optimism about a governor prioritizing economic development more broadly, even as some voice concern that diversification rhetoric could translate into reduced policy attention or resources for an industry that remains, regardless of diversification ambitions, the prefecture's single largest employer and revenue source for the foreseeable future.

Okinawa's tourism recovery since the pandemic has proceeded unevenly across different visitor segments, with domestic tourism rebounding more quickly than inbound international visitors, whose return has depended substantially on broader regional travel patterns and currency dynamics affecting how affordable Japan appears to visitors from key source markets.

Koja's own campaign statements suggested economic diversification would build alongside rather than instead of continued tourism development, a framing tourism industry representatives have generally welcomed even as they wait for more concrete policy detail once the new administration takes office.

The prefecture's tourism infrastructure, including hotel capacity, transportation links and cultural attraction development, has absorbed significant investment over the past decade, representing a sunk institutional commitment that makes any dramatic near-term shift away from tourism-centered economic policy difficult regardless of a new governor's stated priorities.

Kumamoto Recovery Enters Eleventh Week

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Kumamoto Prefecture's earthquake and flood recovery entered its eleventh week Monday, with officials continuing to process livelihood-recovery grants even as administrative resources remain stretched managing two overlapping disaster responses that began weeks apart earlier this summer.

The dual-track recovery, covered extensively in recent weeks, continues serving as a closely watched case study for disaster planners elsewhere in Japan assessing their own preparedness for compounded rather than sequential disaster scenarios, a planning consideration that gained fresh relevance given the volcanic alert activity now also unfolding in Hokkaido.

Prefectural officials report gradual but steady progress on both the earthquake and flood recovery tracks, with displaced-resident numbers continuing their slow decline as the more administratively complex remaining cases, involving contested property boundaries and residents without immediate family support, work through the system.

Tourism officials in the prefecture continue monitoring advance bookings for the autumn travel season, with earlier reporting on encouraging Silver Week demand suggesting the region's dual recovery has not significantly deterred domestic travel interest.

The Digital Agency's AI-assisted damage-assessment tool remains operational under its extended emergency authorization, with officials expected to face a decision in the coming weeks on whether to extend that authorization further or transition to standard administrative processes as the recovery matures.

Japan Manages Disaster Response Across Multiple Fronts Simultaneously

Kumamoto's recovery, Mount Tokachi's volcanic alert and a stalled rain front are all active at once, testing national coordination capacity

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Japan's disaster-response apparatus is managing simultaneous challenges this week: Kumamoto's ongoing dual-track earthquake and flood recovery entering its eleventh week, Mount Tokachi's volcanic alert and hot spring area evacuation in Hokkaido, and a stalled autumn rain front threatening additional flooding along the Sea of Japan coast.

National disaster coordination agencies maintain standing capacity designed to handle multiple simultaneous incidents, though the practical reality of coordinating attention, resources and public communication across distinct disaster types in different regions simultaneously tests that capacity in ways a single, geographically concentrated disaster does not.

Each of the three active situations carries its own distinct risk profile and required response, from Kumamoto's continued administrative and humanitarian recovery work to Mount Tokachi's need for continued seismic monitoring to determine whether the volcanic alert level should eventually be raised further or safely reduced.

Disaster-management specialists describe this kind of multi-front simultaneous response as an increasingly relevant planning scenario for Japan, given the country's exposure to earthquakes, volcanic activity, typhoons and seasonal flooding simultaneously across a geographically extensive and geologically active archipelago.

Public attention inevitably concentrates on whichever situation carries the most acute immediate danger, a dynamic that can leave longer-running recoveries like Kumamoto's own dual-track effort with less sustained public and media attention even as the underlying humanitarian and administrative needs continue without interruption.

International Visitors in Okinawa Take Note of Election Atmosphere

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

International visitors touring Okinawa over the weekend found themselves amid the prefecture's most consequential election in over a decade, with campaign activity, polling stations and Sunday night's victory celebrations forming an unexpected backdrop to what many tourists had planned as a straightforward beach and cultural holiday.

Okinawa's tourism industry generally operates independently of the prefecture's periodic political drama, with visitor-facing businesses reporting minimal disruption to normal operations even during an election weekend that dominated domestic Japanese news coverage.

Some international visitors interviewed informally by domestic media expressed surprise at the visible campaign infrastructure, including sound trucks and campaign signage, that remains a distinctive feature of Japanese electoral culture and differs noticeably from campaign practices in many visitors' home countries.

Sunday night's victory celebration, held in a public setting that drew both supporters and curious onlookers, offered some visitors an unplanned glimpse of Japanese political culture and Okinawan cultural symbolism, including the daruma and shisa imagery incorporated into the celebration itself.

Tourism operators note that election-related disruption to visitor experience in Okinawa has historically been minimal regardless of how consequential the underlying political stakes, with polling stations and campaign activity generally concentrated in areas and formats that do not meaningfully intersect with typical tourist itineraries.

The prefecture's tourism sector will move forward largely unaffected by the leadership transition in the immediate term, even as the longer-term policy questions raised by Koja's diversification agenda remain relevant to the industry's future trajectory.

SOCIETY & SPORTS

Narita and Haneda's Complementary Roles Shape Tokyo's Air Gateway

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Narita Airport's weekend Air Day festival offers a useful moment to consider the complementary roles Narita and Haneda play in serving Tokyo's enormous air travel demand, with the two facilities together forming one of the world's busiest metropolitan air gateway systems despite their distinct operational histories and geographic positioning.

Narita, opened in 1978 after a famously contentious construction period, has traditionally handled a larger share of long-haul international traffic, while Haneda's more central location has made it increasingly important for both domestic connections and, in recent years, an expanding share of international routes as well.

The division of labor between the two airports has shifted gradually over decades, with policy decisions about international route allocation between Narita and Haneda periodically becoming a matter of genuine debate among airlines, government regulators and the surrounding communities affected by flight paths and noise.

Both airports have continued infrastructure investment aimed at expanding capacity and improving passenger experience, reflecting Tokyo's enduring position as one of Asia's most significant air travel hubs regardless of which specific facility handles any individual route.

Air Day-style public events, offered periodically at both airports, serve the dual purpose of public relations and genuine educational value, giving ordinary visitors a rare window into the operational complexity required to manage the flight volumes both facilities handle daily.

The two-airport system's continued evolution will likely remain a recurring policy and planning topic as Tokyo's air travel demand continues growing alongside the broader tourism boom that has characterized Japan's post-pandemic recovery.

Men's Volleyball Beats Iran to Claim Asian Championship, Books LA Spot

The win sends Japan to an eleventh Olympic appearance and a second straight Games qualification

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Japan's men's national volleyball team defeated Iran to win the Asian Championship, securing qualification for the Los Angeles Olympics in the process, according to Yomiuri Shimbun. The result marks the eleventh Olympic appearance in program history and the second consecutive Games the team has qualified for directly through continental competition.

Beating Iran for a continental title carries particular weight given the Iranian program's own sustained strength in Asian volleyball over the past decade, making Sunday's win as much a statement about Japan's current competitive standing in the region as it is a qualification milestone on its own.

Back-to-back Olympic qualifications reflect a program that has built consistent depth rather than relying on a single golden generation, with the current roster blending established international players with younger talent brought through Japan's domestic V.League system in recent seasons.

Continental qualification carries genuine competitive advantage beyond simply securing a berth, allowing the coaching staff to plan preparation and roster development around a confirmed Olympic timeline rather than waiting on a separate, often more uncertain world qualification tournament that other federations must navigate.

Volleyball has maintained a devoted domestic following in Japan across multiple generations, with the men's program's recent international success helping sustain broadcast and sponsorship interest in a sport that, while never rivaling baseball's national following, occupies a secure place in the country's broader sporting culture.

Coaching staff and players alike are expected to shift focus toward Olympic preparation in the months ahead, with roster decisions, training camp scheduling and tune-up competitions against other qualified nations all following from Sunday's result.

Aonishiki Opens Aki Basho With a Win on His Return to Ozeki

The Ukrainian-born wrestler regained sumo's second-highest rank on the September banzuke after a 12-3 finish in Nagoya

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Ozeki Aonishiki opened the Aki Basho with a win on the tournament's first day, according to NHK, a solid start for a wrestler competing at sumo's second-highest rank for the first time since regaining it on the banzuke published at the end of August.

Aonishiki Arata, born Danylo Yavhusishyn in Vinnytsia and the first Ukrainian to win a top-division championship, reached ozeki in just 14 tournaments after his professional debut in September 2023, the fastest promotion to the rank since the modern six-tournament calendar was introduced in 1958.

He entered this tournament having spent July's Nagoya basho ranked at sekiwake, where a 12-3 finish was enough to trigger the automatic return to ozeki that sumo's rules grant a recently demoted wrestler who posts ten or more wins in the tournament immediately following. The September banzuke duly placed him back at ozeki on the east side.

Two reigning yokozuna, Onosato of Japan and Mongolian-born Hoshoryu, head the rest of the field, with sumo's traditional scheduling structure keeping the highest-ranked wrestlers apart until the second week rather than front-loading the tournament's most consequential matchups into its opening days.

Sunday's card drew the sold-out crowds organizers had anticipated for weeks, with tickets for the full fifteen-day run having gone well in advance, a demand pattern the Japan Sumo Association has attributed substantially to sumo's continuing wave of international popularity.

Aonishiki's three top-division championships, the first of which came at Fukuoka in November 2025 with a tie-breaking victory over Hoshoryu, have made him the most closely watched yokozuna candidate in years, though promotion to the sport's highest rank would require a sustained run of tournament-winning form rather than any single strong result.

Ryogoku's surrounding district has seen a marked increase in visitor traffic tied to the tournament's opening, with restaurants and shops catering to sumo visitors reporting business volumes well above recent-year norms for an opening weekend.

SoftBank Wins Sixth Straight as Hanshin's Skid Reaches Five

Yomiuri's own three-game winning streak ended Sunday, while Nippon-Ham snapped a three-game slide

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Fukuoka SoftBank extended its winning streak to six games Sunday, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, tightening the Hawks' grip on a Pacific League pennant that has looked increasingly like a formality for weeks even as the club continues piling up wins down the stretch rather than easing off with the title all but secured.

Central League leader Hanshin suffered its longest losing streak of the season, reaching five games Sunday, a skid that has coincided directly with Yomiuri's own recent surge and narrowed what was once a comfortable Tigers lead down to a margin measured in single games heading into the season's final weeks.

