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★ SECOND TAKAICHI CABINET TAKES OFFICE ★ FED RAISES RATES, YEN AT 156 ★ BOJ MEETS TODAY ★

Takaichi Keeps Her Core and Adds a Partner: The Second Cabinet Takes Office

Kihara, Motegi, Katayama and Koizumi all stay. Ishin enters the cabinet for the first time. The reshuffle answers the question of who governs and leaves the harder one — how a five trillion yen tax cut is paid for — to the Diet

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy, with William | Senior Political Analyst

The second Takaichi Cabinet on the staircase at the Prime Minister's Office on Thursday. Photo: Japan Prime Minister's Office

The second Takaichi Cabinet was inaugurated on Thursday with its four load-bearing posts unchanged, an arrangement that says more about the Prime Minister's position than any of the new faces standing behind her on the stairs at the Prime Minister's Office.

Minoru Kihara stays as Chief Cabinet Secretary. Toshimitsu Motegi stays at the Foreign Ministry. Satsuki Katayama stays at Finance. Shinjiro Koizumi stays at Defence. Ryosei Akazawa and Jonai, both of whom had been named in reshuffle speculation for a fortnight, also keep their portfolios, according to front-page reporting in Yomiuri Shimbun and coverage in Nihon Nogyo Shinbun.

Around that core, the government has done the one genuinely new thing available to it. An agreement on cabinet cooperation has been reached with the Japan Innovation Party, which takes a seat at the cabinet table for the first time in its history.

Those two facts are the reshuffle. Everything else is arrangement.

Continuity in the four senior posts is not the absence of a decision. It is a decision, and an expensive one in a system where cabinet seats are the currency a prime minister uses to pay her party. Takaichi has spent nothing on the offices that matter most to the factions and has instead spent a seat on a coalition partner outside the Liberal Democratic Party altogether.

The calculation behind that is visible in the parliamentary arithmetic. A cabinet cooperation agreement with the Japan Innovation Party, reached alongside the reshuffle according to Yomiuri Shimbun, gives the government a broader base in the chamber than the Liberal Democrats command alone, and the extraordinary session now approaching, with a five trillion yen tax measure and no named funding source, is exactly the kind of test that base was assembled for.

On the agenda is the tax reform outline the Cabinet approved on Tuesday, which cuts the consumption tax on food to 1% for two years from April 2027 and attaches an income-linked benefit. The measure costs roughly five trillion yen a year. Its funding source has still not been named.

That is the sentence the reshuffle was designed to survive.

A finance minister who has spent the past several weeks managing bond yields at levels not seen since the 1990s does not get replaced in the middle of the argument. Katayama's retention keeps the person who signed off on the outline in the chair where she will have to defend it, which is either accountability or the avoidance of a difficult confirmation, depending on which side of the chamber the question comes from.

The Bank of Japan's Policy Board began a two-day meeting on Thursday morning, its first day running in parallel with the cabinet's first day. Markets have largely priced an increase in the policy rate to 1.25%. The decision lands on Friday, into a new cabinet that will have been in office for roughly thirty hours.

The external timing is no gentler. The Federal Reserve raised its target range by a quarter point on Wednesday in Washington, to 3.75 to 4.00%, the first increase in three years and two months and a unanimous one. The Dow fell 631 points. The yen weakened to the 156.25 to 156.35 range in New York. American ten-year yields touched roughly 5.04% before closing near 5.02%. A government taking office into that is not choosing the weather it governs in.

The Liberal Democratic Party's own executive was installed alongside the cabinet, and there the continuity is even more pronounced. Shunichi Suzuki remains Secretary-General. Takayuki Kobayashi remains Policy Research Council Chairman. Yasutoshi Nishimura remains Chairman of the Election Strategy Committee. Hiroshi Kajiyama takes the General Council chairmanship and Hideki Murai the Diet Affairs Committee. Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso stays where he is.

Murai's appointment is the one to watch over the next month. The Diet Affairs Committee chairman schedules the government's business in the chamber, negotiates with his opposition counterparts over what gets debated and for how long, and is the first person a prime minister blames when a bill misses its window. He inherits a tax measure with a hole in it.

Aso's continuation as Deputy Prime Minister settles a question that had been open since the summer. He leads the only organised faction left inside the party, and his position is the closest thing the Takaichi government has to a guarantee of internal quiet.

The quiet is not complete. The replacement of Junichi Ishii as the party's Secretary-General in the House of Councillors has caused a stir that the new appointments have not dispelled, with reporting pointing to a rift over parliamentary affairs and raising concerns about the cooperation the government will need from opposition parties in the upper chamber. The Prime Minister has denied intervening.

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WEATHER — TOKYO

23°C

Low 19°C · Cloudy after rain

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
25°	26°	24°	23°

Front moving away; clear in Hokkaido, cloudy in Kanto, 30°C in Kyushu. Typhoon No. 25 may reach Kanto on Monday. Full forecast, Page 12.

TODAY IN BRIEF

- Second Takaichi Cabinet inaugurated; Kihara, Motegi, Katayama and Koizumi all stay. Ishin enters under a cooperation agreement.
- Fed raises rates a quarter point to 3.75%-4.00%, first increase since July 2023; one more hinted this year. Dow down 631.
- Yen at 156.25-156.35 overnight. Nikkei rebounds to 63,923. Bank of Japan meeting opens today.
- August trade deficit 1.1056 trillion yen, a fourth straight month. US surplus down about 80%.
- Typhoon No. 25 forms; may approach Kanto around Monday. M4.8 quake in Ibaraki overnight.

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Takaichi Keeps Her Core and Adds a Partner: The Second Cabinet Takes Office

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Denials of intervention in personnel matters are a standard feature of Japanese political reporting and are not usually the end of the subject.

What Ishin gets in exchange for its seat is less clear than what it gives. The party completed its own senior appointments this week, installing Shibata as Secretary-General, Umemura as Policy Research Council Chairman and Kanemura as General Council Chairman, which is the housekeeping a party does before one of its figures moves into government.

Ishin has built its identity on administrative reform, lower public sector cost and a scepticism toward Tokyo-centred governance. A seat in a cabinet that has just approved an unfunded five trillion yen tax cut puts that identity under a strain its leadership will have to explain to its own supporters in Osaka.

For the Liberal Democrats, the arrangement buys votes in the chamber and imposes a cost that is easy to underestimate. Coalition partners have to be consulted. Policy that once required agreement within one party now requires agreement between two, and the junior partner's leverage is highest precisely when the government most needs its votes.

The opposition, meanwhile, spent the week on its own organisation rather than on the government's. Members leaving the Constitutional Democratic Party have settled on Democratic Reform Association as the name of their new vehicle, described in reporting as largely provisional, while Komeito members going the other way work through a reinstatement process.

None of that constitutes a position on the funding of the food tax cut, which is the only question in front of the Diet that will move a household's finances.

Takaichi has now been in office a little under a year. Her party's leadership election falls in the autumn of 2027, and a reshuffle this early in a term is conventionally understood as the last free personnel decision a prime minister gets before that contest starts to shape everything else.

She has used it to keep the people who were already carrying the difficult files and to add a partner who reduces the chance of losing a vote. It is a defensive arrangement, assembled by a government that can count.

The test of it begins on Friday afternoon, when the Bank of Japan announces what it has decided, and continues into the extraordinary session, where somebody will eventually have to say where five trillion yen a year is coming from.

FROM PAGE 1

Fed Raises Rates for the First Time in Three Years as Warsh Calls Inflation Too High

Continued from Page 1

The Federal Reserve raised its policy interest rate by a quarter point at Wednesday's meeting of the Federal Open Market Committee, to a range of 3.75 to 4.00%, the first increase since July 2023 and the first unanimous decision in three years and two months, according to Asahi Shimbun, Nikkei and Mainichi Shimbun.

The Committee also indicated the possibility of one further increase before the end of the year.

"Inflation is too high and has lasted too long," Chairman Kevin Warsh said.

American equities fell hard on the decision. The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed down 631 points at 51,461 after being more than 900 points lower during the session, its weakest level in three months.

Yields rose with it. The ten-year Treasury note traded at roughly 5.04% before settling near 5.02%, a level that reprices everything from mortgages in Ohio to the cost of carrying Japanese government debt.

The yen weakened in New York to between 156.25 and 156.35 to the dollar.

For Japan, the move matters chiefly through that exchange rate. A wider interest rate differential rewards holding dollars and penalises holding yen, and the currency has been the main transmission channel for American policy into Japanese consumer prices for three years.

A unanimous vote is worth noting on its own. Dissents at the Federal Reserve are common enough that their absence indicates a committee that has stopped arguing about direction.

The reversal in direction is the larger point. The Fed spent much of the past two years cutting, and Wednesday's decision marks the turn back toward restriction with inflation that has not behaved as forecast.

Tokyo trading on Thursday opens with that backdrop, and with the Bank of Japan's own Policy Board in session.

FROM PAGE 1

Party Executive Installed With Three Chairmen Reappointed

Continued from Page 1

The Liberal Democratic Party's new executive took office alongside the cabinet on Thursday, with Secretary-General Shunichi Suzuki, Policy Research Council Chairman Takayuki Kobayashi and Election Strategy Committee Chairman Yasutoshi Nishimura all reappointed, according to Asahi Shimbun and Nihon Nogyo Shinbun.

Hiroshi Kajiyama becomes Chairman of the General Council and Hideki Murai Chairman of the Diet Affairs Committee. Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso remains in place.

Three reappointments out of five senior posts is a strong signal of continuity in a party that has historically used executive positions to rebalance internal support after a difficult stretch.

The General Council is the body that formally endorses party policy before it goes to the Diet. Its chairman can slow a measure the party is uneasy about, and the food consumption tax cut has already produced audible unease among fiscally conservative members.

Kajiyama's background in the party's economic and industrial policy machinery places someone with revenue instincts at the point where the tax package must clear its last internal hurdle.

The Diet Affairs Committee chairmanship that Murai inherits is the more immediately demanding job. Scheduling is the government's principal defensive weapon in a chamber where the opposition's main tool is delay, and the extraordinary session ahead will be contested on exactly that ground.

Nishimura's retention at Election Strategy matters less this month and more next year. No national election is scheduled, but the committee's work is continuous and its chairman is the party's institutional memory of where its seats are thin.

Suzuki's continuation as Secretary-General also resolves speculation that had run through the summer about whether the post would change hands as part of a wider rebalancing.

Taken together, the appointments describe a leadership that has chosen to keep its existing arrangement rather than to buy support with new positions.

That works while the government is winning votes. The arrangement's weakness is that it leaves the Prime Minister with fewer favours in reserve if the extraordinary session turns against her.

FROM PAGE 1

Bank of Japan Opens Two-Day Meeting With a Rate Rise Largely Priced In

Continued from Page 1

The Bank of Japan's Policy Board began a two-day meeting on Thursday, with market pricing pointing firmly to an increase in the uncollateralised overnight call rate to 1.25% when the decision is announced on Friday.

The meeting opens into an unusually crowded set of conditions. The Federal Reserve raised its own target range by a quarter point on Wednesday to 3.75 to 4.00%, the yen weakened to the 156.25 to 156.35 range in New York, and a new cabinet took office in Tokyo the same morning.

Domestic long-term yields have already moved a long way without the Bank doing anything. Ten-year government debt touched 3.035% this week, the highest in roughly three decades, which means a portion of the tightening the Board might have intended has been delivered by the market in advance.

That changes the character of the decision. A central bank raising its policy rate into yields that have already risen is confirming a direction rather than setting one.

The case for moving is the one Governor Ueda has made repeatedly: that wage growth has to be sustained for inflation to hold near target in a way that does not depend on import costs. Real wages have been the condition he keeps naming.

The case for waiting rests on the currency and the bond market moving in the same direction at once, and on a cabinet that is one day old.

The yen's weakness is the practical argument for action. At 156, imported energy and food are expensive in a way households feel at the till, and the gap between Japanese and American rates is the mechanism keeping the currency there.

Wednesday's Fed increase widened that gap rather than narrowing it, and the American central bank has signalled the possibility of one further rise this year.

A quarter-point move in Tokyo does not close a gap of that size. What it does is signal that the direction of travel is no longer only one way.

The Board's statement and the Governor's press conference on Friday afternoon will be read for the wage language above all else.

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Ishin Enters the Cabinet Under a Cooperation Agreement

The Japan Innovation Party takes a seat at the table for the first time, trading a measure of independence for a share of the government's agenda

By William | Senior Political Analyst

An agreement on cabinet cooperation between the Liberal Democratic Party and the Japan Innovation Party was reached ahead of Thursday's inauguration, giving Ishin a cabinet post for the first time, according to Yomiuri Shimbun's front page and Nihon Nogyo Shinbun.

The arrangement converts what has been an informal working relationship into a formal one. Ishin has supported government measures selectively since Takaichi took office, and the practical effect of a cooperation agreement is that the support becomes assumed rather than negotiated bill by bill.

For a government facing a session in which every contested vote will be counted closely, that reliability is worth more than the seat it costs.

Ishin's leadership completed its own senior appointments before the agreement was signed, with Shibata as Secretary-General, Umemura as Policy Research Council Chairman and Kanemura as General Council Chairman.

The sequencing is deliberate. A party sending a senior figure into a cabinet needs its internal machinery settled first, because the two jobs make competing demands on the same small group of people.

What Ishin gains is influence over the drafting stage of policy rather than only the voting stage. What it loses is the ability to criticise the government it now sits in.

That trade has broken smaller parties in Japanese politics before. The junior partner in a coalition absorbs a share of the blame for outcomes it did not choose and rarely receives a proportionate share of the credit.

Ishin's base in Osaka has been built on a case against the political culture of Tokyo. Explaining a cabinet seat inside a Tokyo government to that base is the leadership's first task.

The government's calculation is simpler. Every vote that becomes reliable reduces the number of members whose individual objections can stop a bill.

With an unfunded tax package heading into the extraordinary session, reducing that number was the most useful thing the reshuffle could do.

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Upper House Personnel Change Still Reverberating as Prime Minister Denies Intervening

Junichi Ishii's departure as the party's Councillors secretary-general raises questions about cooperation in a chamber the government does not control outright

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

The replacement of Junichi Ishii as the Liberal Democratic Party's Secretary-General in the House of Councillors continues to generate friction inside the party, with Yomiuri Shimbun reporting concerns about the effect on cooperation with opposition parties in the upper chamber. The Prime Minister has denied intervening in the decision.

Kazuhiko Aoki has been expected to succeed him. Reporting earlier in the week attributed the change to a rift over parliamentary affairs.

The upper house secretary-general is among the least visible and most consequential posts in Japanese politics. The holder manages the party's business in a chamber that can slow legislation the lower house has already passed, and that work depends on personal relationships with opposition counterparts built over years.