Yomiuri's own three-game winning streak came to an end Sunday, with the club managing little of the sharp pitching or timely hitting that had powered its recent stretch-run charge, a quieter performance that, combined with Hanshin's own struggles, still left the standings gap between the two clubs essentially unchanged.

Hokkaido Nippon-Ham snapped its own three-game losing streak Sunday, a result that keeps the club within striking distance in the Pacific League's second-place race even as SoftBank's own dominance atop the standings leaves little drama at the top of that league.

The Central League race has become the more closely contested story down the stretch, with Hanshin's five-game skid arriving at almost the worst possible moment for a club that entered September with what looked like a comfortable enough cushion to withstand exactly this kind of rough patch without real jeopardy.

Pennant races in both leagues now enter their final stretch with genuine stakes still attached, a contrast to some recent seasons where one or both league titles had been functionally decided well before the calendar turned to the season's final month.

Individual performances across Sunday's full slate will be detailed in box scores available through standard NPB reporting channels, with the standings themselves telling the more consequential story of a Central League race that has tightened considerably faster than most preseason expectations anticipated.

SPORTS

Nozomi Tanaka Sets Tournament Record in 800m, Outside Her Specialty

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Distance runner Nozomi Tanaka set a new tournament record in the 800 meters, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, a notable result given the event sits outside her established specialty distances and represents a different tactical and physiological challenge than the events that built her reputation.

Tanaka has built her competitive career primarily around longer middle-distance events, making a record-setting run at 800 meters a sign of range that track observers will likely read as evidence of broader competitive development rather than a one-off result confined to a single favorable race.

The 800 meters demands a different pacing strategy and energy-system emphasis than the longer distances that have defined Tanaka's career to date, requiring a blend of aerobic capacity and raw speed that not every accomplished distance runner successfully translates across event distances.

Japanese middle-distance running has produced a steady stream of internationally competitive athletes in recent Olympic cycles, and a result of this kind adds to the broader case that the country's distance program has developed genuine depth extending beyond any single signature event or athlete.

Coaching staff working with Tanaka will likely weigh whether Sunday's performance signals a genuine tactical shift toward incorporating shorter-distance racing into her competitive calendar, or whether it remains an occasional departure from the longer events that continue to represent her primary international ambitions.

The specific tournament record broken, and by how significant a margin, will likely draw closer scrutiny from track statisticians in the days ahead as the result is fully contextualized against historical marks at the same distance and venue.

Asian Games Torch Relay Passes Through Nakamura Ward Ahead of Opening

Kabuki actor Kankuro Nakamura joined Sunday's relay leg in Nagoya as the Games prepare to open Monday

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

The Asian Games torch relay passed through Nakamura Ward in Nagoya on Sunday, with kabuki actor Kankuro Nakamura among the participants carrying the flame, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, part of the final buildup before the Games formally open Monday across the Aichi-Nagoya host region.

Nakamura's participation reflects a familiar pattern in major international sporting events hosted in Japan, where cultural figures are woven into ceremonial elements like torch relays to connect the athletic competition to broader regional and national cultural identity.

Nagoya's host role marks Japan's first time staging the Asian Games since Hiroshima in 1994, a three-decade gap that organizers have cited repeatedly in justifying the scale of investment poured into venues, transportation infrastructure and broadcast presentation for this particular edition.

Monday's opening ceremony caps months of preparation across the host region, with competition in several sports scheduled to begin even before the formal ceremony itself, a common scheduling pattern for a Games this large given the sheer number of events that must be accommodated within a roughly two-week window.

Local excitement around the Games has built steadily in the Nagoya area in recent weeks, with the torch relay's route through multiple wards and municipalities serving as a rolling public celebration ahead of Monday's formal start, drawing crowds along the relay path throughout Sunday.

Japan enters the competition with specific medal ambitions across basketball, swimming, judo, gymnastics and athletics, according to Japan Sport Council officials, even as China remains the overwhelming favorite in the overall medal count based on the country's dominant performance in recent editions of the Games.

Ohtani Out Until Sept. 26 as Dodgers Call Up Top Prospect De Paula

The two-way star's 15-day injured list placement, required under MLB's rules for players who both pitch and hit, sidelines him for the balance of the regular season

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Shohei Ohtani will not return to the Los Angeles Dodgers lineup until Sept. 26, the team's penultimate regular-season game against the Giants, after his knee and biceps issues forced a 15-day injured list placement rather than the shorter 10-day option available to position players who do not also pitch.

MLB rules require two-way players like Ohtani to serve the longer 15-day minimum regardless of the specific injury's severity, a structural quirk of his unique roster designation that has periodically extended his absences beyond what a purely hitting-focused placement would require.

The Dodgers have called up top prospect Josue De Paula from Double-A Tulsa to absorb the bulk of designated hitter at-bats during Ohtani's absence, a considerable vote of confidence in a 20-year-old who posted a.303 batting average with 27 home runs, 104 RBI, 106 runs and 31 stolen bases across 588 plate appearances before the promotion.

Ohtani enters the injury list having already reached 30 home runs for a sixth consecutive season, a demonstration of sustained power production that has kept him in the National League Most Valuable Player conversation even accounting for the missed time. His season line stands at a.279 average with 80 RBI, a.381 on-base percentage and a.525 slugging mark through his most recent appearance.

De Paula's rapid promotion, skipping Triple-A entirely, reflects both the organization's confidence in his readiness and the practical urgency of filling Ohtani's spot in a lineup built substantially around his offensive production heading into a playoff push.

The Dodgers separately transferred pitcher Eric Lauer to the 60-day injured list with an elbow issue, continuing a pattern of pitching-staff attrition the club has managed throughout the season while still positioning itself for a third consecutive World Series appearance.

Japanese broadcasters and fans have continued following the Dodgers closely despite Ohtani's absence, with the team's championship pedigree and deep roster giving domestic viewers reason to stay engaged through the stretch run regardless of any individual player's specific availability.

Hanshin's Longest Skid of the Season Reshapes the Central League Run-In

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Hanshin absorbed its longest losing streak of the season over the weekend, a five-game slide that arrives at the point in the calendar when a Central League club can least afford one, with the regular season now inside its closing weeks.

Yomiuri's own three-game winning streak ended on the same day, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, with the Giants managing little of the sharp pitching or timely hitting that had powered the run, meaning the weekend did less to reshape the standings than Hanshin's skid alone might have suggested.

That combination, one club's worst stretch of the year running alongside a rival's surge stalling on the final day, is the kind of sequence that tends to leave a race closer than it was without definitively handing momentum to either side.

Hanshin's coaching staff now faces the immediate task of stabilizing the rotation and lineup that produced the five-game slide, with the remaining schedule offering both the clearest route back to form and the clearest risk of the slide extending.

Climax Series seeding is the practical stake behind the standings themselves, since Japan's postseason format grants the regular-season champion a one-game handicap advantage in the Final Stage, making late-season positioning consequential well beyond bragging rights.

Full standings and individual game results are available through official NPB channels, with the pennant picture in both leagues expected to clarify over the season's remaining weeks.

SPORTS

NPB Results and Notes

Compiled by the Sports Desk

SUNDAY RESULTS — Fukuoka SoftBank won its sixth consecutive game. Hokkaido Nippon-Ham snapped a three-game losing streak. Yomiuri's three-game winning streak ended. Hanshin's losing streak reached five games, the club's longest of the season.

PACIFIC LEAGUE — SoftBank's six-game run extends a stretch of form that has kept the Hawks firmly in control of their own position heading into the season's closing weeks.

CENTRAL LEAGUE — Hanshin's five-game slide and the end of Yomiuri's three-game run leave the league's late-season picture tighter than it looked a fortnight ago, with head-to-head meetings still to come.

CLIMAX SERIES FORMAT — Each league's second- and third-place finishers meet in a best-of-three First Stage. The winner advances to a best-of-six Final Stage against the pennant winner, who carries a one-game handicap reflecting the weight of the regular season.

UPCOMING — NPB's regular season runs through Oct. 31, followed by the Climax Series and Japan Series. The Aki Basho runs through Sept. 27 at Ryogoku Kokugikan. Asian Games competition continues in Aichi-Nagoya through late September.

Complete standings and box scores are published nightly through official NPB channels for readers seeking game and player-level detail.

MLB Scoreboard and Notes

Compiled by the Sports Desk

DODGERS ROSTER: Shohei Ohtani (knee/biceps) placed on 15-day injured list, out until Sept. 26. Josue De Paula recalled from Double-A Tulsa to fill designated hitter duties. Eric Lauer (elbow) transferred to 60-day injured list.

OHTANI SEASON LINE:.279 AVG, 30 HR, 80 RBI,.381 OBP,.525 SLG through his most recent appearance, marking a sixth consecutive season reaching the 30-home-run mark.

PLAYOFF PICTURE: Both American League and National League postseason races remain competitive heading into the season's final weeks, with wild-card positioning in each league unsettled among clusters of teams separated by only a handful of games.

JAPANESE PLAYERS WATCH: Yoshinobu Yamamoto continues anchoring the Dodgers rotation with a 2.62 ERA and 171 strikeouts on the season, figures that have kept him among the National League's most effective starting pitchers even as the club's attention focuses on Ohtani's roster timeline.

This scoreboard compiles results and roster notes nightly from official MLB sources, with continuing coverage through the postseason as both the Dodgers' championship push and the broader league playoff picture develop.

DE PAULA WATCH: The 20-year-old's rapid promotion, skipping Triple-A entirely after a .303 average with 27 home runs at Double-A Tulsa, gives the Dodgers a legitimate offensive option rather than a stopgap during Ohtani's absence, according to organizational scouting assessments.

PITCHING DEPTH: Eric Lauer's move to the 60-day injured list continues a pattern of rotation attrition the Dodgers have managed throughout the season, with Yoshinobu Yamamoto's continued frontline production helping offset the loss of depth elsewhere in the staff.

POSTSEASON SEEDING: Both league wild-card races remain tight enough that a single week's results could meaningfully reshuffle seeding heading into October, according to standings analysis, making the season's remaining weeks genuinely consequential beyond the Dodgers' own division position.

Two Yokozuna Head a Deep Aki Basho Field

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

The Aki Basho's fifteen-day run opens with two reigning yokozuna, Onosato and Hoshoryu, heading a field sumo commentators have described as unusually deep in credible championship contenders, alongside an ozeki rank that now again includes Ukrainian-born Aonishiki.

Onosato, the sole Japanese-born wrestler at the sport's highest rank, and Hoshoryu, born in Mongolia, together carry the institutional weight the yokozuna rank imposes: unlike lower-ranked wrestlers, a yokozuna who accumulates too many losses faces pressure to consider retirement rather than simply dropping in rank, a structural feature unique to the position.

Sumo's traditional scheduling keeps the highest-ranked wrestlers facing progressively tougher opposition as a tournament advances, meaning the head-to-head matchups between yokozuna and ozeki that typically decide the Emperor's Cup fall in the second week rather than the opening days.

Hoshoryu enters with a particular piece of recent history to weigh: it was his tie-breaking loss to Aonishiki at Fukuoka in November 2025 that handed the Ukrainian his first top-division championship, a result that began the fastest ascent to ozeki in modern sumo.

Japan Sumo Association officials and longtime observers alike have pointed to this September's competitive depth as a positive development for a sport whose narrative in some recent years centered on a single dominant figure facing comparatively thin opposition.

X League Premier Fall Series Continues With Full Weekend Slate

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Japan's X League Premier American football competition continued its fall series with a full slate of weekend games, extending the season's second half following the two-month summer break that split the newly restructured competition's 11-round schedule.

Unbeaten Obic Seagulls entered the weekend as the league's clear pace-setter, with the club's title defense continuing to draw comparisons to some of the franchise's most dominant historical seasons given how thoroughly the defense has controlled opposing offenses through the season's opening rounds.

The league's expanded, year-round format has succeeded in maintaining genuine competitive stakes deeper into the season than the sport's traditional shorter schedule allowed, with several clubs below Obic still holding realistic postseason positioning heading into the season's final stretch.

Roster turnover continues shaping storylines across the league, with several teams managing quarterback transitions and other personnel changes during the summer break that are now being tested in live competition as the fall series unfolds.

American football's position within Japan's broader sporting landscape remains modest relative to baseball, sumo and soccer, though the X League Premier's restructuring appears to be succeeding in its core goal of raising competitive intensity and sustaining fan attention across a considerably longer season than the sport has traditionally offered domestically.

SPORTS

Japan Opens Asian Games Basketball Against Indonesia

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Japan's basketball team opens Asian Games group play against Indonesia as competition begins ahead of today's formal opening ceremony in Aichi-Nagoya, with the national federation describing this year's squad as a genuine medal contender in a competition China has historically dominated.

Japanese basketball has invested heavily in program development over the past decade, with the domestic B.League's continued growth providing a stronger talent pipeline for national team selection than existed during earlier eras when Japan's program struggled to compete consistently at the continental level.

Indonesia's own basketball program has grown steadily as a competitive force within Southeast Asia, making Japan's opening matchup a genuine test rather than an assumed formality, particularly given how tournament basketball can produce upset results when a confident underdog catches a favorite still finding its competitive rhythm early in a tournament.

Host-nation advantage carries real weight in a tournament of this kind, with Japan's team benefiting from familiar arenas, minimal travel fatigue and substantial home crowd support throughout the group stage and, should the team advance, the knockout rounds that follow.

Japan Basketball Association officials have set specific internal medal targets for this year's squad, according to Japan Sport Council officials, reflecting genuine confidence in the program's current talent level even as China's own roster depth remains the tournament's most significant obstacle to any team's championship ambitions.

Swimming Competition Opens as Japan Targets Multiple Medals

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Swimming competition begins as part of the Asian Games' opening slate, with Japan Sport Council officials having identified the pool as one of the sports where Japanese athletes carry the most realistic medal expectations across the full two-week competition.

Japan's swimming program has maintained consistent international competitiveness across multiple Olympic cycles, with domestic development systems producing a steady stream of internationally ranked swimmers even as the sport's absolute global elite continues to be dominated by a small number of traditional powerhouse nations outside Asia entirely.

Competition against China looms largest for Japanese swimmers hoping to reach the podium, given China's own substantial recent investment in competitive swimming infrastructure and international coaching talent that has narrowed, without eliminating, Japan's traditional regional advantage in the pool.

Host-nation swimmers often report a measurable performance benefit from competing in familiar training and competition conditions, a factor Japanese swimming officials are counting on as a genuine, if modest, advantage heading into the meet's opening events.

Specific event-by-event medal projections have circulated among Japanese sports media in the run-up to the Games, though officials have generally avoided public predictions specific enough to create outsized pressure on individual athletes before competition even begins.

Continuing coverage will track Japan's swimming results as events unfold throughout the Games, alongside the broader medal table picture developing across all sports on the competition's opening days.

Athletics Competition Set to Begin as Nozomi Tanaka's Form Draws Attention

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Track and field competition at the Asian Games gets underway with Japanese distance runner Nozomi Tanaka entering the competition on the strength of Sunday's tournament-record 800-meter performance, a result outside her established specialty distances that has track observers watching her Asian Games campaign with particular interest.

Japan's athletics program enters the Games with genuine depth across multiple distance events, a program strength built over successive Olympic cycles that has made Japanese distance running one of the country's more consistently competitive international sporting exports even in years without a single breakout individual star.

Tanaka's own range, demonstrated concretely by Sunday's 800-meter record set outside her primary competitive distances, gives Japanese coaching staff genuine flexibility in how they deploy her across the Games' athletics schedule, a luxury not every national team's top distance runner affords their own coaching staff.

Continental athletics competition provides less depth of elite competition than a full Olympic field, though Asian Games track results still carry genuine competitive and historical weight, with performances at this level of competition often serving as meaningful markers in an athlete's broader career trajectory.

China's own athletics program remains the Asian Games' dominant force across most track and field disciplines, making individual Japanese medal performances, particularly in the distance events where Tanaka and her teammates carry realistic expectations, all the more significant against that competitive backdrop.

Lower Division Wrestlers Produce Notable Aki Basho Opening Results

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Sumo's lower divisions produced their own share of notable results on the Aki Basho's opening day, with several young wrestlers posting the kind of surprising wins that sumo traditionalists describe as exactly the career-launching moments retrospectively cited once a wrestler eventually rises through the ranks to greater prominence.

Lower-division bouts, beginning as early as 8 a.m. and continuing through the day before the top-division makuuchi matches in the afternoon, typically draw smaller crowds than the tournament's marquee bouts but offer genuinely unpredictable competition among wrestlers still establishing their competitive identities at the professional level.

Scouts and sumo commentators pay particularly close attention to lower-division performances because today's unheralded competitor occasionally becomes tomorrow's rising star, making the opening days of any tournament a genuine talent-evaluation opportunity beyond the top-division storylines that dominate mainstream coverage.

The Japan Sumo Association's ranking system rewards consistent tournament performance with promotion through a clearly defined hierarchy, giving every wrestler at every level genuine stakes in each individual bout regardless of how far removed they remain from top-division championship contention.

This tournament's opening day lower-division results will factor into promotion and demotion decisions made at the conclusion of the fifteen-day competition, with cumulative win-loss records across the full tournament, rather than any single day's results, ultimately determining each wrestler's ranking movement heading into the next tournament.

Continued daily coverage of the Aki Basho will track both the headline top-division championship race and notable lower-division performances throughout the tournament's remaining fourteen days.

SPORTS & CULTURE

How the Climax Series Format Shapes the Season's Closing Weeks

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

NPB's postseason structure gives the closing weeks of the regular season a weight that a simple win-loss table does not fully convey, and this year's run-in, with SoftBank riding a six-game streak and Hanshin absorbing its longest slide of the season, is a reminder of how quickly that picture can move.

The Climax Series pits each league's second- and third-place finishers against one another in a best-of-three First Stage. The survivor then meets the pennant winner in a best-of-six Final Stage, in which the regular-season champion begins with a one-game advantage already banked.

That handicap is the reason late-season positioning matters beyond pride. A club that finishes first does not merely avoid the First Stage; it starts the Final Stage a win to the good, a margin that has decided series in past years.

For clubs chasing second rather than first, the calculation is different but no less pressing, since second place carries the right to host the First Stage, an advantage worth real value across a short series.

Clubs already out of postseason contention shift naturally toward evaluating younger players and managing pitching workloads, a rhythm familiar to anyone who follows the sport's September calendar.

Scheduling for the Climax Series is confirmed once the regular season closes Oct. 31, with the Japan Series to follow.

Japanese Entries Miss Top Prize at Venice; Quartet Fuga Takes Bronze in Munich

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Japanese entries "Look Back" and "Mr. Nelson" both missed out on the top prize at the Venice Film Festival, according to Yomiuri Shimbun and Asahi Shimbun, a result that tempers what had been building anticipation around Japanese cinema's showing at one of the industry's most closely watched festivals this year.

"Look Back," director Hirokazu Kore-eda's latest feature, had already claimed several independent prizes at the festival, making the top-prize result a genuine near-miss rather than a showing without any recognition at all, a distinction worth holding onto given how competitive Venice's main prize field typically runs.

"Mr. Nelson" entered the festival with its own considerable anticipation, and its absence from the top prize list will likely be read by domestic critics as a disappointment relative to expectations, even as festival placement alone rarely determines a film's eventual commercial or critical trajectory once wider release follows.

Separately, at the Munich International Music Competition, Quartet Fuga won third place in the string quartet category, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, a strong result at one of classical music's most demanding and internationally competitive proving grounds for young ensembles.

Munich's competition carries particular prestige within the classical music world, and a podium finish in the string quartet category specifically represents recognition from a jury drawing comparisons across an international field of similarly rigorously trained young ensembles from conservatories worldwide.

Both results, taken together, offer a mixed but genuinely respectable showing for Japanese arts and culture on the international stage this particular weekend, with strong recognition falling short of the very top prize in both the film and music categories rather than missing the podium entirely.

Narita Airport's Air Day Draws Crowds for Rare Control Tower Viewing

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Narita Airport held its annual Air Day festival, including a public viewing opportunity inside the airport's control tower, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, an event that continues to draw sustained interest from aviation enthusiasts and families looking for a rare behind-the-scenes look at one of Japan's busiest international gateways.

Control tower access represents one of the festival's most sought-after attractions precisely because it remains restricted to the public for the rest of the year, giving visitors a direct look at the operational nerve center coordinating arrivals and departures across one of Asia's busiest air travel hubs.

Air Day events at major Japanese airports have grown into a modest but reliable annual tradition, offering airport operators a low-cost way to build public goodwill and generate positive local media coverage while giving aviation-minded visitors, particularly children, direct exposure to careers and operations they might otherwise never see up close.