Those relationships do not transfer with the job title. A new occupant starts from a lower base of trust at precisely the moment the government needs the chamber to move quickly.

The extraordinary session will take up the consumption tax measure, which has to clear both houses. The upper house is where a government with a thin majority discovers the limits of its own timetable.

A denial of intervention from the Prime Minister's Office is the expected response to reporting of this kind and does not settle the question of how the decision was reached.

What is not in dispute is the timing. Personnel changes in the chamber that reviews legislation, made days before a contested session opens, invite the reading that they were about control of the session.

Party officials have pointed out that executive terms run on their own cycle and that changes at this point in the year are routine.

Both things can be true. A routine change made at an inconvenient moment still costs the government time it may not have.

Upper house floor management depends on relationships that take years to build and can be lost in a single session. Whoever succeeds Ishii inherits the counterparts, the conventions and the unwritten understandings that made the chamber workable, without the personal history that made them his.

POLITICS

Kihara Stays in the Office Where the Government Is Actually Run

The Chief Cabinet Secretary co-ordinates ministries, briefs the press twice a day and manages the crises nobody scheduled

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Minoru Kihara remains Chief Cabinet Secretary in the second Takaichi Cabinet, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, keeping the post that does more day-to-day governing than any other outside the Prime Minister's own office.

The title understates the job. The Chief Cabinet Secretary co-ordinates between ministries that have institutional reasons not to co-operate, controls the flow of paper into the Prime Minister's schedule, and holds the twice-daily press conference at which the government's position on any subject becomes official.

He is also the first responder. When an aircraft is lost, a volcano's alert level is raised or a minister says something unfortunate, the Chief Cabinet Secretary speaks before anyone has decided what the government thinks.

Continuity in the post is therefore worth more than continuity in most cabinet chairs. The relationships that make co-ordination work are personal and accumulate slowly.

Kihara has been close to the Prime Minister since before she took office and is generally described within the party as the person who translates her intentions into instructions the bureaucracy can act on.

That description is a compliment about process rather than policy, which is the correct compliment for the

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role.

The next month will test it. An extraordinary session with a contested tax measure, a central bank decision on Friday and a typhoon forecast to approach Kanto over the holiday weekend all land on the same desk.

The Chief Cabinet Secretary also chairs the co-ordination that follows any disaster, a function that has grown more visible this month after the rain emergency and the Mount Tokachi alert.

Keeping him in place was among the least surprising decisions in the reshuffle, and among the more consequential.

The chief cabinet secretary's daily press conferences are the government's primary channel to the public, which means the holder's judgment about what to say, and what not to, shapes how every other minister's work is received.

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Motegi Retained at Foreign Ministry With Washington and Beijing Both in Motion

A summit between the United States and China is being prepared, and Japan has interests in it that it does not control

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

Toshimitsu Motegi remains Foreign Minister, one of the four senior retentions in the second Takaichi Cabinet reported by Yomiuri Shimbun.

His continuation comes as groundwork proceeds for a meeting between the American and Chinese leaderships, a process in which Japan is an interested party rather than a participant.

Motegi has met the American Secretary of State repeatedly since taking the post, and the value of that record is the reason he keeps it. Foreign ministries run on continuity of contact, and an alliance managed through frequent ministerial conversation does not benefit from a new name every year.

The immediate files are familiar. Tariffs and the investment framework agreed with Washington last year require constant tending. The conflict between the United States and Iran has run since February with Japanese energy security attached to its outcome.

China's Foreign Minister met his Iranian counterpart this week and urged restraint ahead of the summit preparations, according to Asahi Shimbun, a piece of diplomacy that touches Japanese interests at two removes.

Japan imports the overwhelming majority of its crude through the Strait of Hormuz. Anything that lowers the temperature there has a direct effect on the price of electricity in Japanese homes.

The ministry also carries the detentions of Japanese nationals in China, raised in Beijing this week by younger members of the Japan-China Parliamentary League.

Motegi's task in the coming months is unglamorous: keep the American relationship steady through a trade policy that changes without warning, and keep the Chinese relationship functional without conceding anything on the security questions that divide the two countries.

Neither is achieved by announcements. Both are achieved by showing up repeatedly, which is what the retention is for.

The foreign ministry's calendar for the coming weeks is dense by any measure: a Washington-Beijing summit later this month in which Japan is not a participant but is directly affected, a Gulf conflict in its seventh month that sets the price of everything Japan imports, and a North Korean delegation attending the Asian Games.

POLITICS

Katayama Keeps Finance and the Argument She Will Have to Win

The minister who signed the food tax outline now defends it in a Diet session, with yields at three-decade highs

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Satsuki Katayama remains Finance Minister, according to Yomiuri Shimbun and Nihon Nogyo Shinbun, keeping the portfolio through an extraordinary session that will be dominated by a tax measure her ministry has to fund.

The Cabinet approved the outline on Tuesday. It lowers the consumption tax on food to 1% for two years from April 2027 and attaches an income-linked benefit. The cost is roughly five trillion yen a year, and no revenue source has been identified.

Katayama therefore returns to the chamber to defend a package that, from the Finance Ministry's institutional point of view, is difficult to love.

The bond market has already responded to the fiscal picture. Ten-year yields reached 3.035% this week, the highest in around thirty years, with reporting attributing the selling to the tax measure and to a defence spending target of 3.5% of output.

Higher yields raise the cost of servicing a debt stock that is among the largest in the developed world relative to the size of the economy. Every additional point on the curve compounds through the budget for years.

That is the argument Katayama will be making internally, and the argument the opposition will make at her in public, from the opposite direction.

Her retention keeps continuity in the ministry at a moment when the Bank of Japan is expected to raise rates, the trade balance is in deficit for a fourth straight month, and the currency is at 156 to the dollar.

Foreign exchange policy also sits with the Finance Ministry rather than the central bank. After this year's intervention, the ministry's reserve position and its willingness to use it remain live questions.

The minister who ordered the sale of American Treasuries to fund a currency defence is still in the chair when the consequences of that decision arrive.

Finance ministers are also judged by markets on tone as much as substance. A minister who appears rattled by a bond selloff can worsen it; one who acknowledges it calmly while pointing to the mechanism for addressing it can steady it, and Katayama's first statements after the reshuffle will be read for exactly that.

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Koizumi Continues at Defence With a Documents Revision and a Lost Aircraft

The strategic documents are being rewritten against a rising budget argument, and the reconnaissance fleet is down a third

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Shinjiro Koizumi remains Defence Minister in the reshuffled cabinet, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, keeping the portfolio through the revision of Japan's strategic documents and the aftermath of Wednesday's loss of a Global Hawk off Tottori.

The reconnaissance aircraft went silent over international waters roughly 50 kilometres north of the prefecture, with floating debris found nearby and a crash presumed. Japan operated three of the type. The fleet is now two.

Koizumi's continuity matters more than usual because of what the documents revision involves. Rewriting the national security strategy, the defence buildup programme and the associated planning is a process measured in months of interministerial argument, and a change of minister resets a portion of it.

The budget question sits underneath. Reporting this week placed a target of 3.5% of output among the factors moving the bond market, which means defence spending is no longer a debate contained within the security community.

Higher borrowing costs and higher defence ambitions are competing claims on the same fiscal space, and the argument between them is now audible in the price of government bonds.

The alliance dimension is equally live. American expectations of allied contribution have hardened, and Japan's industrial co-operation with the United States on munitions and shipbuilding has expanded in parallel.

Koizumi is among the most recognisable figures in the government, which has advantages and costs. Public attention follows him to a portfolio that has historically preferred to work quietly.

The investigation into the Global Hawk loss will run for months, and its findings will shape how quickly Japan can rely on unmanned systems for the surveillance mission the documents revision is expected to expand.

The defence portfolio also inherits the question of what to do about the Global Hawk fleet, now reduced to two aircraft after this week's loss off Tottori. Production of the type has ended, which means restoring the capability requires a decision about the second-hand market or a different platform, and neither is quick.

Personnel remains the constraint that money addresses least easily. Recruitment has fallen short of targets in a shrinking working-age population, and a spending trajectory toward 3.5% of output would fund equipment faster than the force can find people to operate it.

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Akazawa and Jonai Keep Their Portfolios as Economic Files Carry Over

Trade negotiation and the investment framework with Washington continue without a change of hands

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Ryosei Akazawa and Jonai both remain in their posts in the second Takaichi Cabinet, according to Yomiuri Shimbun's front-page account of the reshuffle and reporting in Nihon Nogyo Shinbun.

Akazawa has been the government's principal negotiator with the United States on trade, meeting the American Commerce Secretary and Trade Representative in Washington this month to advance the investment framework agreed last year.

That framework directs Japanese capital into American semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, critical minerals, shipbuilding, energy and artificial intelligence, and it has survived a period in which American tariff policy has changed repeatedly.

Its survival depends in part on the same faces appearing on the Japanese side of the table. Trade negotiation is a relationship business, and each tranche of projects requires agreement on detail that a new minister would need months to master.

With the yen at 156 and a trade deficit that widened again in August, the economic diplomacy portfolio is closer to the centre of the government's difficulties than its title suggests.

Retaining both ministers removes the risk of a handover in the middle of a negotiation that Washington has shown no inclination to slow down for Japanese political scheduling.

It also means that when the next tranche is announced, the people who negotiated it will be the ones explaining it to the Diet.

Continuity in the economic portfolios matters because the files carry over intact. The tariff arrangement with Washington, the consumption tax outline and the energy cost picture do not restart with a reshuffle, and ministers who negotiated them are better placed to defend them than successors briefed from a folder.

Akazawa's role in the trade relationship with the United States was central to the arrangement now visible in August's collapsed surplus, and he will be the one answering for how that arrangement is performing.

Jonai's continuation keeps the economic security brief in hands familiar with the semiconductor supply chain questions that a Washington-Beijing summit could reshape without Japanese participation.

POLITICS

Departing Constitutional Democrats Settle on Democratic Reform Association

Komeito members moving the other way begin a reinstatement process as the opposition rearranges itself again

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

The new party being formed by members leaving the Constitutional Democratic Party will be called the Democratic Reform Association, according to Mainichi Shimbun, while members associated with Komeito are going through a reinstatement process.

The name follows a template. Japanese opposition vehicles have been assembled and dissolved repeatedly since the Democratic Party of Japan left government, and the resulting labels tend to combine the same small set of words in different orders.

Voters are not helped by this. Party identity is the shorthand through which people who do not follow politics closely make a decision at the ballot box, and a name that changes every few years erases that shorthand.

The organisational cost is heavier still. Local branches, candidate networks and the volunteers who actually deliver leaflets are built over years and do not transfer cleanly between vehicles.

The reinstatement process for Komeito-linked members is the mirror image of the same phenomenon, and the two movements together describe an opposition still redistributing its members rather than contesting the government's programme.

That programme now includes an unfunded five trillion yen tax cut heading into an extraordinary session, which is the kind of target an organised opposition would be expected to press.

Instead the week's opposition news has been about names. The government has not had to defend its arithmetic against a unified case.

Whether the Democratic Reform Association becomes a durable party or a way station depends on what it does in the session, not on what it is called.

Japan's opposition has restructured repeatedly since the Democratic Party of Japan's period in government ended, and the churn has made continuity of identity difficult for voters to track from one election to the next.

The reinstatement process for members from Komeito, reported by Mainichi Shimbun, adds a further layer, since it means the new vehicle is drawing from more than one former home and must reconcile the expectations each group brings.

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What a Reshuffle Changes, and What It Leaves Exactly Where It Was

By William | Senior Political Analyst

A cabinet reshuffle is one of the few unilateral powers a Japanese prime minister holds, and its effects are consistently overstated in the days around it.

What changes is the distribution of political debt. Cabinet seats are the currency a leader uses to reward loyalty, buy silence and settle factional claims, and the reshuffle is when those accounts are balanced.

What does not change is the machinery. Ministries are run by career officials whose careers outlast any minister, and policy in progress continues on its existing trajectory regardless of who signs the papers.

This is why continuity in the senior portfolios is read as a substantive decision rather than an absence of one. Keeping four ministers in place means the Prime Minister has paid her party in some other coin, or has decided not to pay it at all.

The second effect is on the Diet calendar. A new cabinet has to be introduced to the chamber, ministers have to answer their first questions, and the opposition gets a fresh set of targets who have not yet learned where the traps are.

For a government heading into a difficult session, minimising that exposure is a reason to change as little as possible.

The third effect is on public attention. Reshuffles generate a few days of coverage and a small movement in approval ratings that rarely survives the next month of ordinary governing.

Governments that expect a reshuffle to fix a polling problem are usually disappointed. The problems that move ratings are prices, scandals and visible failures, none of which are solved by a new minister.

The honest description of Thursday's exercise is that it added a coalition partner, kept the difficult files in experienced hands, and left the question of how the food tax cut is funded exactly where it was on Wednesday.

What does change is the set of faces the public sees defending policy, and in a session that will be televised and contested, presentation carries more weight than the formal reallocation of seals suggests.

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Extraordinary Session Opens With a Tax Measure and an Unanswered Question

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

The extraordinary Diet session ahead will take up the tax reform outline approved by the Cabinet on Tuesday, which cuts the consumption tax on food to 1% for two years from April 2027 alongside an income-linked benefit.

The measure's cost of roughly five trillion yen a year has no named funding source, and the session is where that will be pressed.

Committee rooms, rather than the floor, are where the pressing happens. A minister on the floor answers a question and moves on. In committee the same question can be asked eleven different ways by

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members who have read the ministry's own projections.

The government's defence is the one every temporary tax measure relies on: the two-year limit makes the package legislatable without requiring a permanent answer, and hands the renewal decision to a future cabinet.

The opposition's difficulty is that voting against a food tax cut is close to impossible to explain to households facing the prices of the past three years.

That leaves an argument about method rather than principle, which is a harder argument to win in public and a more important one to have.

The new Diet Affairs Committee chairman, Hideki Murai, controls the government's scheduling in the lower house, and his first task is to get the measure through committee without conceding the days the opposition wants for scrutiny.

In the upper chamber, the same task falls to a party organisation that has just changed its secretary-general under contested circumstances.

Nothing about the arithmetic requires the government to lose. Everything about the arithmetic means it cannot afford to be careless.

Session length is set by the government and can be extended, and the density of the agenda, with a tax measure, a defence spending trajectory and a Bank of Japan decision all landing in the opening days, makes extension more likely than not.

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How Cabinet Cooperation Agreements Work, and What They Cost

By William | Senior Political Analyst

A cabinet cooperation agreement is a written understanding between parties about how a government will be run, and its significance lies in the detail rather than the signature.