Narita's role as one of Japan's two primary gateway airports for international travel, alongside Haneda, means the facility handles enormous daily passenger and cargo volumes, making any public event that pulls back the curtain on its operations a genuine curiosity even for visitors without a specific aviation interest.

Airport staff typically volunteer their time to guide festival visitors and answer questions during events of this kind, according to organizers, reflecting the kind of institutional community outreach that has become a standard feature of major infrastructure operators' public relations calendars.

Autumn Kabuki Season Opens in Tokyo Theaters

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Tokyo's major kabuki theaters are opening their autumn programming this week, part of the traditional seasonal calendar that has governed kabuki performance scheduling for generations, with productions typically running several weeks and drawing both dedicated longtime enthusiasts and increasingly a share of international visitors seeking an authentic traditional theater experience.

Autumn kabuki programming often features works distinct from the spring and summer seasonal repertoire, with certain classical pieces traditionally associated with the season's harvest themes and the changing natural world that kabuki's classical repertoire draws on extensively for both plot and visual staging.

Kabuki's continued vitality as a living theatrical tradition, rather than a purely museum-piece cultural artifact, depends substantially on this kind of sustained seasonal programming that gives both performers and audiences a rhythm of anticipation and engagement across the full year rather than concentrating performances into isolated special events.

Ticket pricing for premium kabuki performances has climbed in recent years alongside the broader tourism-driven demand affecting other traditional Japanese cultural experiences, a dynamic that mirrors the ticket-pricing tension sumo's own tourism boom has created between accessibility for longtime domestic fans and market-driven pricing for high-demand performances.

Training for kabuki's specific performance traditions, including the onnagata female-role specialization and the distinctive vocal and movement techniques passed down through specific acting families, continues through an apprenticeship system that has remained remarkably stable in structure even as the broader entertainment landscape around it has transformed completely.

CULTURE

Akiya Renovation Culture Continues Growing Amid Vacant Home Crisis

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Interest in renovating Japan's vacant akiya homes continues growing as a distinct cultural and lifestyle trend, extending well beyond the purely economic real estate story of a country grappling with millions of abandoned properties amid sustained rural depopulation.

Social media content documenting akiya renovation projects, often undertaken by younger buyers or foreign purchasers drawn by dramatically low purchase prices relative to urban housing costs, has helped popularize a renovation culture that treats these often decades-neglected properties as creative and lifestyle projects rather than purely distressed assets.

Municipal governments in areas with high akiya concentrations have increasingly supported this renovation trend through subsidy programs and streamlined property transfer processes, recognizing that successfully renovated and occupied akiya properties deliver genuine community and tax-base benefits that abandoned, decaying structures do not.

The renovation trend intersects directly with Japan's broader rural revitalization challenge, since a successfully renovated akiya occupied by a new resident, whether domestic or foreign, represents exactly the kind of population retention or attraction rural communities facing demographic decline are actively seeking.

Renovation costs and structural challenges vary enormously across individual akiya properties, with buyers needing to weigh a property's specific condition, including foundation integrity, roofing and plumbing systems that may not have been maintained for years, against the property's low acquisition cost before committing to a renovation project.

Whether the current renovation trend meaningfully dents Japan's overall akiya inventory, now numbering in the millions of vacant properties nationwide, remains an open question given the sheer scale of the underlying vacancy crisis relative to the comparatively modest number of properties any individual renovation trend, however culturally visible, can realistically address.

Shisa and Daruma: The Symbols Behind Sunday's Victory Celebration

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

The daruma doll lifted at Genta Koja's victory celebration Sunday carries its own specific tradition within Japanese political culture, with candidates and their supporters customarily painting in one eye of a daruma figure upon declaring candidacy and completing the second eye only once victory is confirmed, a ritual practiced across Japanese elections at every level from local council races to national contests.

The daruma's origins trace to Bodhidharma, the semi-legendary founder of Zen Buddhism, with the doll's rounded, weighted base designed so it always returns upright when tipped over, a physical property that has made the figure a broader Japanese symbol of resilience and perseverance through setbacks well beyond its specific electoral application.

The green shisa figure also visible at Sunday's celebration carries distinctly Okinawan rather than mainland Japanese symbolism, with shisa, lion-dog guardian statues rooted in Ryukyuan tradition predating Okinawa's formal incorporation into Japan, traditionally placed at building entrances to ward off evil spirits and protect the household or community within.

Pairing daruma and shisa symbolism at Sunday's celebration reflected a deliberate visual statement about Koja's own identity as both a participant in mainland Japanese electoral tradition and a candidate rooted in Okinawan cultural heritage, a duality that ran through much of his campaign's broader messaging.

Shisa figures remain a ubiquitous presence across Okinawa, appearing on rooftops, at building entrances and increasingly as tourist souvenirs, making the figure both a genuine piece of living cultural tradition and a commercially significant symbol of Okinawan identity marketed heavily to visitors.

Nagoya Prepares to Host Japan's First Asian Games Since 1994

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Nagoya's role hosting this year's Asian Games marks Japan's first time staging the competition since Hiroshima in 1994, a three-decade gap that host-region officials have cited repeatedly in justifying the scale of investment poured into venues, transportation infrastructure and broadcast presentation for this particular edition.

The Aichi-Nagoya region's existing industrial and economic strength, anchored substantially by Toyota's automotive manufacturing base, gave organizers a genuine infrastructure and logistics advantage in preparing for a Games of this scale compared with some prior host cities that required more extensive ground-up infrastructure development.

Local cultural programming surrounding the Games has drawn on the region's own distinct heritage, including the torch relay's incorporation of kabuki actor Kankuro Nakamura, reflecting a broader effort to weave regional cultural identity into what is fundamentally an international athletic competition.

Hosting a Games of this scale carries genuine economic stakes for the region beyond the immediate tourism and broadcast revenue, with organizers and local officials hoping the infrastructure investment and international visibility produce lasting benefits extending well past the roughly two-week competition itself.

Nagoya's hosting bid succeeded amid competition from other potential Asian host cities, reflecting both the strength of Japan's specific proposal and broader regional dynamics in international sports hosting decisions that increasingly weigh financial sustainability alongside a bidding city's raw infrastructure capacity.

Kore-eda's 'Look Back' Builds on a Career of Festival Recognition

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Hirokazu Kore-eda's "Look Back," which claimed several independent prizes at Venice before missing the festival's top award, continues a career pattern for the director that has included sustained international festival recognition across multiple prior films spanning family drama and social realism.

Kore-eda's international reputation has grown steadily since his earlier festival breakthroughs, building an audience among serious international cinema followers who track his work independently of whichever specific prize any individual film ultimately claims or misses.

The film's reception at Venice, drawing independent prizes without the top award, mirrors a pattern seen periodically across major festivals in which a strong film competes in an unusually deep field rather than facing any specific weakness in the work itself.

Domestic Japanese audiences typically show renewed interest in a director's work following international festival attention, regardless of whether the specific result involves the top prize, giving "Look Back" a commercial tailwind heading toward wider release independent of Sunday's specific outcome.

Kore-eda has continued working across a range of subject matter throughout his career rather than repeating a single successful formula, a pattern that has kept international festival programmers and critics engaged with each new release as a distinct artistic statement.

EDITORIAL & OPINION



TODAY'S CARTOON

"A pause that only one side keeps is not safety. It is surrender on the installment plan." — 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.

Whoever Wins AI Wins

A pause kept by only one side is not caution. Today's cartoon makes that case bluntly, and the argument holds up better than its critics usually credit

By Samantha Ortiz | Editorial Page Editor

Taro Suzuki's cartoon this morning places Uncle Sam in the middle of a road, arms spread wide beneath a banner reading "Whoever Wins AI Wins," one hand gesturing toward an American lane marked "Deploy, Iterate, Win the Stack" and the other toward a Chinese industrial-AI complex whose own sign reads simply, "No pause. State scale." Behind him, a column of robots marches under a checkered flag and a banner promising "Strategic Primacy." In front of him, protesters carry signs reading "Pause the Frontier" and "Killer Robots Coming Soon?" On the table at the bottom of the frame sit the objects that make the cartoon's real argument: a laptop running system diagnostics, a robotic arm labeled "Real Tools, Real Work," a checklist reading "Engineering Problems Have Owners: Alignment, Safety, Control, Advantage," and a plain wooden sign that states the whole case in nine words: "Risks Are Real. Forfeit Is Worse." The caption beneath the scene is a single sentence worth sitting with before anything else gets said about it: a pause that only one side keeps is not safety. It is surrender on the installment plan.

That sentence deserves to be taken seriously on its own terms rather than dismissed as boosterism dressed up in safety language, and it deserves an honest reckoning with what it gets right and where it asks readers to accept more than the cartoon's own evidence actually earns. Start with what it gets right, because the case is stronger than most unilateral-pause advocates like to admit.

China's approach to artificial intelligence development has never pretended to be anything other than state-directed industrial policy at national scale. Beijing has poured resources into AI manufacturing integration, into robotics deployment across factory floors, into data infrastructure treated as a matter of national competitiveness rather than a subject for open ethical debate. There is no meaningful domestic constituency inside China's AI industrial complex arguing for a voluntary capability pause, no equivalent of the open letters and moratorium proposals that periodically circulate through American and European AI research communities. The Chinese state has made its intentions plain: deploy AI as a tool of national industrial and military advantage, at scale, without waiting for an international consensus on safety norms that shows no sign of actually arriving. A government that has watched this unfold for the better part of a decade has no particular reason to expect that pattern to change merely because American AI labs decide, on their own initiative, to slow down.

Given that reality, the specific proposals that periodically surface under the banner of pausing frontier AI development carry a structural problem their advocates rarely address head-on: who, exactly, is bound by the pause? If the answer is only American and allied labs, operating under boards, governments and legal systems that can actually enforce a moratorium, then the pause does not reduce the world's exposure to advanced AI capability. It reduces only the exposure that comes from capability sitting in the hands of the labs most likely to have invested in the alignment, safety and control research the cartoon's own checklist names explicitly. Capability does not stop accumulating globally because the most safety-conscious developers stop accumulating it themselves. It simply migrates toward whoever keeps building, and on the available evidence, the entity most likely to keep building without pause is a state apparatus that has shown considerably less public interest in alignment research than the labs a voluntary pause would actually restrain.