Such agreements typically cover which policies the partners commit to advance, how disagreements are resolved before they reach the chamber, and how many cabinet seats the junior party receives.

The Japanese precedent that matters most is the long partnership between the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito, which demonstrated both the stability a formal coalition provides and the friction that accumulates when a small party's priorities are repeatedly deferred.

The junior partner's leverage is highest when the senior partner most needs its votes, which is the position the Takaichi government occupies going into a session built around an unfunded tax measure.

That leverage is also fragile. A small party that threatens to leave a coalition too often invites the calculation that it would be cheaper to call an election than to keep paying.

For the senior partner, the cost is procedural. Policy that once required agreement inside one party now requires agreement between two, and the additional step is where timetables slip.

For the junior partner, the cost is identity. Voters who supported a party for its criticism of government do not automatically transfer that support to the same party inside government.

The measure of whether an agreement is working is not how often the partners appear together. It is whether the junior party's distinctive priorities show up in legislation that would not otherwise have contained them.

Komeito's long partnership with the Liberal Democratic Party is the standing reference for how such arrangements age. It delivered durable influence over policy while eroding the distinctiveness that had defined the party before it entered government.

Ishin's Osaka base gives it something Komeito never had: a governing record at prefectural and city level that its national positions are grounded in, which may make the differentiation problem easier to manage.

POLITICS

The Arithmetic of a Cooperation Agreement

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

A cabinet cooperation agreement is a specific kind of political instrument, and the one concluded this week between the Liberal Democratic Party and the Japan Innovation Party is worth reading for what it actually delivers.

It is not a merger and not a full coalition of the kind Komeito maintained for a quarter of a century. It is an undertaking by the smaller party to support the government in the chamber on defined matters, in exchange for a cabinet seat and a voice in drafting.

For a government, the value of such an undertaking is measured in reliability. Votes that are promised in advance can be counted on when a session becomes difficult, which is worth more than votes that must be negotiated measure by measure.

That reliability is not free. The partner must be consulted on policy it will be asked to defend, which means decisions that once required agreement within one party now require agreement between two.

The extraordinary session now approaching supplies an immediate test. The consumption tax outline the cabinet approved this week carries an annual cost of roughly five trillion yen and no identified funding source, and both parties approved it before it reached cabinet.

Ishin therefore enters the chamber committed to a measure whose hardest question it did not answer, which is the standing risk of joining a government mid-argument.

The upper house presents a separate calculation. The House of Councillors can delay legislation the lower house has passed, and the replacement of the Liberal Democrats' secretary-general there, over a reported disagreement about parliamentary affairs, has drawn concern about opposition cooperation in that chamber.

The Prime Minister has denied intervening in that change, according to Yomiuri Shimbun, though the concern it produced is about consequence rather than cause.

A cooperation agreement does nothing about the upper house directly. It strengthens the government's position in one chamber while the other remains a question of negotiation.

What the agreement does establish is that the government expects the session to be hard, and has arranged its numbers accordingly before it opens rather than after.

Whether the arrangement holds under pressure will be visible in the first contested vote, which is the only measure of such agreements that has ever meant anything.

POLITICS

The Photograph on the Stairs, and What It Is For

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Every Japanese cabinet begins with the same image: ministers arranged on the red-carpeted staircase at the Prime Minister's Office, the senior figures on the lowest step, everyone in dark formal dress, the whole assembly looking slightly uncomfortable.

The photograph is not a courtesy to the press. It is the government's own record, released through the Prime Minister's Office, and it performs a constitutional function of a modest kind by showing the public who has been appointed.

Position on the staircase follows precedence rather than seniority in age, and readers who follow these things closely can read the government's internal hierarchy off the arrangement before a single appointment is formally announced.

The formality is deliberate. A cabinet is a collective body that bears collective responsibility, and the image of a group standing together is the visual expression of that idea.

It is also, unavoidably, a document of the country's political demography. The proportion of women on the steps is counted by every newsroom in Japan within minutes of the image being released, and this year the counting takes place on the same day the World Economic Forum placed Japan 117th of 145 countries in its gender gap index.

The photograph will be reproduced on front pages, in school textbooks and in retrospectives for as long as the cabinet is remembered, which for most cabinets is not very long.

For one morning, though, it is the only thing the government has actually produced, and everybody photographs it.

The convention of the staircase photograph dates to the postwar period and has been maintained through every change of government since, which is part of its function. A new cabinet photographed in the same place as its predecessors is asserting continuity of the state even where the politics have changed.

The composition is not accidental. The prime minister stands at the centre of the front row; the senior ministers flank her; the arrangement of the rows behind follows precedence that the Cabinet Office manages with care.

For the public the photograph is often the only image of the full cabinet they will see, since ministers appear individually thereafter, and it is the image that accompanies every subsequent report on the government's fortunes.

POLITICS

Ground Self-Defense Force Unit Collected Personal Data From Experts Without Consent

A local intelligence unit recorded and retained information on people it approached, according to reporting

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

A Ground Self-Defense Force local intelligence unit collected and stored personal information about outside experts it contacted without obtaining their consent, according to reporting carried by Asahi Shimbun.

The practice concerns people approached in the ordinary course of the unit's work — academics, researchers and specialists whose expertise a military organisation might reasonably want to consult.

The issue is not the contact. It is the retention of personal information gathered during that contact by an organisation whose files are not ordinarily subject to public inspection.

Japan's legal framework for personal information places obligations on public bodies as well as private ones, and consent is the ordinary basis on which personal data is collected and kept.

Intelligence functions sit awkwardly inside that framework, which is why the rules governing them are usually written specifically rather than left to general principle.

The practical damage falls on the relationship between the Self-Defense Forces and the academic community. Experts who suspect that a conversation will generate a file are less willing to have the conversation.

That matters for a defence establishment that has spent two decades trying to widen its access to civilian technical expertise, particularly in cyber and space, where the relevant knowledge sits outside the uniformed services.

The Defence Ministry's response will determine whether this is treated as a local failure of procedure or as evidence that the rules governing domestic intelligence collection need to be written more clearly.

Japan's personal information protection framework applies to government bodies as well as private ones, and the collection of data from individuals in the course of official contact without their consent raises questions under it that the Defense Ministry will need to answer.

Intelligence units operating domestically occupy a sensitive position in a country whose postwar settlement placed deliberate limits on the military's role, and disclosures of this kind draw attention disproportionate to the practical scale of what was collected.

POLITICS

The Portfolios That Will Decide Whether This Cabinet Is Judged a Success

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Cabinets are remembered for two or three decisions, and the portfolios that produce those decisions are rarely the ones with the grandest titles.

Finance is the first. A five trillion yen tax cut without a funding source, a bond market pricing three-decade-high yields and a defence path toward 3.5% of output all converge on one ministry, and the answer it gives in committee will define the session.

Defence is the second, for a reason that has less to do with the strategic documents revision than with procurement. A fleet of three reconnaissance aircraft reduced to two by a single accident is what an insufficient buy looks like when something goes wrong.

The third is the economic revitalisation and trade portfolio, where the investment framework with Washington requires continuous management and where any change in American tariff policy arrives first.

Health, labour and welfare is the quiet fourth. A country with 107,677 centenarians, a care workforce that cannot be recruited and a medical spending trajectory that rises every year has its largest long-term fiscal problem inside that building.

The ministries that generate the most daily news — education, environment, digital — will matter to the people they serve and are unlikely to determine how the cabinet is remembered.

The Chief Cabinet Secretary sits across all of them, which is why the retention of Minoru Kihara was the least remarked and most consequential of Thursday's decisions.

Finance sits first on that list for reasons this week made plain: a bond market that pushed long-term yields to three-decade highs, a Federal Reserve that has just raised rates, and a Bank of Japan meeting whose outcome the finance minister will be asked to interpret on Friday.

Defence sits second, with a strategic documents revision, a spending trajectory that bond investors have already priced, and a lost surveillance aircraft whose replacement will require a decision the minister must own.

The chief cabinet secretary sits above both in practice, since the holder decides each day what the government says about all of it.

POLITICS

Committee Rooms Are Where the Funding Question Gets Asked

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

The Japanese Diet does its real work in committee, and the distinction matters for anyone trying to follow what happens to the food consumption tax measure.

Floor debate is largely ceremonial. Positions are read, the cameras record them, and nothing is discovered.

Committee questioning is different. Members have the ministry's own projections in front of them, they can ask the same question repeatedly in slightly different forms, and officials rather than only ministers can be required to answer.

It is also where the timetable is contested. An opposition that cannot defeat a bill can slow it, and the currency of that fight is committee days.

The government's tool is the schedule, which the Diet Affairs Committee chairman controls in negotiation with his counterparts. Hideki Murai takes that post this week.

The specific question waiting for the Finance Ministry is the one the outline does not answer: which revenue replaces roughly five trillion yen a year, and if none does, what the borrowing implies for a debt stock being refinanced at rising yields.

Governments are rarely defeated on such questions. They are damaged by them when the answer is visibly unavailable over several days of televised questioning.

Standing committees shadow the ministries, with the budget and finance committees carrying the work on a measure of this kind, and questioning is allocated by party strength in a way that gives the coalition the largest share.

That allocation has been criticised for limiting scrutiny, since a government's own members rarely press it as hard as opponents would, and the opposition's reorganisation this month further reduces the pressure it can apply.

Amendments negotiated in committee are where a funding source, if one is ever named, would first appear, which makes the committee stage rather than the final vote the point at which the measure's substance is decided.

POLITICS

What Changing Parties Involves, and Why It Happens So Often

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

With members leaving the Constitutional Democratic Party for a new vehicle and Komeito-linked members going through a reinstatement process, it is worth

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setting out what a party change actually involves in the Japanese system.

For a member elected in a single-seat constituency, the party label is one asset among several. The personal support organisation, built over years of attending funerals, festivals and local business meetings, belongs to the member rather than to the party.

That is why individual members can move without losing their seats, and why Japanese party structures have been more fluid than those in systems where the label carries the vote.

For a member elected through proportional representation, the position is different. The seat was won on a party list, and rules restrict movement to parties that contested the same election, which is one reason realignments cluster among constituency members.

Money matters too. Public party subsidies are allocated by seat count and are assessed at a fixed point in the year, which gives realignments a seasonal rhythm that has nothing to do with policy.

None of this is corruption. It is the predictable behaviour of politicians inside a set of rules, and the rules were written to encourage strong parties without quite achieving it.

The cost falls on voters, who are asked to keep track of which vehicle their representative currently occupies, and on the idea that an election result should determine a parliament's shape for its full term.

Party switching is constrained by law in one respect: members elected through proportional representation lists may not join a party that competed against their original one in the same election, a rule introduced to prevent list seats being treated as personal property.

That constraint does not apply to members elected in single-seat constituencies, which is why realignments tend to proceed through the formation of new vehicles rather than through defections to existing ones.

Voters have shown limited patience with the pattern, and the persistent difficulty facing Japan's opposition is that each reorganisation resets the recognition its predecessors had built.

ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS: A Cabinet Built to Survive a Session Rather Than to Start Something

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Reshuffles are usually described in terms of the people who arrive. This one is better read through the people who did not move.

Keeping the Chief Cabinet Secretary, Foreign Minister, Finance Minister and Defence Minister in place is a decision to preserve capacity at the four points where the government is currently under load: coordination, the American relationship, the bond market and a strategic documents revision.

It is also a decision not to spend cabinet seats on internal party management, which is the conventional purpose of a reshuffle for a leader whose support inside her party is described by her own colleagues as real rather than deep.

Instead the seat went outside the party altogether, to a coalition partner whose votes give the government a margin that survives an absence or a defection.

The trade is legible. Takaichi has bought parliamentary arithmetic and paid in factional goodwill, which is a reasonable exchange for a government whose immediate problem is a contested session rather than an internal challenge.

The cost arrives later. Factional claims deferred are not factional claims settled, and a leadership election falls in the autumn of 2027.

What the arrangement does not do is create capacity for anything new. A cabinet assembled to hold four difficult files steady and to avoid losing votes is not a cabinet positioned to launch a programme.

That may be the correct reading of the moment. A government managing a currency at 156, a fourth consecutive monthly trade deficit, a central bank normalising rates and an unfunded tax cut has enough to do without adding an initiative.

Governments that spend a full term managing, however, tend to arrive at their next leadership contest without an answer to the question of what they were for.

The test of a cabinet built to survive a session is whether it also governs during it, and the measure of that will be whether the funding question receives an answer before the vote rather than after.

ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS: Two Central Banks, One Currency, and a Gap That Will Not Close This Week

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

The Federal Reserve raised its target range to 3.75 to 4.00% on Wednesday. The Bank of Japan is expected to raise its policy rate to 1.25% on Friday. The gap between the two, which is what sets the direction of the yen, will be wider after both moves than it was before them.

This is the difficulty at the centre of Japanese monetary policy. The currency responds to the differential rather than to the direction, and Japan cannot close a gap of that size with quarter-point increments while the other side is also moving.

What a Japanese increase can do is change expectations. Markets price paths rather than levels, and a central bank that is clearly in a tightening cycle attracts different flows from one that is thought to be finished.

The Fed's signal of one further increase this year complicates that, but it also sets a horizon. American policy that peaks while Japanese policy is still rising is the configuration that would turn the currency, and it is a plausible configuration for next year.

Domestic conditions argue for moving regardless of the external picture. Ten-year yields near 3.035% show a market that has already repriced, real wages are the condition the Governor keeps naming, and the August import bill demonstrates what a weak currency costs a country that buys its energy abroad.

The argument for caution is the calendar. A cabinet one day old, an extraordinary session about to open and a typhoon forecast over a holiday weekend are not reasons for a central bank to do anything, but they are the environment in which a decision will be received.

The Governor's press conference will matter more than the decision. If the Board raises and signals that it is finished, the yen weakens on the news. If it raises and signals a path, the currency has something to work with.

The Federal Reserve's move to a 3.75% to 4.00% range, with a further increase hinted for this year, widens the differential regardless of what the Bank of Japan decides on Friday, since a quarter-point move in Tokyo would only offset a quarter-point move in Washington.

That is the arithmetic behind the yen's slide to the 156 range overnight, and it explains why a Japanese rate increase that markets have fully priced is unlikely to strengthen the currency much on its own.

For households the differential arrives as import prices, and for the Bank of Japan it arrives as an inflation picture with an imported component that domestic policy cannot address directly.

ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS: A Ranking Japan Improves by One Place and Explains Away Every Year

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

The annual response in Tokyo to the gender gap index has settled into a routine. Officials note that the index has methodological limitations, that it does not measure welfare, and that Japanese women are healthier and better educated than in almost any country on earth.

All of that is true and none of it is responsive. The index measures gaps between men and women within a country, and it is precisely because Japanese women are healthy and well educated that their under-representation in management and in politics is so conspicuous.

A country that educates women to the same standard as men and then employs them disproportionately in positions that do not lead anywhere has not encountered a measurement problem. It has made a series of choices.

The choices are identifiable. Careers structured around unbroken service reward the employee least likely to take leave. Promotion tracks that require relocation assume a household with one career in it. Long hours are treated as evidence of commitment rather than of poor scheduling.

None of those rules mentions sex, which is why they have survived the legislation that prohibits rules that do.

The political component, where Japan scores worst, has one new variable this year in a female prime minister, and the composition of the cabinet inaugurated on Thursday is the next data point.

One place of improvement in a year is within the noise. What is not noise is that the score has moved slowly for a decade while the explanations have been produced at exactly the same rate.

The World Economic Forum's index measures four domains, and Japan's position is determined almost entirely by two of them: political empowerment, where the share of women in the Diet and the cabinet remains low, and economic participation, where the gap in senior management and in pay persists.

On health and education the country scores near the top, which is why the composite ranking so consistently produces the explanation that the numbers do not capture Japanese circumstances. They capture them precisely; the circumstances are the problem.

The reshuffle inaugurated on the same day the ranking was reported offers a small illustration, with the cabinet photograph showing a front row that includes the prime minister and two other women among its five senior figures and rows behind that do not.

INTERNATIONAL

Congressional Estimate Puts the Cost of the Iran Conflict at 5.9 Trillion Yen

Opposition to the spending is coming from inside the American governing party, which changes the politics of a war in its seventh month

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

American spending on the war with Iran has reached the equivalent of roughly 5.9 trillion yen according to congressional estimates, with opposition to the outlay emerging from within the ruling party itself, Yomiuri Shimbun reported.

A congressional cost estimate is a specific kind of document. It is produced by the legislature rather than the executive, which means it is not the administration's own accounting of its war, and it therefore functions as an independent number that critics can cite.

The figure covers the direct costs of operations: munitions expended, ships and aircraft deployed and sustained, fuel, and the personnel costs of a posture maintained since February.

Wars are expensive in ways that arrive later. Equipment used at a high tempo needs replacing sooner, munitions stockpiles drawn down have to be rebuilt at current prices, and medical and veterans' costs run for decades after the shooting ends.

The political significance is in the source of the objection. Opposition from within a governing party to that party's own war is the condition under which congressional constraints on executive military action become possible rather than rhetorical.

American presidents have conducted sustained operations without formal declarations for most of the past half century, and the legislature's practical leverage has been the appropriation rather than the authorisation.

For Japan, the conflict's cost is measured differently. Roughly nine in ten barrels of Japanese crude pass through the Strait of Hormuz, and the war has held prices above 100 dollars while war-risk insurance premiums for tankers transiting the strait have climbed.

That reaches Japanese households as electricity bills, petrol at close to 170 yen a litre and an import bill that pushed the trade balance into a fourth consecutive monthly deficit in August.

An American debate about whether the war is affordable is therefore, for Tokyo, a debate about how long the energy premium lasts.

Neither the administration nor Tehran has signalled a change of course. Talks aimed at ending the conflict have continued intermittently since June while strikes have continued alongside them.

INTERNATIONAL

Chinese Foreign Minister Urges Restraint on Iran Before Summit With Washington

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

China's Foreign Minister met his Iranian counterpart and called for restraint ahead of preparations for a summit between the United States and China, according to Asahi Shimbun.

The meeting is better understood as a message to Washington than as a message to Tehran.

Beijing is Iran's largest customer for crude oil and one of the few major economies that has continued buying through the conflict. That relationship gives China a degree of influence over Iranian calculations that no Western capital possesses.

Demonstrating a willingness to use that influence, immediately before a summit, is a way of establishing what China brings to the table.

For the American side, a reduction in tension in the Gulf would relieve an energy price problem that has become a domestic political problem. Any Chinese contribution to that outcome has a price, and the price will be discussed in the summit's trade and technology sections.

Japan watches the exchange with a direct interest and no seat. Tokyo's energy security depends on the strait staying open, and its diplomatic weight in Tehran is limited despite a historical relationship considerably warmer than Washington's.

There is a secondary Japanese interest in how the summit handles semiconductors and export controls, where American restrictions on China have pulled Japanese suppliers into compliance obligations they did not negotiate.

Summit groundwork of this kind is conducted through exactly these bilateral meetings, and the pattern of who meets whom in the preceding weeks is the most reliable available guide to what will be on the agenda.

China's relationship with Iran combines energy purchases, infrastructure investment and a shared interest in limiting American influence in the Gulf, which gives Beijing standing to counsel restraint and an interest in being seen to do so before meeting Washington.

For Japan, which imports the overwhelming majority of its crude through the waters the conflict has disrupted, any channel that reduces the risk of escalation is welcome regardless of who operates it.

INTERNATIONAL

What Japan Has Riding on a Washington-Beijing Meeting It Does Not Attend

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Japanese interests in a summit between the United States and China fall into three categories, and only one of them is discussed openly in Tokyo.

The first is trade. Any American-Chinese understanding on tariffs or market access changes the competitive position of Japanese exporters in both markets, and Japan has no vote on the terms.

The second is technology. Export controls on semiconductor equipment have been extended to Japanese suppliers through alliance pressure rather than through Japanese legislation, and a change in the American posture would change Japanese obligations without a Japanese decision.

The third is security, and it is the one Tokyo prefers not to discuss in public. A warming between Washington and Beijing raises, in Japanese strategic thinking, the perennial question of whether American commitments in the region might be traded against concessions elsewhere.

That anxiety is old, predating the current governments in all three capitals, and it has been a constant feature of Japanese strategic calculation since the 1970s.

It is also why Japan invests so heavily in the visible architecture of the alliance: joint exercises, industrial co-operation, basing arrangements and the frequency of ministerial contact.

Arrangements that are difficult to unwind quickly are the practical answer to a fear about political reversal.

The Japanese approach to a summit it does not attend is therefore to make sure that its own agenda has been

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put to Washington beforehand, repeatedly, through the channels it does control.

That work is done by the foreign minister, which is one reason Toshimitsu Motegi keeps his job this week.

Rare earth supply presents the mirror image of the semiconductor question, with Chinese export controls on materials essential to magnets, motors and electronics affecting Japanese manufacturers regardless of the state of Japan-China relations.

INTERNATIONAL

Seven Months of Conflict Have Built a Permanent Premium Into Japanese Energy

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

The conflict between the United States and Iran began in late February. Its most durable effect on Japan is not a single price spike but a premium that has settled into the cost base.

Crude above 100 dollars is the visible part. The less visible part is insurance: war-risk premiums for vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz have risen repeatedly, and that cost is embedded in every cargo that reaches a Japanese refinery.

Shipping companies have also adjusted routing and scheduling in ways that add days and therefore cost. None of that appears as a headline oil price.

The result runs through the Japanese economy in a predictable sequence. Refinery input costs rise, wholesale fuel prices follow, electricity generation costs rise where gas and oil are burned, and the industrial tariff feeds into everything manufactured domestically.

August's import bill, 28% higher than a year earlier, is that sequence expressed as a single number.

The yen at 156 applies a second multiplier to all of it, which is why the currency and the energy question cannot be separated in Japanese policy discussion.

Nuclear restarts were the structural answer, and this week's withdrawal of the Hamaoka application after falsified seismic data was discovered pushed that answer further away.

The strategic petroleum reserve exists for interruptions of supply rather than for elevated prices, and the government has been clear that no release is under consideration while cargoes continue to arrive.

What remains is efficiency, diversification of suppliers and the slow work of adding non-fossil generation, none of which changes a household's bill this winter.

War-risk cover is priced separately from ordinary marine insurance and is quoted for defined areas, with underwriters adjusting rates as their assessment of a region changes, and those assessments respond to incidents rather than to capability analysis.

INTERNATIONAL

How the Cost of a War Gets Counted, and What Gets Left Out

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Congressional estimates of war spending, such as the figure of roughly 5.9 trillion yen now attached to the Iran conflict, are narrower than the phrase suggests.

What they usually include is incremental cost: the additional money spent because the operation is happening, over and above what the armed forces would have cost anyway.

That means the salary of a sailor already in the navy may not appear, while the extra fuel burned by the ship she serves on does.

What they typically exclude is replacement. Munitions fired have to be manufactured again, often at higher prices and with lead times measured in years, and that spending arrives in later budgets under different headings.

Equipment wear is treated similarly. Aircraft flown at wartime tempo reach overhaul thresholds sooner, and the accelerated maintenance appears as ordinary sustainment.

The largest omission is long-term care of veterans, which academic studies of earlier conflicts have repeatedly found to exceed the direct operational cost over the following decades.

None of this means the estimates are wrong. It means they are a floor, and they are usually presented as such by the bodies that produce them.

For the legislative argument now under way in Washington, the floor is sufficient. A number that is certainly too low is a stronger argument than a number that can be disputed.

Congressional estimates of war costs typically count appropriated funds and exclude the longer-term obligations that follow, including veterans' care, equipment replacement and the interest on borrowing that financed the spending, which is why such figures understate the eventual total.

The conversion into yen reflects the Japanese-language reporting the figure comes from, and the underlying dollar amount is what the American debate is conducted in.

ECONOMY

Nikkei Rebounds for the First Time in Four Sessions, Closing at 63,923

Chip and AI names lead the recovery, with the index finishing at the session high before the Fed decision landed

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

The Nikkei Stock Average rose for the first time in four trading days on Wednesday, closing at 63,923 yen, up 438.90 points or 0.69%, according to Nikkei. The index finished at its high for the session.

The broader Topix gained 0.61% to 4,061.72.

Support came from artificial intelligence and semiconductor names that had been sold heavily earlier in the week, and from firmer Asian markets through the afternoon.

The rebound arrived before Wednesday's Federal Reserve decision in Washington, which means Thursday's session in Tokyo is the first to price a quarter-point American increase, a 631-point fall on the Dow and a yen at 156.

The week's pattern has been a market pulled between two forces. Doubts about the pace of artificial intelligence investment have hit the chip complex repeatedly, while banks and insurers have been bought on the prospect of a higher domestic policy rate.

Wednesday's session tilted back toward the first group without the second giving up its gains.

Volume has been modest through the week, which is characteristic of trading ahead of a central bank meeting. The Bank of Japan's Policy Board convened on Thursday morning and announces on Friday.

The index remains well above where it began the year, and the argument about whether that level is justified by earnings or by the currency has not been settled by anything that happened this week.

A weaker yen flatters the reported results of exporters without changing the volume of anything they sell. At 156 to the dollar, a substantial share of the profit growth reported by Japan's largest manufacturers is translation rather than trade.

That is the number Friday's decision could begin to move.

ECONOMY

August Trade Deficit Widens to 1.1 Trillion Yen as Import Bill Outruns a Record Export Month

Exports rose 19.3% and imports 28.0%; the surplus with the United States fell roughly 80% to 70.3 billion yen

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Japan recorded a trade deficit of 1.1056 trillion yen in August, the fourth consecutive monthly shortfall and roughly 2.7 times the deficit recorded in the same month last year, according to Ministry of Finance figures.

Exports rose 19.3% from a year earlier to 10.0484 trillion yen. Imports rose 28.0% to 11.154 trillion yen.

Both sides of that ledger are growing quickly, which is not what a weak economy looks like. The problem is the gap between the growth rates.

A 28% increase in the import bill in a country that buys nearly all of its energy abroad is a statement about two prices at once: the price of crude, which has held above 100 dollars through the Gulf conflict, and the price of the yen used to pay for it.

At 156 to the dollar, every barrel costs materially more in yen than it did a year ago even if the dollar price had not moved.

The surplus with the United States fell to 70.3 billion yen, down roughly 80% from a year earlier. That figure is the clearest measure available of what the tariff arrangement agreed last year has done to the bilateral balance.

Japanese exporters absorbed part of the tariff cost to hold market share, American buyers absorbed part in higher prices, and the residual surplus shrank to a fraction of its former size.

For a government that agreed to those terms in exchange for predictability, the number is the price of the predictability.

The wider deficit also has a currency consequence that runs in an uncomfortable direction. A country running persistent trade deficits is selling its own currency to pay for imports, which weakens the currency, which raises the import bill.

Breaking that loop is one of the arguments for a higher domestic policy rate, and the Policy Board is in session as the figures land.

The offsetting consideration is that export volumes are holding up. A 19.3% increase in export value is not the profile of an economy losing its industrial base, whatever the balance says.

ECONOMY

July Machinery Orders Slip 3.7% but Remain 11.2% Higher Than a Year Ago

The Cabinet Office holds its assessment at 'signs of recovery' as the forward indicator of capital investment gives back part of June's gain

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Private sector machinery orders excluding volatile ships and electric power equipment fell 3.7% in July from the previous month to 1.0169 trillion yen, the first decline in two months, according to Cabinet Office figures reported by Reuters.

Measured against July last year, the same series was 11.2% higher.

The Cabinet Office maintained its assessment that the series shows signs of recovery.

Core machinery orders are watched because they arrive before the spending they predict. A company that orders machinery in July installs it months later and records the capital investment later still, which makes the series one of the earlier signals available about business intentions.

It is also noisy. Single large orders can move a monthly figure by several percentage points, which is why the ships and power equipment categories are stripped out and why analysts look through individual months to the trend.

The trend, on the year-on-year comparison, remains positive by a double-digit margin.

What makes July's decline worth attention is the environment around it. Borrowing costs have risen sharply, with ten-year government yields touching 3.035% this week, and companies deciding whether to finance new equipment now face a materially different calculation than they did a year ago.

Set against that, the semiconductor and artificial intelligence investment cycle continues to generate demand for exactly the kind of precision equipment this series measures.

Machine tool orders for August, reported separately, were 65% higher than a year earlier at 197.8 billion yen, which points in the opposite direction from July's core reading.

Reconciling those two is the work of the next several months. Both cannot describe the same underlying trajectory indefinitely.

ECONOMY

Standard Land Prices Rise a Fifth Year, With Tokyo Up 7.9% Across All Uses

The national average for all uses gained 1.5%, extending a recovery that has been concentrated in a small number of places

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Standard land prices rose 1.5% nationally across all uses, the fifth consecutive annual increase, according to Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism figures published this week and carried into Thursday's morning editions. Tokyo prices for all uses rose 7.9%.

The distance between those two numbers is the story the national average conceals.

A 1.5% national figure sounds like the gentle recovery of a mature property market. A 7.9% figure for Tokyo describes something else: sustained competition for a limited stock of well-located land in a city where demand has not stopped growing.

Standard land prices are assessed as of 1 July each year by prefectural governments and are used as a reference for transactions, for taxation and for public land acquisition. They are a survey of value rather than a record of sales, which makes them steadier than transaction data and slower to turn.