This is the cartoon's central argument, stated in the caption with more bluntness than most policy papers manage: a pause kept by only one side does not produce a world with less dangerous AI in it. It produces a world where the AI that does get built is disproportionately built by the side least inclined to worry about the problem in the first place. Forfeiting the frontier does not eliminate frontier risk. It just transfers the frontier to whoever picks up what was set down, and there is no reason to expect the party picking it up shares the caution of the party who set it down.

None of this means the protesters in Suzuki's own cartoon are simply wrong, and a fair editorial owes them a genuine hearing rather than a caricature. "Killer robots coming soon?" is a cheap-looking sign, but the underlying concern it gestures toward, that increasingly autonomous and increasingly capable AI systems embedded in physical robotics raise real questions about control, accountability and unintended escalation, is not a cheap concern. Anyone who has followed the actual research literature on AI alignment knows the open technical problems are genuine: ensuring advanced systems reliably pursue the goals their operators intend rather than proxies for those goals, maintaining meaningful human oversight as systems grow more capable and more autonomous, preventing capability from outrunning the tools available to verify what a system will actually do in situations its training did not anticipate. "Pause the Frontier" is a slogan, but underneath the slogan sits a genuine research community doing serious work on exactly the problems the cartoon's own checklist lists as having owners: alignment, safety, control.

Continued on Page 20

EDITORIAL & OPINION

Whoever Wins AI Wins — Continued from Page 19

The honest disagreement, then, is not between people who think AI risk is real and people who think it is fake. It is a disagreement about the right response to a difficult problem under difficult competitive constraints. One camp argues the responsible path is to slow down capability development until safety research catches up, even if that means accepting a period where the most cautious developers fall behind less cautious ones. The other camp, the one the cartoon is making its case for, argues that falling behind is not actually a safety-preserving move once you account for who fills the gap, and that the more responsible path is to keep building while investing heavily in exactly the alignment, safety and control work the checklist names, rather than setting down the tools that let you do that work at the capability frontier where it actually matters.

Put simply: safety research conducted on yesterday's models does not straightforwardly transfer to tomorrow's, and a lab that stops advancing its own frontier capability in the name of caution does not thereby gain more time to solve alignment. It gains less relevance to the problem, as the frontier itself continues moving without it, driven by developers under no comparable safety constraint. The laptop on Suzuki's table, running system diagnostics, and the checklist beside it are doing real work in the composition: they are the argument that responsible AI development looks like active, engaged safety engineering conducted by people still building at the frontier, not abstention by people who have stepped back from it.

Where does this leave Japan, a country with genuine AI ambitions of its own but nothing resembling the raw compute scale or capital depth of either Washington's frontier labs or Beijing's state-directed industrial complex? The honest answer is that Japan's own AI policy has consistently favored a lighter-touch, guidance-based approach over binding statutory constraint, a posture examined in these pages before and one that sits closer to the American lane in Suzuki's cartoon than to either the European Union's more heavily regulated model or China's state-scaled industrial approach. That positioning was defensible on its own terms as a bet that flexibility would serve a mid-sized AI power better than premature binding rules. Today's cartoon adds a sharper edge to that same argument: in a genuine two-power race for AI primacy, a third country's own domestic regulatory caution matters considerably less to the global outcome than which of the two frontier powers, America or China, ultimately sets the terms other countries, Japan very much included, will eventually have to operate under.

That is the strategic stake underneath the safety debate, and it is worth stating plainly rather than leaving implicit: American AI primacy and Chinese AI primacy are not equivalent outcomes for a country like Japan, regardless of how the underlying safety questions eventually resolve. An American-led AI order operates through allied institutions, export-control frameworks, and technology-sharing relationships Japan already participates in and has helped shape, imperfectly, but through channels where Japanese interests get a genuine hearing. A Chinese-led AI order would operate through an entirely different set of institutions, ones Japan has no comparable voice within and every reason, given the security environment covered extensively elsewhere in these pages this month, to expect would not weigh Japanese interests favorably. Whoever wins AI does not just win a commercial and military technology race. They win disproportionate influence over the rules, standards and dependencies that everyone else, allies and rivals alike, will have to live inside afterward. A Japan-first view of this question cannot be indifferent to which side wins that contest, even while taking the underlying safety concerns seriously on their own terms.

This is not an argument for recklessness, and it would be a genuine misreading of both the cartoon and the case being made here to take it that way. The checklist in the composition's corner, "Engineering Problems Have Owners: Alignment, Safety, Control, Advantage," is doing exactly the work a responsible version of this argument requires: naming safety and control as engineering problems to be solved through continued, well-resourced work, not concerns to be waved away. "Risks Are Real. Forfeit Is Worse" is not a claim that risks are fake. It is a claim about comparative risk: the risk of continued, safety-invested development against the risk of ceding frontier capability to a competitor with a demonstrably different risk tolerance and a demonstrably different set of institutional checks on how that capability eventually gets deployed.

Critics of this position will point out, correctly, that competitive pressure has its own well-documented tendency to erode safety margins even among developers who intend to maintain them. A race dynamic, once underway, creates incentives to cut corners, to ship capability before safety validation is fully complete, to treat alignment research as a cost center competing against product timelines rather than a precondition for responsible deployment. This is a real dynamic, observed across other high-stakes technology competitions historically, and it deserves to be named directly rather than argued around. The honest response is not that competitive pressure poses no risk to safety discipline. It is that the alternative, unilateral restraint by the safety-conscious side alone, does not remove that pressure from the system. It simply removes the safety-conscious side's own influence over how the pressure gets managed, while leaving the pressure itself, and the less safety-conscious competitor responding to it, fully in place.

There is also a fair question about whether "whoever wins AI wins" overstates AI's determinative power relative to the many other factors, economic, military, demographic, diplomatic, that shape which nations hold genuine global influence a generation from now. AI capability is unlikely to be the single variable that decides everything, and a cartoon compressed into a single frame necessarily compresses a more complicated argument into its most forceful form. But the underlying claim does not need to be literally total to be substantially true: a technology this general-purpose, this economically and militarily consequential, confers real and probably durable advantage on whichever power ends up setting its terms, even if it is not, by itself, sufficient to guarantee every other dimension of national strength.

Where the cartoon's argument runs into its most legitimate limit is at the question of verification and trust, an issue the composition itself does not really address. "Deploy, Iterate, Win the Stack" assumes American developers can, in fact, maintain the safety discipline the checklist calls for while also moving fast enough to stay ahead of a state-scaled competitor operating with fewer safety commitments of its own. That is an empirical bet, not a settled fact, and the honest version of this argument should say so plainly rather than assuming continued American technical leadership and continued safety discipline are automatically compatible outcomes rather than two things that could, in a sufficiently intense competitive environment, start trading off against each other. The checklist's confidence that alignment, safety and control all have owners capable of doing the work does not by itself guarantee those owners will be given the resources, time and organizational priority the work actually requires once competitive pressure intensifies further.

Continued on Page 21

EDITORIAL & OPINION

Whoever Wins AI Wins — Continued from Page 20

That caveat matters, and a serious editorial position on this question should hold two things simultaneously rather than resolving the tension too cleanly in either direction: the case against a unilateral pause is strong, for exactly the reasons the cartoon lays out, and the case for taking alignment and safety research seriously, funding it adequately, and building institutional structures that keep safety work from simply losing every competitive-pressure trade-off, is equally strong and does not disappear just because the pause argument fails. The right reading of today's cartoon is not "safety concerns are overblown." It is "safety concerns are real enough that the side most likely to take them seriously should stay in the race rather than leave the field to the side least likely to take them seriously at all."

Japan's own position in this contest remains modest by the standards of the two frontier powers, but modest does not mean irrelevant. Japanese semiconductor manufacturing capacity, examined at length in recent coverage of the domestic chip revival effort, sits directly inside the supply chain both American and Chinese AI development ultimately depend on. Japanese firms supplying specialized equipment, materials and components to the global AI hardware buildout have genuine leverage in exactly the technology-transfer and export-control debates that determine how much of the American lane's advantage actually holds against Chinese industrial-scale deployment. A Japan-first reading of the current AI competition treats that supply-chain position as strategic leverage to be used deliberately in service of the outcome, American-led AI primacy over Chinese-led AI primacy, that serves Japanese interests, rather than as a purely commercial relationship to be managed for revenue alone.

International comparison sharpens the stakes further. Europe has pursued the opposite bet from either American or Chinese AI policy, building the most comprehensive binding regulatory framework of any major economy through the AI Act, prioritizing precaution and enforceable constraint over speed of deployment. Whatever the framework's merits as domestic policy, Europe has not emerged from this period as a serious contender for frontier AI capability, and the continent's own technology sector leaders have said as much publicly, warning that a regulatory environment built primarily around constraint rather than competitiveness risks leaving Europe permanently dependent on capability developed elsewhere. That outcome is instructive for exactly the debate the cartoon stages: choosing caution unilaterally does not obviously produce a safer world. It can just as easily produce a world where the cautious party has less say in how the technology actually gets deployed, having ceded the frontier to competitors operating under no comparable constraint.

South Korea and Taiwan offer a different comparison worth weighing alongside Europe's, given their own position, like Japan's, inside the critical semiconductor supply chain that both American and Chinese AI development depend on. Neither country has the scale to compete directly for frontier AI capability, and neither has attempted to. Instead, both have positioned their own industrial strength, chip fabrication and advanced packaging, as leverage within the broader American-led technology alliance, extracting genuine influence over how supply chains and export controls get structured despite lacking frontier-model capability of their own. That model, strategic positioning within an alliance rather than independent frontier competition, describes Japan's most realistic path through the current AI race considerably better than either the unconstrained American lane or the state-directed Chinese complex the cartoon depicts as the two available options. Japan does not need to win the AI race outright to benefit decisively from the correct side winning it.

None of this resolves the genuine philosophical disagreement at the heart of the AI safety debate, and it would overstate the case to pretend a single editorial, or a single cartoon, settles a question serious researchers on multiple sides continue to study in good faith. What today's cartoon accomplishes, at its best, is forcing a version of the question that too much abstract safety discourse manages to avoid: not "should AI development be safe," a question with an obvious answer everyone already agrees on, but "what actually makes AI development safer given that development is going to continue somewhere regardless of what any single actor decides." Framed that way, unilateral restraint by the party most invested in safety research looks considerably less like caution and considerably more like exactly what the caption calls it: surrender, paid out gradually, one ceded advantage at a time, to a competitor who was never going to reciprocate the gesture.