The forces behind the Tokyo figure are familiar. Redevelopment around major stations, demand for logistics sites near the capital, and a hotel and retail sector rebuilt around foreign visitors spending a currency that buys a great deal more yen than it did five years ago.

Set against that, much of regional Japan continues to record flat or falling assessments in the same survey, in places where the working-age population is shrinking and the buyer of last resort is the local authority.

For households, rising land prices arrive as a cost. Tokyo condominium prices reached a record average this year, and the land component is a substantial share of that.

For local governments, they arrive as revenue, since fixed asset taxes are levied on assessed value.

For the Bank of Japan, a fifth consecutive year of increases is one more piece of evidence that the deflationary period is genuinely over, which is the premise on which the policy normalisation now under way rests.

Whether that is a recovery or a divergence depends on which half of the country the reader lives in.

ECONOMY

Gasoline Holds Near 170 Yen as Pump Prices Ease Marginally

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

The national average retail price of regular gasoline was 169.90 yen a litre as of Monday, down 0.1 yen from the previous week, according to Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry figures reported by Nihon Nogyo Shinbun.

A movement of ten sen is not relief. It is a price holding still near a level that has become the background condition of Japanese household budgets.

Two forces are pushing in opposite directions. Crude has held above 100 dollars a barrel through the Gulf conflict, which raises the cost of the product. The yen at 156 to the dollar raises it again on the way into the country.

Against those, the domestic retail market has been competing on margin, which is the main reason the pump price has moved sideways rather than up.

Fuel costs reach households through more than the pump. Road freight sets the delivery cost of everything sold in a supermarket, and agricultural machinery, greenhouse heating and fishing vessels all run on the same fuel.

That is the channel through which an energy price becomes a food price, and it is one of the reasons the government's tax response has been directed at food rather than fuel.

For rural households, where car ownership is not optional and journeys are longer, the burden of a 170 yen litre is substantially heavier than the national average suggests.

The weekly survey by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry samples retail prices nationwide and reports the average with a lag of a few days, which means the figure describes the position on the 14th rather than the pump today.

Regional variation is substantial, with prices in Hokkaido, Okinawa and remote areas running well above the national average because of transport costs, and prices in the metropolitan areas running below it because of competition.

Crude above $100 a barrel and a yen weakening toward 156 both push the underlying cost upward, which makes a week of marginal easing at the pump more likely a reflection of subsidy and timing than of any change in the fundamentals.

ECONOMY

Machine Tool Orders Jump 65% in August to 197.8 Billion Yen

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Machine tool orders rose 65% in August from a year earlier to 197.8 billion yen, according to figures reported by Nihon Keizai Shimbun.

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Machine tools are the equipment that makes other equipment, which is why the series is followed as a measure of industrial confidence across several economies at once. Japanese builders sell heavily into China, the United States and Europe as well as at home.

An increase of that size reflects a low base a year ago as much as strength today, and monthly figures in this series swing widely.

The demand behind it is nevertheless identifiable. Semiconductor fabrication, electric vehicle components and the defence-related manufacturing expanding in several countries all consume precision machining capacity.

Japanese builders have spent two decades competing on accuracy and reliability rather than price, a position that has held up better against Chinese competition than the equivalent position in consumer electronics did.

The figure sits awkwardly beside July's 3.7% decline in core machinery orders, a domestic series measuring a different slice of the same capital investment cycle.

Export demand and domestic demand are not obliged to move together, and at the moment they are not.

Machine tool orders are among the more sensitive indicators of manufacturing intention, since a company buys a lathe or a machining centre only when it expects to have work for it over several years.

A 65% year-on-year rise reflects a low base in the comparison month as much as strength in the current one, and analysts read the level of orders alongside the growth rate for that reason.

Overseas demand, particularly from semiconductor-related and automotive customers, has driven the recovery in orders more than domestic capital spending has, which ties the sector's fortunes to the same export environment the trade figures describe.

ECONOMY

Payment Processing Sector Counts 154 Firms and 30 Trillion Yen After a Failure

A trade ministry survey follows the collapse of Zen-Toshin, exposing how much money moves through lightly regulated intermediaries

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

There are roughly 154 payment processing companies operating in Japan handling something in the order of 30 trillion yen, according to a Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry survey conducted after the bankruptcy of Zen-Toshin and reported by Asahi Shimbun.

The survey exists because the failure raised a question nobody could answer immediately: how much money sits, in transit, inside companies that most consumers have never heard of.

Payment processors occupy the space between a shopper and a merchant. The customer pays, the processor receives, and the merchant is paid days or weeks later. During that interval the money is on the processor's books.

Thirty trillion yen is not the amount held at any one moment. It is the scale of the flow, and the float inside it is what a failure exposes.

When a processor collapses, merchants who have already delivered goods discover that the payment for them has not arrived, and small businesses with thin cash reserves absorb the shock first.

Japan's regulatory architecture was built around banks. The obligations that apply to a bank holding deposits — capital requirements, segregation of client money, supervision — were not designed for companies that hold other people's money for a fortnight as a byproduct of a technology service.

Cashless payment has grown quickly in Japan from a late start, driven by government promotion, point rewards and the convenience of code-based payment. The intermediary layer grew with it.

A survey is the first step rather than a remedy. The decisions that follow — whether client funds must be segregated, whether processors need capital against the float, whether the sector is supervised by the trade ministry or the financial regulator — are the ones that determine whether the next failure costs merchants money.

Payment processors sit between merchants and the card and bank networks, and their failure leaves merchants unpaid for transactions that customers have already completed, which is the exposure the Zen-Toshin bankruptcy exposed.

A survey establishing the sector's size is the precondition for any regulatory response, since a ministry cannot supervise what it has not counted, and the 30 trillion yen figure indicates a scale that had grown faster than oversight.

ECONOMY

Council Approves OTC-Style Drug Surcharge With Long-Term Users Exempted

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

A subcommittee of the Social Security Council has approved an additional patient charge for prescription drugs with over-the-counter equivalents, with medicines used continuously over the course of a year excluded from the surcharge, according to Yomiuri Shimbun.

The exclusion is the significant part. The policy is aimed at people who obtain through a prescription, at subsidised cost, a medicine they could buy in a pharmacy — painkillers, antihistamines, skin preparations and similar products.

Exempting long-term users separates that group from patients who take the same category of medicine every day for a chronic condition, for whom the pharmacy price over a year is a serious expense rather than a convenience charge.

Without the exemption, a policy aimed at casual use would have fallen hardest on people managing continuous illness.

The wider objective is containment of public medical spending in a country where the population over 100 has just passed 107,000 and the share of the population over 65 continues to rise.

Measures of this kind produce modest savings individually. Their significance is cumulative, and as a signal about which costs the system intends to shift toward patients.

The design detail that matters next is how continuous use is verified, since the definition determines who pays and imposes an administrative load on pharmacies and prescribers.

The distinction between drugs used occasionally and drugs used continuously is the substantive point of the exemption. A surcharge on an antihistamine bought twice a year is a nudge toward the pharmacy shelf; a surcharge on a medication taken daily for a chronic condition is a tax on being ill.

Japan's health insurance system covers a wide range of medications that in other countries are bought over the counter, and the surcharge is intended to shift routine purchases out of the insured system while protecting those who depend on it.

The Social Security Council's subcommittees do the detailed work of health policy, and their approval generally precedes ministerial adoption, which makes this week's decision the substantive one rather than a preliminary step.

ECONOMY

Asian Development Bank President Warns of Uncertainty in the Global Economy

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

Asian Development Bank President Masato Kanda has pointed to uncertainty in the global economy, according to Yomiuri Shimbun.

The assessment carries particular weight because of where Kanda sat before he took the post. As Japan's vice minister of finance for international affairs he was the official responsible for currency policy, including intervention, which makes him unusually well acquainted with how quickly conditions can change.

The sources of uncertainty are not obscure. The Federal Reserve has resumed raising rates. Tariff policy in the world's largest economy has changed repeatedly within a single year. A conflict in the Gulf has held crude above 100 dollars and put shipping insurance premiums on a permanent upward path.

Developing Asian economies absorb all of that through currencies that weaken when American rates rise, and through import bills denominated in dollars.

The Asian Development Bank's lending programmes are built on multi-year assumptions about growth and borrowing costs, and both assumptions have moved.

Japan is among the bank's largest shareholders and has traditionally supplied its president, a position that gives Tokyo a voice in development finance across a region where it competes for influence with Beijing.

Warnings from institutional figures rarely move markets. They matter because they shape the assumptions inside the institutions that lend.

The Asian Development Bank's president is a former Japanese vice-minister of finance for international affairs, a career that included direct responsibility for currency policy, and his assessment of global uncertainty carries the weight of that background.

The bank's own lending is concentrated in the developing economies of the region, which are exposed to the same combination of American tightening, elevated energy prices and trade disruption that Japan faces from a stronger position.

Capital tends to leave emerging markets when American rates rise, and a Federal Reserve that has just increased its target range with a further move hinted is the environment in which such warnings are usually delivered.

ECONOMY

Markets, Rates and Prices at a Glance

Compiled by the Economics Desk

NIKKEI 225 (SEPT. 16 CLOSE): 63,923 yen, up 438.90 points or 0.69%, the first gain in four sessions and a close at the session high. TOPIX (SEPT. 16 CLOSE): 4,061.72, up 0.61%.

US MARKETS (SEPT. 16 CLOSE): Dow Jones Industrial Average 51,461, down 631 points, a three-month low after trading more than 900 points lower during the session. US 10-YEAR TREASURY: around 5.02% at the close after touching roughly 5.04%.

CURRENCY: dollar-yen 156.25 to 156.35 in New York trading. FED FUNDS TARGET: 3.75 to 4.00% after a unanimous quarter-point increase on Sept. 16, the first rise since July 2023.

JAPAN 10-YEAR YIELD: near 3.035% this week, around a three-decade high. BOJ POLICY RATE: 1.00%, with the Policy Board meeting Sept. 17 and 18 and markets positioned for an increase to 1.25%.

AUGUST TRADE BALANCE: deficit of 1.1056 trillion yen, a fourth consecutive monthly shortfall. Exports 10.0484 trillion yen, up 19.3%. Imports 11.154 trillion yen, up 28.0%. Surplus with the United States 70.3 billion yen, down about 80%.

JULY CORE MACHINERY ORDERS: 1.0169 trillion yen, down 3.7% on the month, up 11.2% on the year. AUGUST MACHINE TOOL ORDERS: 197.8 billion yen, up 65% on the year.

STANDARD LAND PRICES (AS OF JULY 1): national average all uses up 1.5%, a fifth consecutive annual rise. Tokyo all uses up 7.9%. REGULAR GASOLINE (SEPT. 14): 169.90 yen a litre, down 0.1 yen on the week.

UPCOMING: Bank of Japan policy decision and Governor's press conference, Sept. 18. Extraordinary Diet session with the food consumption tax measure. Respect for the Aged Day, Sept. 21, with Typhoon No. 25 forecast to approach Kanto.

MACHINERY ORDERS (July): private sector orders excluding ships and power generation down 3.7% on the month to 1.0169 trillion yen, up 11.2% on the year. Cabinet Office assessment unchanged at signs of recovery.

CENTRAL BANKS: Federal Reserve raised its target range 0.25 points to 3.75%-4.00% on the 16th, the first increase since July 2023, by unanimous vote, with one further increase hinted for this year. Bank of Japan meets Sept. 17-18 with an increase widely anticipated.

ECONOMY

How a Quarter Point Reaches a Kitchen Table

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

A change in the Bank of Japan's policy rate is an adjustment to the interest charged between financial institutions overnight. The distance between that and a household budget is longer than it looks, and the route is worth tracing.

The first stop is the banks' own funding cost, which moves almost immediately. The second is the short-term prime rate, which is the reference for a large share of Japanese variable-rate mortgages.

Variable-rate borrowing is the dominant form of home loan in Japan, a legacy of three decades in which fixing a rate meant paying for insurance against an event that never arrived.

Most contracts adjust the applied rate twice a year and hold the monthly payment steady for five years, absorbing the change by shifting the split between interest and principal. Borrowers therefore feel a rise as a slower reduction in their debt before they feel it in their payment.

On the other side of the ledger, deposit rates rise too, though historically by less and later. For a country where households hold an unusually large share of their assets in cash and deposits, that is not a small matter.

Savers have been the silent losers of the zero-rate decades. A policy rate at 1.25% begins, slowly, to return something on money that has earned nothing for a generation.

Corporate borrowers meet the change through loan renewals rather than immediately, which is why the effect on business investment shows up months later in series such as machinery orders.

The fastest channel of all is the currency. If a rate rise strengthens the yen, imported energy and food become cheaper in yen terms within weeks, and that reaches the kitchen table faster than any mortgage adjustment.

Japanese mortgages are predominantly variable rate, and the convention that limits payment increases to 125% of the previous amount at each five-year adjustment spreads a rate move across cycles rather than delivering it at once.

Between adjustments, a higher rate changes the composition of the payment rather than its size, with more going to interest and less to principal, which extends the effective life of the loan without the borrower necessarily noticing.

ECONOMY

Yields Near 3% Are Repricing a Generation of Assumptions

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Japanese ten-year government bond yields touched 3.035% this week, a level last seen in the 1990s, and the consequences run wider than the government's own borrowing costs.

Japan's financial system was built around the assumption that the risk-free domestic rate was close to zero. Pension funds, insurers and banks all constructed portfolios on that basis, and many of them went abroad to find yield that did not exist at home.

A domestic bond paying 3% changes that calculation. Capital that left in search of returns has a reason to come home, which is one of the mechanisms that could support the yen without any intervention at all.

For life insurers with long-dated liabilities, higher yields are relief. Matching a promise made decades ago is far easier at 3% than at 0.3%.

For holders of the existing stock of low-coupon bonds, the same move is a loss, since prices fall as yields rise.

For the government, the cost arrives gradually. Debt is refinanced in tranches, so the average interest cost of the national debt lags market yields by years, but the direction is now set.

That is the fiscal argument sitting underneath the extraordinary session. A five trillion yen annual tax cut with no funding source is being proposed into a market that has just repriced the cost of borrowing for the first time in three decades.

Markets do not vote on fiscal policy. They price it, and the pricing is visible every day at the long end of the curve.

The Bank of Japan's dismantling of yield curve control, which had capped long-term rates directly, is what made a move of this size possible, and a market setting rates without a cap is doing something Japanese bond markets had largely stopped doing.

Life insurers and pension funds hold substantial domestic bond portfolios, and higher yields improve the returns backing long-term obligations that years of suppression had squeezed, which is the

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constituency that benefits from the move.

ECONOMY

A Surplus Down 80% Is What the Tariff Arrangement Looks Like in the Data

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

Japan's trade surplus with the United States fell to 70.3 billion yen in August, roughly 80% lower than the same month a year earlier, according to Ministry of Finance figures.

That collapse is the arithmetic consequence of the arrangement Japan accepted last year: a 15% tariff on most exports to the American market, negotiated down from a proposed 25%, in exchange for predictability and alongside a 550 billion dollar investment commitment.

A tariff is a tax paid at the border, and its cost is divided between the exporter, the importer and the final buyer according to who has the least ability to walk away.

Japanese manufacturers with long-established American market positions had the least ability to walk away, which is why they absorbed a substantial portion in margin rather than passing the whole amount into price.

The automotive sector carries most of this weight. Vehicles and components are the largest single element of Japanese exports to the United States, and sector-specific measures on autos and steel sit on top of the general rate.

For Washington, a shrinking bilateral surplus is the stated objective achieved. For Tokyo, it is the price of a settlement that has held while American trade policy toward other partners has changed repeatedly.

The investment side of the bargain complicates the ledger further. Japanese capital building factories in Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas produces American output and American employment that no longer appears in the trade figures at all.

Measured by the balance alone, Japan is losing. Measured by the stability of access to its largest export market, the calculation is less obvious, and it is the calculation the government made.

The tariff arrangement was negotiated in 2025 against the threat of a considerably higher rate, and its defenders argue that a surplus down 80% is the cost of predictability rather than evidence of a bad bargain.

Its critics point to the same figure and ask what predictability is worth if the trade it protects has shrunk this far, a question the minister responsible will face in the session ahead.

ECONOMY

Why the Import Bill Keeps Outrunning Exports

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

A trade deficit in a country that exports as much as Japan does is usually a story about energy, and this one is no exception.

Japan buys nearly all of its crude oil and natural gas abroad, most of the oil through the Strait of Hormuz, and pays for it in dollars. Two multipliers therefore sit on top of the physical volume: the dollar price of the commodity and the yen price of the dollar.

Crude above 100 dollars and a yen at 156 apply those multipliers simultaneously.

The nuclear question sits directly underneath. Every reactor not generating electricity is replaced by fuel that has to be imported, and this week's withdrawal of the Hamaoka restart application after the discovery of falsified seismic data pushed the prospect of additional restarts further away.

Food is the second element. Japan's calorie self-sufficiency is low by the standards of comparable economies, and the same currency effect that inflates the fuel bill inflates the grocery import bill.

On the export side, the picture is stronger than the balance implies. Shipments rose 19.3% in value in August, and semiconductor equipment, machine tools and precision components continue to find demand.

The trap is that a weak currency helps exporters in yen terms while making the imports every factory depends on more expensive, and the second effect grows as the first flatters the accounts.

That is the loop a higher policy rate is meant to interrupt, and it is one reason the Policy Board's meeting this week has drawn more attention than most.

Energy is the largest single component of the import bill, and a yen near 156 against a crude price above $100 raises its yen cost through two channels at once, since the fuel is priced in dollars and converted before any Japanese buyer pays for it.

Exports rising 19.3% while imports rise 28.0% is a currency story on both sides: a weaker yen flatters export values in yen terms without necessarily increasing volumes, and inflates import values regardless of volume.

ECONOMY

One Land Price Average, Two Property Markets

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

The national average land price increase of 1.5% describes a country that does not exist. It is the arithmetic middle of two markets moving in different directions.

In the first, land within reach of a major station in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya or Fukuoka is competed for by developers, logistics operators, hotel groups and households, and prices reflect a genuine shortage of well-located sites.

In the second, land in towns whose working-age population has been falling for thirty years has no marginal buyer at all, and assessments drift down or stand still because nothing has changed hands to prove otherwise.

Averaging the two produces a number that is true and useless.

The policy consequences differ as sharply as the prices. In the cities, the question is affordability, and the record average price of a Tokyo condominium is its most visible expression. In the regions, the question is vacant property, and the abandoned house has become a planning category rather than an anomaly.

Tax policy applies uniformly to both. Fixed asset taxes are levied on assessed value, so rising urban assessments raise municipal revenue in places that already have it and leave shrinking municipalities where they were.

Successive governments have tried to move activity out of Tokyo through relocation incentives and regional revitalisation funds. The land price series is the clearest available evidence of how that effort is going.

Five consecutive years of national increases is nonetheless a real change from the long decline that followed the bubble, and for anyone who bought property in the 1990s, an assessment that rises at all is unfamiliar news.

Inheritance tax assessment draws on a related valuation series set at around 80% of the public notice level, which means fourteen consecutive years of Tokyo increases have translated into rising liabilities for families transferring property.

That pressure has forced sales of family property in metropolitan areas where values rose sharply, a consequence the price index records without describing.

ECONOMY

The Indicator That Looks Forward, and Its Limits

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Core machinery orders are among the few Japanese statistics that describe the future rather than the past, which is why a 3.7% monthly fall attracts attention out of proportion to its size.

The series counts orders placed with machinery manufacturers by private customers, excluding ships and electric power equipment because a single vessel or generator can distort a month beyond usefulness.

An order precedes delivery, delivery precedes installation, and installation precedes the capital investment entry in the national accounts. The chain gives the series a lead of roughly six to nine months over the spending it anticipates.

The cost of that lead is volatility. Monthly swings of several percentage points are routine, and the Cabinet Office's own guidance discourages reading any single month as a signal.

This is why the Cabinet Office's assessment language matters more than the monthly number. A change in the standing phrase — from signs of recovery to something weaker — would be a genuine event. The phrase was unchanged in July.

Two things complicate the reading now. Borrowing costs have risen far enough to alter investment decisions, and the artificial intelligence build-out is generating demand that does not behave like an ordinary cycle.

An economy can have expensive money and a technology boom at the same time. The orders data is where the two meet, and July's decline is the first month in a while in which the first of them appeared to have the upper hand.

The series excludes ships and power generation equipment from its headline because single orders in those categories can be large enough to move a monthly figure by themselves and say nothing about the broader picture.

A month-on-month decline alongside an 11.2% year-on-year rise is the pattern of a series that is volatile around an upward trend, which is why the Cabinet Office's assessment did not change.

Semiconductor and data centre construction have supported orders through recent quarters, and the equipment those projects require flows through this series before it appears anywhere else.

ECONOMY

What to Watch When the Bank of Japan Reports on Friday

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

The Policy Board's statement arrives on Friday afternoon, followed by the Governor's press conference. Three things in it will matter more than the headline rate.

The first is the vote. A unanimous decision signals a Board that has settled on a direction; dissents in either direction indicate an argument that will shape the next meeting.

The second is the language on wages. Governor Ueda has tied the case for normalisation to evidence that wage growth is sustaining inflation domestically rather than importing it through the currency, and any change in that formulation is the clearest available guide to the pace ahead.

The third is the treatment of the bond market. Yields near 3.035% have done a portion of the tightening already, and whether the Board describes that as helpful or as something requiring a response tells markets how much further it intends to go.

What the Board is unlikely to address directly is the currency, which is the Finance Ministry's responsibility. Governors are careful about the exchange rate for that reason, and the careful phrasing is itself informative.

A rise to 1.25% would leave Japanese policy at a level still far below the American range of 3.75 to 4.00%, which is why the decision changes expectations more than it changes the differential.

For borrowers, the practical consequence arrives at the next contractual reset rather than on Friday. For savers, it arrives as the first meaningful deposit rates in a generation.

The statement matters more than the decision when the decision is priced. Markets have almost fully anticipated a move to 1.25%, so the reaction will turn on whatever the board says about the pace afterward and about the environment it is operating in.

That environment now includes a Federal Reserve that has just raised rates, a yen in the 156 range, long-term yields at three-decade highs and a cabinet that has approved an unfunded tax measure, none of which the Bank of Japan controls and all of which it must acknowledge.

Governor Ueda has consistently framed normalisation as conditional rather than programmatic, and Friday's communication will be read for whether that framing survives a week in which conditions moved sharply.

ECONOMY

What a 156 Yen Dollar Means at the Supermarket

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

A currency level is an abstraction until it is traced through to a shelf, and the route from 156 yen to the dollar to a household's weekly shop is short.

Japan imports most of its energy and a large share of its food. Both are priced internationally in dollars, so a weaker yen raises the landed cost of both before a single domestic margin is added.

Wheat is the clearest case. Imported through a government mechanism and sold on to millers at a price revised twice yearly, it sets the cost of bread, noodles and a great deal of processed food.

Cooking oil, soybeans, animal feed and fertiliser follow the same path. Feed costs in particular reach consumers with a lag, through the price of eggs, chicken, pork and dairy.

Fuel does the rest. Road freight sets the delivery cost of everything in the shop, and petrol near 170 yen a litre is embedded in every item on every shelf.

The offsetting benefit accrues to exporters and to the tourism sector, where a cheap yen has produced record visitor numbers and full hotels.

That is the distributional problem in a sentence: the benefits of a weak currency are concentrated in corporate earnings and in one industry, and the costs are spread across every household that eats.

It is also the clearest argument for the policy normalisation the Bank of Japan is pursuing, whatever the pace.

Food follows energy with a lag and less visibly, as processors and retailers absorb part of the increase before passing the remainder through, frequently as smaller package sizes rather than higher prices.

The food consumption tax cut approved this week addresses the same budget line from a different direction, though not until April 2027, and does nothing about the input costs that a weaker yen imposes on the producers who set the prices.

ECONOMY

The Fed's Turn Lands Hardest on the Economies That Did Not Vote for It

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

American monetary policy is set for American conditions and exported to everybody else, which is why the Asian Development Bank's president chose this week to warn about global uncertainty.

A higher dollar rate pulls capital toward dollar assets. Emerging Asian currencies weaken, import bills in local currency rise, and central banks in those countries are forced to choose between defending the currency and supporting domestic demand.

Countries with dollar-denominated debt face the bill twice, once through the interest rate and once through the exchange rate.

Japan is insulated from the worst of this because it borrows in its own currency and holds enormous foreign assets. The channel here is the exchange rate and the import bill rather than a funding crisis.

For the region's developing economies, the combination is harsher: a stronger dollar, crude above 100 dollars and trade policy in their largest export market that has changed repeatedly within a single year.

Japanese manufacturers with supply chains across Southeast Asia have an interest in how those countries cope, since a component shortage in Thailand or Vietnam reaches a Japanese assembly line within weeks.

The Asian Development Bank's lending assumptions were built for a lower-rate world, and revisiting them is the practical content of a warning that otherwise sounds like a formality.

Capital tends to move toward higher yields, and a Federal Reserve raising rates draws money out of economies whose central banks are not, which is the mechanism behind the yen's overnight move and behind pressure on emerging market currencies across the region.

For an importing country the consequence is direct: everything priced in dollars costs more in local currency, and the central bank faces a choice between following the Federal Reserve and accepting the inflation that not following produces.

The Bank of Japan's meeting, opening the morning after the American decision, is where that choice is being made, with the difference that a Japanese increase has already been priced while the Federal Reserve's had not been entirely.

ECONOMY

ECONOMY

The One Sector That Wants the Yen Exactly Where It Is

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

A currency at 156 to the dollar is a problem for households buying imported food and a gift to the businesses that sell Japan to foreigners.

Inbound tourism has been the clearest beneficiary of the weak yen, and the effect runs well beyond hotel rooms. Restaurants, department stores, regional crafts, ski resorts and the transport operators carrying visitors between them all price in yen and collect from customers earning in stronger currencies.

The land price survey published this week shows where that money has gone. Commercial assessments in tourist districts have been among the strongest performers, and hotel development has been a principal driver of transactions in Kyoto, Osaka and Hokkaido.

The costs are equally visible and increasingly discussed. Crowding at the best-known sites, pressure on local transport, rubbish, and the conversion of residential buildings into short-term accommodation have all generated municipal responses.

Several cities have moved to restrict new short-term rental registrations in residential districts, and accommodation taxes have spread.

A stronger yen would relieve the pressure and reduce the revenue at the same time, which is why the tourism industry's view of monetary normalisation differs from the manufacturer's and from the shopper's.

For regional Japan, where the alternative sources of growth are scarce, the trade is not close. Visitors are the demand that arrived when the domestic population stopped growing.

Inbound tourism has been among the economy's strongest performers, with a yen that has made Japan inexpensive for international visitors relative to the alternatives and visitor numbers that have supported hospitality, retail and transport.

That strength has produced its own difficulties, with housing costs in transformed destinations disconnecting from local wages and congestion prompting entry charges at several sites, which is why the sector's preference for a weak yen is not universally shared even within the regions that benefit.

A Bank of Japan increase that strengthened the currency would reduce the discount visitors currently enjoy, which is the one sector for which Friday's decision carries a cost rather than a benefit.

ECONOMY

The Structure Underneath the Pump Price

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

A litre of regular petrol at 169.90 yen is a stack of components, and the crude oil in it is only one.

The gasoline tax is levied per litre rather than as a percentage, which means it does not rise with the oil price but also does not fall when the price falls. A petroleum and coal tax and a climate change levy sit alongside it.

Consumption tax is then applied on top of the total, including on the fuel taxes themselves, which is the arrangement Japanese motoring organisations have objected to for decades.

Refining, distribution and retail margins make up the remainder, and competition between filling stations is the part of the structure most sensitive to local conditions. Rural areas with one station have higher prices than suburbs with four.

Subsidies to wholesalers have been used repeatedly since 2022 to hold the retail price below politically sensitive thresholds, at considerable cost, and their unwinding has been a recurring argument in every budget since.

The fundamental exposure does not change. Japan imports the crude, pays in dollars and refines domestically, so the yen and the barrel price set the floor under everything else.

With crude above 100 dollars and the currency at 156, a pump price that moves ten sen in a week is holding steady rather than easing.

Japan's gasoline price contains a fixed tax component that does not move with crude, which is why a large move in the oil price produces a proportionally smaller move at the pump.

Government subsidies to wholesalers have periodically held retail prices below where crude would otherwise put them, a measure that shields drivers while transferring the cost to the general budget.

Distribution costs vary by region, with remote and island areas paying substantially more than the metropolitan average because of transport, which is why the national figure describes a middle that most drivers do not pay.

BUSINESS

Hitachi Energy Commits 82 Billion Yen to a Mississippi Transformer Plant

The equipment that connects power to a grid has become the constraint on American electricity expansion, and Japanese industry is selling into the shortage

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

Hitachi Energy is to build a transformer factory in Mississippi at a cost of roughly 82 billion yen, according to reporting carried by Sankei Shimbun and Nihon Keizai Shimbun.

Transformers are not a glamorous product. They raise and lower voltage so that electricity can travel long distances and then be used safely at the other end, and nothing connects to a grid without one.