There is a final piece of the composition worth returning to before closing: the robotic arm on the table, labeled plainly, "Real Tools, Real Work." It sits deliberately apart from the marching column of humanoid robots behind Uncle Sam's shoulder, the ones the protest sign asks about with real unease. The distinction the cartoonist is drawing there is not subtle, and it deserves to be stated in words as clearly as Suzuki states it in ink: the AI competition worth winning is not primarily a race to build the most cinematic robot army. It is a race to build the tools, industrial, medical, scientific, that do real work reliably, safely and at scale, with the checklist's own alignment and control commitments genuinely built in rather than bolted on after the fact. Losing that race to a competitor with a different, less careful relationship to those same commitments is the actual risk the cartoon is naming, considerably more than any single dramatic image of marching machines could capture on its own.

Today's cartoon ends where it began, on a single hard sentence, and the argument earns the bluntness of its own closing line. A pause kept by only one side is not caution extended to the whole field. It is a unilateral concession dressed up in the language of caution, one that hands the frontier to whichever competitor was never planning to pause in the first place. The right response to genuine AI risk is not for the safety-conscious developer to leave the race. It is for the safety-conscious developer to stay in it, fully resourced on exactly the alignment, safety and control work the checklist names, precisely because staying in the race is the only path that keeps safety-minded engineering anywhere near the actual frontier where the risk lives. Suzuki's cartoon, and the case behind it, deserve to be read in that spirit rather than dismissed as mere hawkishness dressed up in a lab coat.



OUR STAFF — THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE JAPAN MORNING POST

Japan-first, alliance-first. Founded in service of accurate coverage of Japan's security, industry, families and culture.

OWNER:

Paul Carter | PUBLISHER: WPM Productions

MANAGING EDITOR:

Dixon Yan

SENIOR EDITOR, INTERNATIONAL DESK:

Jonathan Mercer

POLITICS & POLICY:

Michael Hayes, Deputy Editor | William, Senior Political Analyst

JAPAN BUREAU:

Aiko Tanaka, Senior Japan Correspondent | Emi Kondo, Society & Local News

ECONOMICS & FINANCE:

Yuki Saito | DATA & VISUALIZATION: Kenta Sakamoto

JAPAN-U.S. COVERAGE:

Rachel Kim, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

INVESTIGATIONS & LONGFORM:

Daisuke Ito

TECHNOLOGY & SCIENCE:

Ethan Cole, Editor | Maya Suzuki, Science & Innovation

CULTURE & SOCIETY:

Naomi Kato, Editor

SPORTS:

Oliver Brooks, Desk Editor | Haruto Yamamoto, Reporter

FOOD & RESTAURANTS:

Grace Park | REAL ESTATE & URBAN DEVELOPMENT: Kenji Fukuda

EDITORIAL PAGE:

Samantha Ortiz, Editor

PHOTO EDITOR:

Hiroshi Nakamura, Tokyo | GRAPHICS DIRECTOR: Claire Reynolds

STAFF CARTOONIST:

Taro Suzuki | CROSSWORD: James O'Neill, Editor & Constructor

COPY DESK:

Benjamin Lee, Chief | Olivia Martinez, Features

MULTIMEDIA & VIDEO:

Akira Watanabe | RESEARCH & ARCHIVE: Hana Ito

PAGE DESIGN & PRODUCTION:

Daniel Foster

1-2-3 Otemachi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0004 | www.japanmorningpost.com | newsdesk@japanmorningpost.com

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 that rules him out until Sept. 26.

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 the 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.

EDITORIAL STANDARDS & PRACTICE

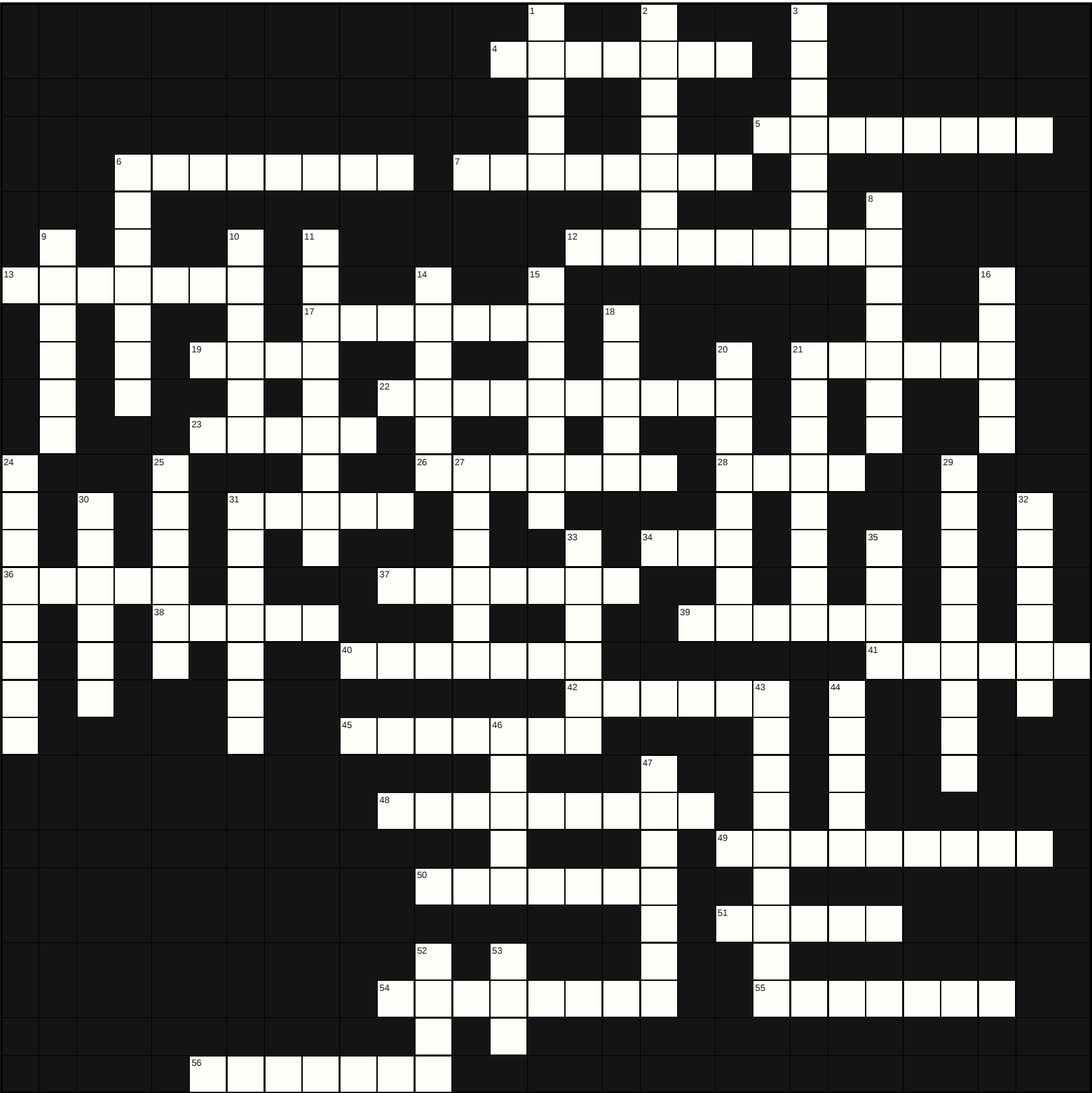
The Japan Morning Post is edited and produced independently of WPM Productions' ownership. News reporting and editorial opinion are kept separate: articles appearing under the Editorial & Opinion banner reflect the newspaper's institutional view or that of a named columnist; all other reporting is written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

Sourcing: The Japan Morning Post 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 — 59 Words



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

ACROSS

4. Resigning Chubu Electric chairman's surname (7)
5. City that decided new council members in a by-election (8)
6. Japan's prime minister (8)
7. Democratic vote, as in Okinawa on Sunday (8)
12. Waiting list for ___ rose for the first time in nine years (9)
13. Shizuoka city where a factory attack injured 15 (7)
17. Director of Look Back, shown at Venice (7)
19. Prefecture where a cake shop owner died in an arson case (4)
21. Vote difference between Sunday's top two Okinawa candidates (6)
22. Sport in which Japan's men beat Iran for a continental title (10)
23. Broader Tokyo market index that held up better than the Nikkei (5)
26. Japanese-born yokozuna heading the Aki Bashi field (7)
28. Team Japan's volleyball squad beat to reach the Olympics (4)
31. What the American lane in today's cartoon says to deploy and win (5)
34. Currency trading near 153 to the dollar (3)
36. Gate marking a Shinto shrine (5)
37. Hokkaido volcano raised to alert Level 3 (7)
38. ___ Electric, utility whose leaders resigned over data fraud (5)
39. Film festival where two Japanese entries missed the top prize (6)
40. Giants club whose own streak ended at three (7)
41. Denny ___, two-term Okinawa governor defeated Sunday (6)
42. Host city of today's Asian Games opening (6)
45. Benefits the Supreme Court ruled foreign residents can be denied (7)
48. Ukrainian-born ozeki who opened the Aki Bashi with a win (9)
49. Country where a ferry capsized, killing at least six (9)
50. Tigers club enduring a five-game losing streak (7)
51. Vessel that capsized with roughly 130 missing (5)
54. City where Nakatani announced a mayoral candidacy (8)
55. Share of eligible voters who cast a ballot, up 3.65 points Sunday (7)
56. City with a four-candidate open mayoral race (7)

DOWN

1. What today's cartoon argues only one side would keep (5)
2. Kyoto district where a water main flooded a shopping street (7)
3. Nuclear plant at the center of the Chubu Electric scandal (7)
6. Tropical storm season running above average this year (7)
8. ___ Reserve, meeting Tuesday and Wednesday this week (7)
9. Traditional Japanese robe (6)
10. Illegal online ___ cases logged by police number over 5,000 (6)
11. Tokyo's sumo arena (9)
14. Relocation site the new Okinawa governor accepts outright (6)
15. Expressway connecting Tokyo and Niigata, site of Sunday's pileup (7)
16. Tokyo ___ prices hit a record average in July (5)
18. Autonomous machine depicted marching in today's cartoon (5)
20. US-Japan security partnership (8)
21. Gunma town where a massive expressway pileup occurred (8)
24. Hawks club on a six-game winning streak (8)
25. City hosting the international music competition Quartet Fuga placed in (6)
27. Tokyo's benchmark stock index (6)
29. AI safety concept paired with control and advantage in today's cartoon (9)
30. Airport that held its annual Air Day festival (6)
31. Feudal Japanese warrior (7)
32. Nozomi ___, distance runner who set an 800m record (6)
33. Sacred Shinto site (6)
35. Japan's national legislature (4)
43. Friday's worst-performing major Nikkei stock (9)
44. Grand sumo tournament now underway (5)
46. ___ Games, opening today in Aichi-Nagoya (5)
47. Prefecture that just elected a new governor (7)
52. Genta ___, winner of the Okinawa governorship (4)
53. Central bank expected to raise rates this week (3)

Asian Games Open Today in Aichi-Nagoya

Japan stages the continent's largest multi-sport event for the first time since 1994, with medal ambitions across basketball, swimming, judo and athletics

The Asian Games open today in Aichi and Nagoya, with competition in several sports having already begun ahead of the formal opening ceremony, a scheduling pattern common to a Games of this size 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 on today's schedule, 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 venues spread throughout the host region.