They have also become one of the hardest things in the world to buy. Lead times for large power transformers have stretched to several years, driven by data centre construction, electrification of transport and heating, and the replacement of American grid equipment installed generations ago.

A factory is the only real answer to a queue of that kind. Capacity cannot be improvised, because the specialised steel, the copper winding and above all the trained workforce take years to assemble.

Mississippi offers the combination American manufacturing investment has favoured recently: available land, lower construction and labour costs than the coasts, and state governments willing to compete for the jobs.

For Hitachi, the plant is also a hedge against trade policy. Equipment built in the United States is not exposed to tariffs on imports from Japan, and the investment counts toward the bilateral framework agreed last year.

Japan's own grid faces a version of the same shortage. Connecting offshore wind, restarting transmission projects and reinforcing the links between regional utilities all require the same equipment from the same constrained global supply.

Capacity built in Mississippi does not serve a substation in Tohoku. Japanese utilities are competing in the same queue as everyone else, and the domestic grid investment programme has to be planned around lead times measured in years rather than months.

The order books of the handful of firms capable of building this equipment are, for the moment, the single best forward indicator of where electricity demand is expected to grow.

Transformer lead times have stretched to years worldwide as replacement of ageing grids, connection of renewable generation and data centre construction converged on a product built to order from grain-oriented electrical steel produced by a limited number of mills.

BUSINESS

Banks Rediscover the Interest Margin as Rates Climb

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Bank and insurance shares have been among the firmer parts of the Tokyo market this week, and the reason is straightforward: a higher policy rate widens the gap between what a lender pays for money and what it charges for it.

That gap is the core of commercial banking, and in Japan it has been compressed for so long that an entire generation of bankers has never worked in a normal one.

Deposit rates near zero left no room to lower funding costs further, while competition pushed lending rates down toward the same floor. Banks responded by chasing fee income, selling investment products and lending abroad.

A policy rate at 1.25%, with a market expecting more, begins to restore the ordinary arithmetic. Lending rates reset upward faster than deposit rates, and the difference falls to the lender.

Regional banks have the most to gain and the most to fear. Their business is more concentrated in traditional lending than the megabanks', so margin recovery matters more, but their borrowers are smaller firms with thinner cushions against higher repayments.

Credit quality is the other side of the trade. Loans written when money was free are being refinanced into a different world, and some borrowers whose business models depended on cheap debt will not survive the transition.

For insurers, higher long-term yields are unambiguously good news. Matching decades-old promises to policyholders is far easier when a domestic government bond pays 3%.

The market's enthusiasm for the sector is therefore a bet on normalisation continuing, and Friday's decision is the next test of it.

Credit risk is the counterweight to the margin improvement. Borrowers who took on debt at near-zero rates face higher servicing costs as loans reprice, and the affordability assessments made at origination assumed an environment that no longer applies.

Real estate lending has drawn specific regulatory attention given land values that have risen for fourteen consecutive years in Tokyo against financing costs now moving the other way.

BUSINESS

Households Are Dropping Flood Cover From Fire Insurance to Hold Down Premiums

The share of policies including water damage is falling in a country where water damage is becoming more common

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

The proportion of fire insurance policies in Japan that include flood and water damage cover is declining, with policyholders removing it to reduce premiums, according to Asahi Shimbun.

The logic is easy to follow at the kitchen table and difficult to defend at the level of the country. Premiums have risen repeatedly as insurers have repriced for a decade of severe weather. Removing the most expensive component is the fastest way to bring the annual cost down.

The component being removed is the one that covers the risk that has grown.

Japanese fire insurance has historically bundled a range of perils, water damage among them, and the bundling meant that most households were covered against flooding whether or not they had thought about it.

Unbundling transfers the decision to the policyholder, who is asked to assess a risk that is difficult for an individual to judge. Hazard maps exist and are published by municipalities, but a household reading one has to translate a shaded polygon into a judgement about their own building.

This month's rain emergency, in which one death was recorded and landslide warnings extended across several prefectures, is the sort of event that would fall inside the cover being dropped.

Insurers face their own arithmetic. Repeated large payouts have forced premium increases, the increases push customers to reduce cover, and the shrinking pool of insured risk makes the remaining premiums harder to spread.

That spiral is familiar from other markets where climate-related claims have risen. It ends either with public participation in the risk pool or with a population that is uninsured against the thing most likely to happen to it.

For a country this exposed to typhoons and torrential rain, a falling rate of flood cover is a number worth watching more closely than most.

Flood cover is priced on location, and households in areas that hazard maps identify as exposed pay the most for it, which is exactly the population for whom dropping it is most dangerous and most tempting.

BUSINESS

The Argument About Artificial Intelligence Spending Is Now Priced Daily

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Semiconductor and artificial intelligence shares have moved the Tokyo market in both directions this week, falling early and recovering on Wednesday, and the swing describes an argument that has not been settled.

On one side is the volume of committed capital. Data centre construction, chip fabrication and the equipment that supports both represent spending plans stretching years ahead, and Japanese equipment makers sit in the supply chain for almost all of it.

On the other is the question of who eventually pays for the output. Enormous fixed investment is being made on the expectation of revenue that has, so far, materialised in some applications and not others.

Reports that a major American developer would postpone a listing this year sharpened that doubt, and a leading laboratory's public call for slower development added a different kind of uncertainty on top.

For Tokyo, the exposure is concrete rather than speculative. Testing equipment, lithography components, precision machining and the materials that go into advanced packaging are Japanese industrial strengths, and their order books depend on the build-out continuing.

The domestic policy bet is larger still. The state has committed something approaching three trillion yen to a single advanced logic venture in Hokkaido, an investment premised on sustained demand for leading-edge capacity.

None of this is decided by a week of trading. What the week shows is that the market is no longer willing to price the investment cycle as a certainty, which is a change from six months ago.

Firms with diversified end markets have held up better than those whose revenue depends on a small number of very large customers, which is the market's way of expressing the same doubt in portfolio form.

Japanese semiconductor equipment makers occupy a position in the global supply chain out of proportion to the country's share of final chip production, supplying tools and materials that fabrication plants worldwide depend on, which makes their shares a leveraged bet on the durability of AI capital expenditure.

Domestic fabrication investment, including projects in Kumamoto and Hokkaido, provides demand less exposed to the international cycle, which is the argument the sector's defenders make on days like Monday's.

BUSINESS

What Merchants Learned When a Payment Processor Failed

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

The collapse of Zen-Toshin has prompted the trade ministry survey that counted 154 payment processing firms and roughly 30 trillion yen in flows, and the sequence is the familiar one: a failure reveals a gap, and the gap is measured afterwards.

For the merchants involved, the loss is immediate and concrete. Goods were sold, customers paid, and the money that should have arrived days later did not.

Small retailers and restaurants operate on cash cycles measured in weeks. A missing settlement is not an accounting inconvenience; it is a payroll that cannot be met.

The structural issue is that these companies hold other people's money without being banks. A deposit at a bank is protected by capital rules, supervision and an insurance scheme. A balance sitting inside a payment processor between Tuesday and the following Monday generally is not.

Japan's shift to cashless payment has been rapid and encouraged by policy, including consumption tax point rebates designed to push adoption. The intermediary layer expanded with it, largely outside the regulatory perimeter built for banks.

The available remedies are well understood from other jurisdictions: mandatory segregation of client funds in trust accounts, minimum capital against the float, regular reporting and a defined supervisor.

BUSINESS

Each imposes cost, and the cost falls hardest on the smaller processors whose competitive advantage is low fees.

The alternative is to let the next failure allocate the losses to whichever small businesses happen to be holding a receivable that week.

Payment processors hold merchant funds between the time a customer pays and the time the merchant is settled, an interval that can run days, and a failure in that interval leaves merchants having delivered goods for money they will not receive.

Regulatory responses in other jurisdictions have included client money segregation and capital requirements, measures the ministry's survey provides the basis for considering.

BUSINESS

How Japan Went Cashless Faster Than It Expected To

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Japan was, for years, the developed economy that would not give up cash. Clean notes, an extraordinarily dense network of automated teller machines and a cultural preference for settling in coin kept card and code payment marginal long after other countries had moved.

That has changed quickly. Government promotion, point rebate schemes tied to the consumption tax increase, code-based payment applications and the simple convenience of a phone at a convenience store till have moved a large share of everyday transactions off paper.

The transition has not been uniform. Urban chains accept everything; small rural businesses, older proprietors and some medical practices still prefer cash, and a traveller outside the major cities learns quickly to carry notes.

Older customers have adapted less completely than younger ones, and the gap shows up in the same places as other digital divides: in the ability to use a public service, book a ticket or claim a discount.

The infrastructure behind it all is the part nobody sees, which is why the failure of a processing company registers as a surprise rather than as a known risk.

A cash economy fails in obvious ways, such as robbery and the cost of moving notes around. A cashless one fails invisibly, in the space between a customer's payment and a merchant's bank account.

Japan has built the second system on top of habits formed under the first, and it is now discovering which of the old protections it assumed would carry over.

Japan's cash preference persisted longer than in comparable economies for reasons that included low crime, wide ATM availability and merchant reluctance to pay card fees, and the shift when it came was driven by government incentive programmes as much as by consumer demand.

QR code payments operated by telecommunications and internet companies captured much of the growth, bypassing the card networks and creating the processing layer whose size the ministry has now measured.

The pandemic accelerated adoption sharply, as contactless payment moved from convenience to preference, and the infrastructure built for that surge is what now requires supervision.

BUSINESS

The Gender Gap Ranking Is Mostly a Measure of Who Runs Things

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Japan's placement at 117th of 145 countries in the World Economic Forum's gender gap index, reported by Asahi Shimbun, is driven overwhelmingly by two of the four categories the index measures.

In health and in education, Japan scores close to parity. Girls complete school and enter university at rates comparable with boys, and life expectancy for women is among the highest in the world.

In political empowerment and economic participation, the picture is entirely different, and those two categories are where the ranking is lost.

Economic participation is not chiefly about whether women work. Japanese female labour force participation has risen substantially over two decades and now exceeds the level in several countries ranked far above Japan on the index.

It is about what they are paid and what they manage. The index weighs wage equality for similar work, income, and the share of legislators, senior officials and managers who are women.

That last measure is where Japanese corporations sit lowest. Boards and senior management remain overwhelmingly male at the largest listed companies, and the pipeline below them thins at exactly the career stage when promotion decisions are made.

The structural explanation is well documented: long hours rewarded over output, transfers that assume a spouse who does not work, and a childcare burden still distributed unequally at home.

None of that is fixed by a ranking. What a ranking does is make the comparison unavoidable once a year, which is roughly the function a published league table is designed to perform.

Board representation, senior management and political office are where the gap concentrates, and each is determined by decisions made by people already holding such positions, which is why the pattern is self-perpetuating.

Corporate governance reforms have set targets for women on boards, and progress against them has been real without being sufficient to move the composite ranking materially.

BUSINESS

Regional Lenders Face the Best and Worst of Normalisation

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Japan's regional banks have spent a decade being told that their business model does not work. Rising rates test whether the diagnosis was about the model or about the rates.

Their difficulty was structural on both sides. Deposits from ageing populations in shrinking prefectures were plentiful and earned nothing. Lending opportunities in those same prefectures were scarce, because the businesses that would have borrowed were closing rather than expanding.

A higher policy rate widens the margin on the loans they do make, and there are a great many of them. That is the best part of normalisation for the sector.

The worst part is on the other side of the balance sheet. Many regional lenders went looking for yield abroad and in long-dated domestic bonds during the zero-rate years, and portfolios built at low yields lose market value when yields rise.

Their borrowers are also more fragile than the megabanks'. Small and medium-sized companies in regional Japan have thinner reserves, and a firm that has survived on refinancing at close to zero may not survive refinancing at three times that.

Consolidation has been the policy answer for years, and mergers have proceeded steadily, though slowly enough that the sector remains more fragmented than the arithmetic suggests it should be.

The next two reporting seasons will separate the banks whose problem was the interest rate environment from those whose problem was their own lending book.

Regional banks lend to the small businesses and agricultural borrowers with the thinnest margins, and rice farming in particular has seen bankruptcies at record pace, a trend driven by input costs and demographics that higher borrowing costs compound.

The Financial Services Agency's announced rebuild of its inspection system, including specialised personnel training and generative AI tools, arrives with exactly this category of accumulated exposure in view.

Consolidation among regional lenders has proceeded slowly, and the rate environment now emerging may accelerate it as the difference between institutions that managed the easy years well and those that did not becomes visible.

BUSINESS

Japan's Own Grid Is Standing in the Same Equipment Queue

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

Hitachi Energy's decision to build transformers in Mississippi is a response to American demand, and it does nothing for the Japanese grid, which faces a version of the same shortage.

Japan's transmission system was built around regional utilities operating semi-independently, with limited capacity to move power between them. The limitations became a national issue after 2011, when the inability to transfer electricity across the frequency boundary between eastern and western Japan compounded a supply crisis.

Reinforcing those links, connecting offshore wind in the north to demand in the south, and replacing equipment installed during the high-growth decades all require the same class of heavy electrical equipment that is now backordered worldwide.

Data centre construction in Japan competes for the same components, and the artificial intelligence build-out has turned electricity supply into a siting constraint for the industry.

Lead times measured in years change how utilities plan. Equipment has to be ordered before the project is approved, which requires certainty about regulatory approval that the approval process is not designed to provide.

The obvious answer is more domestic manufacturing capacity, and the obvious objection is that a factory built for a temporary surge becomes a liability when the surge ends.

Manufacturers have responded by expanding cautiously and by favouring locations close to the demand, which is precisely the calculation that put a Japanese company's new plant in Mississippi.

Japan's grid is divided between 50-hertz and 60-hertz regions, a legacy of nineteenth-century equipment purchases that has complicated east-west power transfer ever since, and each expansion of conversion capacity requires the same heavy equipment now in global shortage.

Offshore wind, on which policy has placed considerable weight, requires transmission from coastal generation to inland demand, and semiconductor fabrication projects require connections sized for loads regional networks were not built to serve.

Nuclear restarts use existing connections and avoid this constraint, an underappreciated argument in their favour on timing grounds, which this week's Hamaoka withdrawal makes moot for that plant.

BUSINESS

What an Index Near 64,000 Is Actually Pricing

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

The Nikkei has spent the month between roughly 63,000 and 66,000, a range that would have seemed impossible for most of the past thirty years and that is now unremarkable.

Three things are inside the price. The first is earnings, which have been genuinely strong at Japan's largest exporters and at the trading houses.

The second is the currency, which flatters those earnings without changing what any company sells. A yen at 156 converts overseas revenue into considerably more yen than a yen at 130 would.