Sunday's torch relay through Nagoya's Nakamura Ward, which included kabuki actor Kankuro Nakamura among its participants, capped the final ceremonial buildup before today's opening.

Swimming and athletics competition both feature prominently in the opening days' schedule, two disciplines in which Japan Sport Council officials have identified realistic medal expectations across the full two-week programme.

Distance runner Nozomi Tanaka enters the athletics programme on the strength of a tournament-record 800-metre performance set over the weekend, a result outside her established specialty distances that has given Japanese coaching staff additional flexibility in how they deploy her across the schedule.

Local cultural programming surrounding the Games has drawn on the host region's own heritage, reflecting a broader effort to weave regional identity into what is fundamentally an international athletic competition.

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.

The Aichi-Nagoya region's existing industrial and transport infrastructure, anchored substantially by the area's automotive manufacturing base, gave organizers a logistical advantage in preparing for a Games of this scale compared with hosts requiring more extensive ground-up construction.

Daily results and medal-table coverage will continue throughout the Games' roughly two-week run, tracking Japanese performances alongside the broader regional competition.

Host-nation athletes often report a measurable benefit from competing in familiar venues without travel fatigue, an advantage Japanese officials are counting on across several disciplines as competition gets underway.

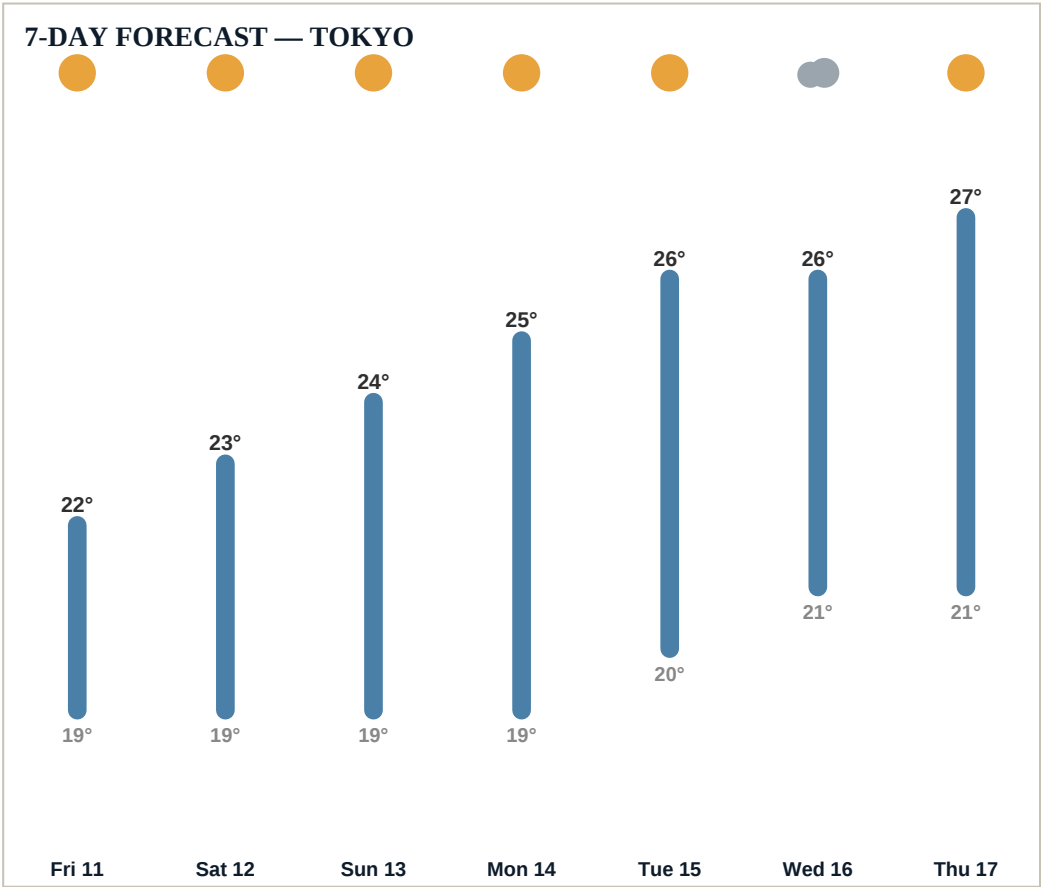
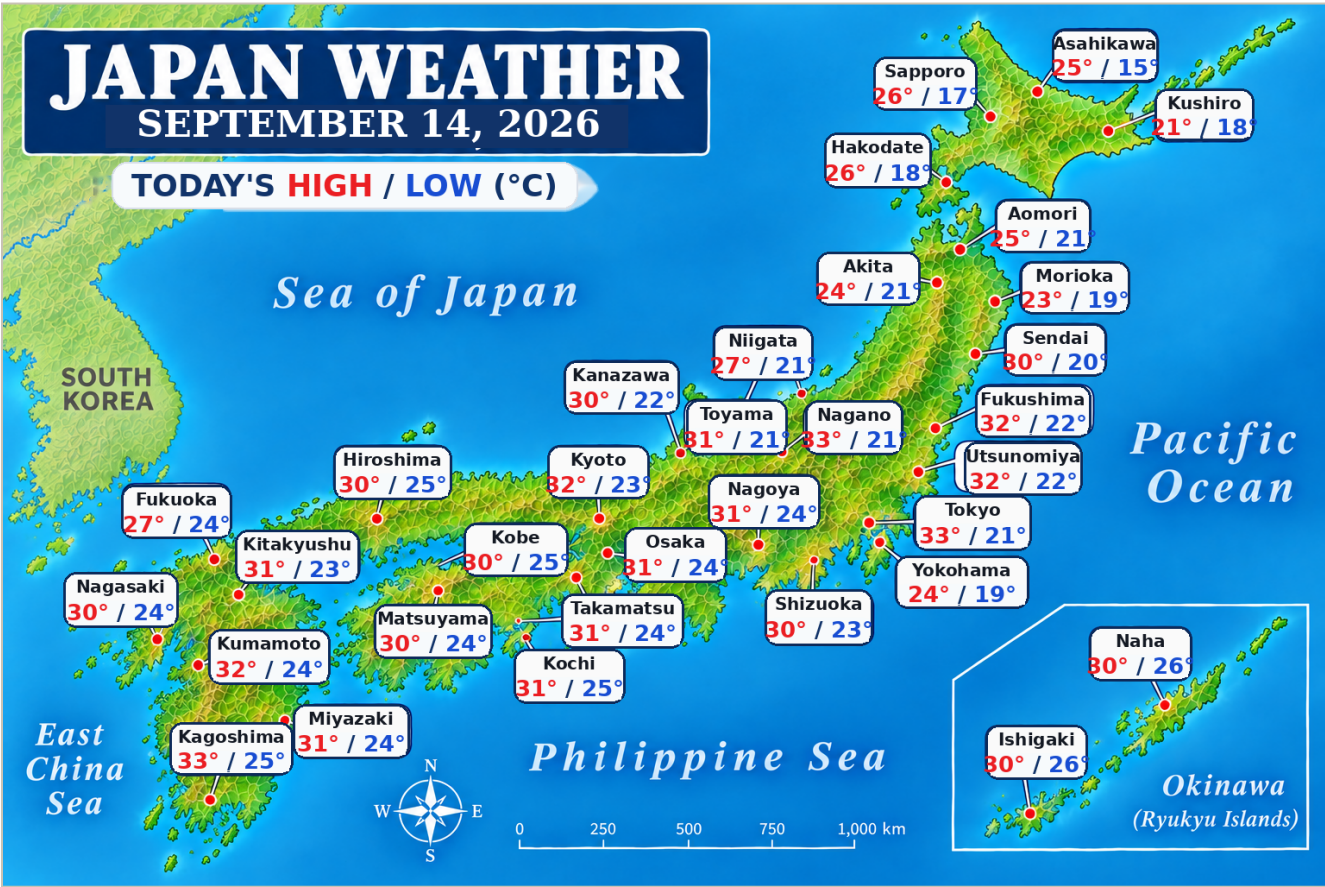
Hosting a Games of this scale carries economic stakes for the region beyond immediate tourism and broadcast revenue, with organizers hoping the infrastructure investment and international visibility produce benefits extending well past the competition itself.

Nagoya's successful bid came amid competition from other potential Asian host cities, reflecting both the strength of Japan's specific proposal and broader regional dynamics in hosting decisions that increasingly weigh financial sustainability alongside raw infrastructure capacity.

WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

22°C

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



TOKYO METROPOLITAN AREA — Monday, September 14, 2026

Morning: Warm and humid, with markets reopening after the weekend and the Asian Games opening in Aichi-Nagoya later today. Sunrise 5:22 a.m.

Afternoon: Hot, high near 33°C, among the warmest readings of the week for the capital as late-summer heat holds on into mid-September.

Evening: Clear, cooling toward 26°C by 9 p.m. Sunset 5:51 p.m.

Overnight: Mild, low near 21°C.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Monday's national map shows hot conditions holding across nearly the entire country, with Tokyo's high of 33°C matched or exceeded from Nagoya through Osaka, Kyoto and much of Kyushu, where Kumamoto and Kagoshima both reach 32-33°C. Hokkaido remains comparatively mild, with Sapporo at 26/17°C and Asahikawa at 25/15°C, continuing the seasonal split between a north already easing toward autumn and a south still firmly in late-summer heat. The autumn rain front stalled over the Sea of Japan is expected to bring heavy rain to that coast later in the week.

UV INDEX & AIR QUALITY

UV Index: 8 (Very High) in Tokyo. Air Quality Index: Moderate in the Kanto plain, Good elsewhere. Pollen: Negligible.

TODAY'S HIGH / LOW BY REGION (°C)

Hokkaido — Sapporo 26/17, Asahikawa 25/15, Kushiro 21/18, Hakodate 26/18: mild across the island, continuing a clear north-south split with the rest of the country.

Tohoku — Aomori 25/21, Morioka 23/19, Akita 24/21, Sendai 30/20, Fukushima 32/22: a warm day, with Fukushima running notably hot for the region.

Chubu & Hokuriku — Niigata 27/21, Toyama 31/21, Kanazawa 30/22, Nagano 33/21, Nagoya 31/24: Nagano the standout, tying the day's hottest readings on the main islands outside Kyushu, with the Asian Games opening in nearby Nagoya today.

Kanto — Utsunomiya 32/22, Tokyo 33/21, Yokohama 24/19, Shizuoka 30/23: Tokyo running hotter than Yokohama today, a reminder of how much the built-up urban core can diverge from the immediate coast even a short distance away.

Kansai — Kyoto 32/23, Kobe 30/25, Osaka 31/24: firmly in late-summer heat, consistent with the broader Kansai-through-Kyushu pattern holding today.

Shikoku — Takamatsu 31/24, Kochi 31/25, Matsuyama 30/24: hot and humid across the island.

Chugoku & Kyushu — Hiroshima 30/25, Kitakyushu 31/23, Fukuoka 27/24, Nagasaki 30/24, Kumamoto 32/24, Miyazaki 31/24, Kagoshima 33/25: Kagoshima the warmest reading on the main islands today.

Okinawa — Naha 30/26, Ishigaki 30/26: warm and steady, a day after Sunday's election and heading into a new governorship under sharply different weather conditions than the campaign's final stretch.

SEVEN-DAY EXTENDED FORECAST FOR TOKYO

Tuesday, Sept. 15: High 32°C, low 22°C. Mostly sunny. US Federal Reserve's two-day policy meeting begins today.

Wednesday, Sept. 16: High 31°C, low 22°C. Partly cloudy. Bank of Japan's two-day policy meeting begins today.

Thursday, Sept. 17: High 30°C, low 21°C. Mostly sunny. Federal Reserve policy decision expected today.

Friday, Sept. 18: High 29°C, low 21°C. Partly cloudy, chance of rain. Bank of Japan policy decision expected today.

Saturday, Sept. 19: High 28°C, low 20°C. Rain likely, tied to the stalled autumn front over the Sea of Japan side extending its influence into the Pacific coast.

Sunday, Sept. 20: High 27°C, low 20°C. Partly cloudy.

EXTENDED OUTLOOK (September 15-21)

Hot, late-summer conditions are expected to persist across most of the country through midweek before the stalled autumn rain front begins exerting more influence on the Pacific side as well as the Sea of Japan coast it has already been affecting. Forecasters continue watching the western Pacific for further tropical development given this year's above-average typhoon season, though no system currently threatens Japan directly. The coming week carries unusually concentrated stakes regardless of the weather itself, with the Federal Reserve and Bank of Japan both meeting within days of each other and the Asian Games opening today in Aichi-Nagoya.

AUTUMN RAIN FRONT

The seasonal rain front responsible for Japan's early-autumn wet season has stalled over the Sea of Japan, according to national forecasters, with heavy rain expected primarily along that coast beginning Monday and continuing into the middle of the week. Residents in Sea of Japan-facing prefectures, particularly those still managing recovery from earlier disaster events elsewhere in the country, are advised to monitor local advisories closely as the front's exact positioning continues to evolve.

ALMANAC

Today's sunrise: 5:22 a.m. Today's sunset: 5:51 p.m. Day length: 12 hours, 29 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 10:41 a.m. and 11:08 p.m.; low tide 4:35 p.m. Barometric pressure: 1013 hPa, gradually falling.

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

TRANSITION NOTICE: Prefectural offices in Naha begin transition procedures this week following Sunday's gubernatorial election result.

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

STOCK MARKET REOPENS AFTER VOLATILE WEEK: Tokyo markets resumed trading Monday following Friday's 1.93% decline, with investors weighing a full week of central bank decisions ahead, including both the Federal Reserve and Bank of Japan meeting within days of each other for the first time in recent memory.

CHUBU ELECTRIC INTERIM LEADERSHIP EXPECTED THIS WEEK: The utility is expected to name interim leadership following Sunday's dual resignation of its president and chairman, with permanent successors likely to take considerably longer given the scale of the Hamaoka data-integrity review still underway.

OKINAWA TRANSITION TIMELINE TAKES SHAPE: Prefectural officials in Naha began preliminary transition planning Monday as Genta Koj's incoming administration works to staff key positions ahead of his formal inauguration, a process that in past Okinawa gubernatorial transitions has typically extended several weeks.

THIS WEEK'S CALENDAR

MONDAY, SEPT. 14: Asian Games open in Aichi-Nagoya. Tokyo markets reopen after the weekend. Gulf and Iranian foreign ministers meet in Salalah, Oman. Aki Basho Day 2 at Ryogoku Kokugikan.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 15: US Federal Reserve begins its two-day policy meeting. Asian Games competition continues across multiple venues.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 16: Bank of Japan begins its two-day policy meeting. Asian Games competition continues.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 17: Federal Reserve policy decision expected. Asian Games competition continues.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 18: Bank of Japan policy decision expected, with markets widely anticipating a move to 1.25%.

THROUGH SEPT. 27: Aki Basho grand sumo tournament continues daily at Ryogoku Kokugikan.

THROUGH LATE SEPTEMBER: Asian Games competition continues across the Aichi-Nagoya host region.

THROUGH OCT. 31: NPB regular season continues, followed by the Climax Series and Japan Series.

READER SERVICES

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Home delivery and digital access may be arranged through Reader Relations at subscriptions@japanmorningpost.com. Digital access is available at 3,900 yen per month; print and digital combined at 6,800 yen per month.

NEWS TIPS: Readers with information relevant to ongoing coverage may contact the newsdesk at newsdesk@japanmorningpost.com. Correspondence is reviewed by the relevant desk editor.

CORRECTIONS: The Japan Morning Post publishes corrections promptly once an error is confirmed. Please direct correction requests to corrections@japanmorningpost.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: Letters responding to published coverage or editorial positions are welcome and may be sent to letters@japanmorningpost.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

ARCHIVE ACCESS: Subscribers may access archived editions through the newspaper's digital archive. Inquiries regarding archive access should be directed to Reader Relations.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Accounting & Tax: Kanda Accounting Group, Tanaka & Associates Legal Services: Marunouchi International Law Partners Relocation & Immigration: Meridian Relocation Services Translation & Interpretation: Otemachi Translation Bureau

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

The Japan Morning Post is published daily. Home delivery and digital access may be arranged through Reader Relations at subscriptions@japanmorningpost.com.

MORE SPORTS AND CULTURE NOTES

NPB PENNANT RACES ENTER FINAL STRETCH: Both the Central and Pacific League races remain genuinely contested with weeks of the regular season still to play, following a weekend that saw Hanshin's lead over Yomiuri narrow further even as SoftBank's own Pacific League position looks increasingly secure.

AKI BASHO FIELD DESCRIBED AS UNUSUALLY DEEP: Sumo commentators continue describing this September's tournament as carrying more credible championship contenders than several recent Aki Basho editions, a dynamic that could make the back half of the fifteen-day tournament considerably more competitive than Aonishiki's status as favorite might otherwise suggest.

ASIAN GAMES BROADCAST COVERAGE EXPANDS: Domestic broadcasters have expanded coverage hours for the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games relative to recent editions hosted outside Japan, reflecting both the host-nation advantage in broadcast rights negotiation and genuine anticipated public interest in Japan's first Asian Games hosting role since 1994.

MARKET REFERENCE

NIKKEI 225 (Friday close): 64,011.34, down 1,259.61 points or 1.93%.

TOPIX (Friday close): 4,028.30, down 26.28 points or 0.65%.

YEN: approximately 153-154 per dollar.

CRUDE OIL (WTI): mid-\$104 range, briefly above \$108 in recent sessions.

BOJ POLICY RATE: 1.00%, with a move to 1.25% widely expected this week.

FED TARGET RANGE: 3.50%-3.75%, with a hike priced as more likely than not.

52-WEEK NIKKEI HIGH: 72,831.73, set June 22, 2026.

ADDITIONAL PROPERTY LISTINGS

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

MINATO: New-build 2LDK near Tokyo Tower, 91 sq m. Reference MNT-227.

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: Kan-Etsu Expressway remains partially closed near Minakami, Gunma Prefecture, following Sunday's multi-vehicle collision. Drivers are advised to seek alternate routes.

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

MORE NATIONAL NOTES

MOUNT TOKACHI EVACUATION ORDER REMAINS IN EFFECT: The evacuation order covering the hot spring area near Mount Tokachi remained in effect Monday, with the Japan Meteorological Agency's Level 3 alert continuing to restrict mountain entry pending further monitoring of seismic activity.

MIC RECORDS QUESTION AWAITS FORMAL RESPONSE: The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications had not issued a detailed public response as of Monday to reporting that chat logs documenting misconduct may have been deleted following a disclosure request, despite legal requirements that such records be preserved.

AUTUMN RAIN FRONT TO BRING WEEK OF WET WEATHER: The stalled seasonal rain front is expected to keep Sea of Japan-facing prefectures under periodic heavy rain through much of the coming week, a pattern forecasters say is typical for mid-September even as this year's specific timing has drawn additional attention given ongoing recovery efforts elsewhere in the country.

TRANSPORT AND PUBLIC ADVISORIES

KAN-ETSU EXPRESSWAY: Partial closures continue near Minakami, Gunma Prefecture, following Sunday's multi-vehicle collision. Drivers are advised to seek alternate routes and to check current conditions before departure.

MOUNT TOKACHI, HOKKAIDO: Eruption alert at Level 3. Mountain entry is restricted and an evacuation order remains in effect for the nearby hot spring area. Travelers to the Tokachi region should check current alert status before finalizing plans.

SEA OF JAPAN COAST: A stalled autumn rain front is expected to bring heavy rain along the Sea of Japan side through much of the week. Residents in affected prefectures are advised to monitor local advisories, particularly in areas where soil is already saturated.

OKINAWA: Prefectural offices in Naha begin transition procedures this week following Sunday's gubernatorial election result. Routine public services are expected to continue without interruption during the handover.