The third is governance. A decade of pressure from the exchange and from investors has produced share buybacks, the unwinding of cross-shareholdings and higher payout ratios, which raise the value of a share independently of the business behind it.

Each of those has a limit. Earnings depend on global demand that is slowing in places. The currency reverses if the Bank of Japan normalises and the Federal Reserve eventually stops. Governance improvements are one-off gains that cannot be repeated indefinitely.

That is why the market has become sensitive to the artificial intelligence investment question. A large part of the remaining growth story rests on the semiconductor supply chain, and that chain's order books depend on a build-out whose economics are now being argued about openly.

A rebound of 438.90 points in a single session, as on Wednesday, is a market that has not made up its mind rather than one that has.

Wednesday's rebound to 63,923 came on a day the Federal Reserve was still meeting, which means Thursday's session is the first to price the American decision and the yen's overnight slide together.

The Nikkei's price-weighted construction gives high-priced technology names outsized influence, which is why SoftBank Group's swings have moved the index by more than the company's size would suggest in either direction this week.

Foreign investors have been substantial net participants in Japanese equities through this year's rally, and their positioning ahead of a Bank of Japan decision that narrows the differential is among the variables strategists watch.

TECHNOLOGY

Four Carriers Join Forces to Extend 'True 5G' Coverage

Shared infrastructure in places none of them would build alone, and the difference between the 5G on the label and the 5G in the specification

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

Japan's four telecommunications carriers are collaborating to expand areas served by what the industry calls true 5G, according to Asahi Shimbun.

The phrase exists because much of what has been sold as 5G in Japan and elsewhere is not the thing the specification describes. Early deployments ran new radio equipment over existing fourth-generation core networks, which delivered a speed improvement and little else.

Standalone 5G, the version the industry now labels true, replaces the core as well. That is what enables the characteristics the technology was designed for: very low latency, the ability to connect enormous numbers of devices in a small area, and network slicing, which reserves a guaranteed portion of capacity for a specific customer.

Those capabilities matter less for watching video on a train than for industrial applications: factory automation, remote operation of machinery, autonomous vehicles and the sensor networks that infrastructure operators are beginning to deploy.

Building it is expensive, and the economics are unforgiving outside dense urban areas. A base station in a mountain valley serves few customers regardless of which generation of technology it runs.

Collaboration is the standard answer. Sharing towers, power and backhaul between carriers who compete on service allows coverage in places none of them would reach on their own.

Japan has practical reasons to care beyond convenience. A population dispersed across mountainous terrain, an ageing rural workforce and a policy interest in remote medicine and autonomous transport all depend on connectivity where the commercial case is weakest.

Docomo separately plans more than 10,000 new 5G base stations within the fiscal year.

The measure of whether the collaboration works will not be a coverage map. It will be whether a factory in a regional prefecture can run the same automation as one in Kanagawa.

The distinction the carriers are drawing is between coverage claimed on refarmed lower-band spectrum, which delivers the 5G label without the performance, and coverage on the higher bands that deliver the advertised speeds but propagate poorly and require dense base station deployment.

TECHNOLOGY

What Standalone Networks Would Actually Change on a Factory Floor

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

The industrial case for standalone fifth-generation networks rests on three characteristics that the consumer experience barely touches.

The first is latency. A machine that must stop within milliseconds of a sensor detecting a fault cannot wait for a round trip through a network designed for video streaming, and the difference between twenty milliseconds and two is the difference between a safety system that works and one that does not.

The second is device density. A factory instrumented with thousands of sensors needs a network that can address all of them simultaneously, which is a different problem from serving a few hundred phones.

The third is slicing: reserving a defined portion of network capacity for a specific use, so that a remotely operated crane is not competing for bandwidth with the lunchtime traffic of everyone in the building.

Private networks built inside a single site are the fastest route to all three, and Japanese manufacturers have been early adopters of the local licensing scheme that permits them.

The public network build-out matters for the applications that cannot be confined to one site: autonomous transport, remote medicine in rural areas,

TECHNOLOGY

and infrastructure monitoring across bridges and tunnels.

That is the gap the four carriers' co-operation on coverage is intended to close, and it is the reason the expansion matters beyond the speed test on a commuter's phone.

Standalone 5G runs on a core network built for the technology rather than on the 4G core that most current deployments still rely on, which is what enables the low latency and network slicing that industrial applications require.

Factory automation, port logistics and remote operation of equipment are where those characteristics matter, since a robot arm or a crane responding to a command needs the response to arrive predictably rather than merely quickly.

Enterprise and industrial applications are where carriers expect the technology's commercial return to materialise, since consumer applications rarely need what the higher bands and the standalone core provide.

TECHNOLOGY

Japan's Place in the Chip Chain Is Upstream, Which Is Why the Argument Matters Here

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

Japan does not manufacture many of the world's leading-edge logic chips. It manufactures a great deal of what is required to make them, which is a different and in some respects more durable position.

Photoresists, specialty chemicals, silicon wafers, bonding materials and the precision components inside lithography systems are dominated by a small number of Japanese suppliers, several of which hold majority global shares in their niches.

Testing equipment is another Japanese strength, and testers are one of the constraints on how quickly advanced packaging can scale.

That upstream position explains why an argument in California about the pace of artificial intelligence investment moves share prices in Tokyo within hours. The suppliers sell into the capital expenditure of every fabrication plant being built, regardless of whose logo is on the finished chip.

It also explains the vulnerability. Upstream suppliers are exposed to the investment cycle rather than to end demand, and capital spending is the first thing a chip maker cuts when it becomes uncertain.

The state's direct investment in leading-edge manufacturing in Hokkaido is an attempt to add a downstream position to the upstream one, on the argument that a country supplying the inputs should also be able to make the product.

Whether that argument is correct will not be settled by a week of trading, or by a year of it.

Export controls on advanced equipment sales to China constrain a market that had represented meaningful revenue for several Japanese suppliers, and any shift agreed between Washington and Beijing this weekend reaches those companies without Japan participating.

The upstream position confers leverage over the physical inputs to AI capability rather than over the software, which is where Japan's practical influence on the frontier actually lies.

Domestic fabrication investment in Kumamoto and Hokkaido provides a source of demand less exposed to the international cycle and to the policy decisions of other governments.

COURTS

Chamber of Commerce Official Indicted Over 40 Million Yen Taken From Accounts

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

The secretary-general of the Sumoto Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been indicted on suspicion of embezzling approximately 40 million yen from the organisation's accounts, according to Sankei News.

Chambers of commerce in Japanese regional cities occupy a position of considerable trust. They administer subsidy applications for small businesses, run mutual aid schemes, collect membership fees and act as the intermediary between local firms and the prefecture.

The secretary-general typically has practical control of day-to-day administration, including banking, in an organisation whose board is made up of working business owners with limited time to inspect the books.

That combination — routine authority over money, oversight by volunteers — is the standard setting for long-running misappropriation in small institutions, and it recurs in cases involving neighbourhood associations, agricultural cooperatives and school parents' bodies.

Sumoto sits on Awaji Island in Hyogo Prefecture, and its chamber serves a business community of exactly the scale where a single administrator handles everything.

The damage extends past the money. Members who paid fees and relied on the chamber to process subsidy paperwork now have reason to check what else was not done properly.

The remedies are unglamorous and effective: dual authorisation for payments, annual external audit, and rotation of the staff who handle banking.

Organisations of this size resist them because they cost money and imply distrust of colleagues, which is precisely the reasoning that makes the next case possible.

Chambers of commerce and industry are membership organisations funded substantially by their members' fees, and an embezzlement case involving a secretary-general goes to the trust on which such bodies depend.

Sumoto is on Awaji Island in Hyogo Prefecture, and the chamber serves a local business community small enough that a loss of 40 million yen represents a material share of its resources.

SOCIETY

Japan Counts 107,677 People Aged 100 or More, and Nine in Ten Are Women

A fifty-sixth consecutive record arrives days before Respect for the Aged Day, with the oldest person in the country aged 114

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

There are 107,677 people aged 100 or older in Japan, the first time the figure has exceeded 100,000 and the fifty-sixth consecutive year in which it has set a record, according to Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare figures reported by Asahi Shimbun. Roughly 90% are women. The oldest person in the country is 114.

The count is published each September ahead of Respect for the Aged Day, which falls this year on Monday the 21st, and it has become the most quoted single statistic about Japanese demography.

Fifty-six consecutive records is the part worth pausing on. The streak began when the number was in the hundreds. It has continued through every economic cycle, every government and every health scare since, which makes it one of the most consistent trends in any developed country.

The reasons are neither mysterious nor cost-free. Universal health insurance since 1961, an early and effective campaign against stroke through salt reduction and blood pressure control, low rates of obesity, and a diet built around fish, rice, soy and vegetables have combined to produce the longest life expectancy in the world.

The distribution between the sexes is the striking feature of this year's figure as of every previous year's. Nine centenarians in ten being women is a gap that medicine explains only partially.

Women outlive men almost everywhere, by margins of four to seven years in most developed countries. In Japan the gap is at the wider end, and the difference compounds at the extreme end of the age distribution, where a few additional years of average life expectancy translate into an enormous difference in the number of survivors.

Biological explanations run alongside behavioural ones. Smoking rates among Japanese men were for decades among the highest in the developed world while rates among women remained low, and the mortality consequences of that divergence are still working their way through the population.

Occupational exposure, alcohol consumption and the pattern of work-related stress point in the same direction.

The practical consequence of 107,677 people over 100 is that the country's oldest cohort now includes tens of thousands of people who outlive their own children, and a great many who outlive their savings.

Long-term care insurance, introduced in 2000, was designed for a population with a different shape. It funds home help, day services and residential care through a mix of premiums paid from the age of 40, public money and user contributions.

Its difficulty is not the money alone. Care work is physically demanding, poorly paid relative to its difficulty, and competing for staff with every other sector in a labour market where workers are scarce.

A country can extend life with medicine and public health. Supporting the years that result requires people, and people are exactly what the demographic arithmetic does not supply.

Foreign workers now fill part of that gap under a succession of visa programmes, and the government's move this week to expand foreign worker categories touched on the same shortage from the other end.

For the individual families involved, the statistic is a relative at the end of a very long life, most likely a grandmother or great-grandmother, still being cared for by a daughter or daughter-in-law who is herself past seventy.

That is the ordinary shape of Japanese ageing, and the reason the September count lands each year as both an achievement and a warning.

SOCIETY

Japan Ranked 117th of 145 in Gender Gap Index, Last Among the G7

One place better than last year, on a measure driven almost entirely by politics and corporate management

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Japan ranks 117th out of 145 countries in the World Economic Forum's gender gap index, improving by one place from 118th last year and remaining the lowest-ranked member of the Group of Seven, according to Asahi Shimbun's front page.

The index measures the gap between men and women within each country across four areas: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

It does not measure development. A country can be wealthy and rank poorly, and a poorer country can rank well if its gap between the sexes is narrow. That design is what makes Japan's placement possible alongside a high income per head and universal education.

Japanese scores in health and education sit close to parity. Girls finish school and enter universities at rates comparable with boys, and women's life expectancy is the highest in the world.

The ranking is lost in the other two categories, and most heavily in political empowerment, which counts the share of parliamentary seats, ministerial posts and years of female leadership.

That last component moved this year for the obvious reason: the country has a female prime minister for the first time. The index credits years in office as head of government, and a first year counts for little in a measure built over half a century.

The cabinet inaugurated on Thursday will be read against the same standard, and the count of women on the staircase at the Prime Minister's Office is already being made.

Economic participation is the second drag. Women's labour force participation in Japan is high by international standards, but the index also weighs wage equality, income and the proportion of managers and senior officials who are women, and it is there that the gap is widest.

Improving by one place in a year is within the noise of a ranking whose membership and scoring change slightly each edition. The underlying scores move slowly.

What the index does reliably is force an annual comparison that is otherwise easy to avoid, and the comparison with the other six members of the G7 is the one that lands hardest in Tokyo.

SOCIETY

Magnitude 4.8 Earthquake in Southern Ibaraki Shakes Kanto in the Early Hours

Intensity 3 recorded across the region shortly after midnight, with no tsunami risk

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

An earthquake of magnitude 4.8 struck southern Ibaraki Prefecture at around 12:07 a.m. on Thursday, registering a maximum seismic intensity of 3 in parts of the Kanto region, according to Sankei News. There was no risk of tsunami.

An intensity of 3 on the Japanese scale is the level at which most people indoors feel the shaking, hanging objects swing visibly and dishes rattle. It does not damage sound buildings.

Southern Ibaraki is among the more seismically active areas in eastern Japan, sitting above a complicated junction where the Pacific and Philippine Sea plates descend beneath the land.

That geometry produces frequent moderate earthquakes at intermediate depth, and a magnitude in the high fours is an ordinary event for the area rather than an unusual one.

The distinction between magnitude and intensity is the one that matters when reading these reports. Magnitude measures the energy released at the source and has a single value for each earthquake. Intensity measures the shaking felt at a particular place and differs from town to town depending on distance, depth and the ground underneath.

A magnitude 4.8 at moderate depth beneath Ibaraki produces intensity 3 in the Kanto plain, where soft sediment amplifies motion, and less than that on harder ground further away.

Japan Meteorological Agency notices distinguish between earthquakes that carry tsunami risk and those that do not within minutes, and the absence of a tsunami warning is a specific determination rather than a silence.

For the millions of people who felt it, the practical response is the standard one: check that heavy furniture is secured, that escape routes are not blocked, and that the household emergency supplies are current.

Thursday's shaking arrived in the same week that a volcanic alert on Mount Tokachi was raised to level 3 and a typhoon formed east of the Philippines, which is an ordinary September in Japan rather than an extraordinary one.

Southern Ibaraki sits on a complex of faults associated with the Philippine Sea Plate's descent beneath the Kanto region, and earthquakes of this magnitude there are frequent enough that the Japan Meteorological Agency's regional network is dense across the area.

SOCIETY

Typhoon No. 25 Forms East of the Philippines and Points Toward the Holiday Weekend

Dujuan is expected to strengthen, reaching the Ogasawara Islands on Friday and Saturday and possibly approaching Kanto on Respect for the Aged Day

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

A tropical depression developed into Typhoon No. 25, named Dujuan, at around 9 p.m. on Wednesday, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency and tenki.jp. As of 3 a.m. on Thursday it was near the Mariana Islands with a central pressure of 996 hectopascals, a maximum wind speed of 20 metres a second and a large radius.

The storm is expected to strengthen as it moves.

The forecast track takes it toward the Ogasawara Islands on Friday and Saturday, with stormy winds and rough seas expected there, and raises the possibility of severe conditions in the Izu Islands around Sunday.

The closest approach to the Kanto region may come around Monday the 21st, Respect for the Aged Day and the final day of the holiday weekend.

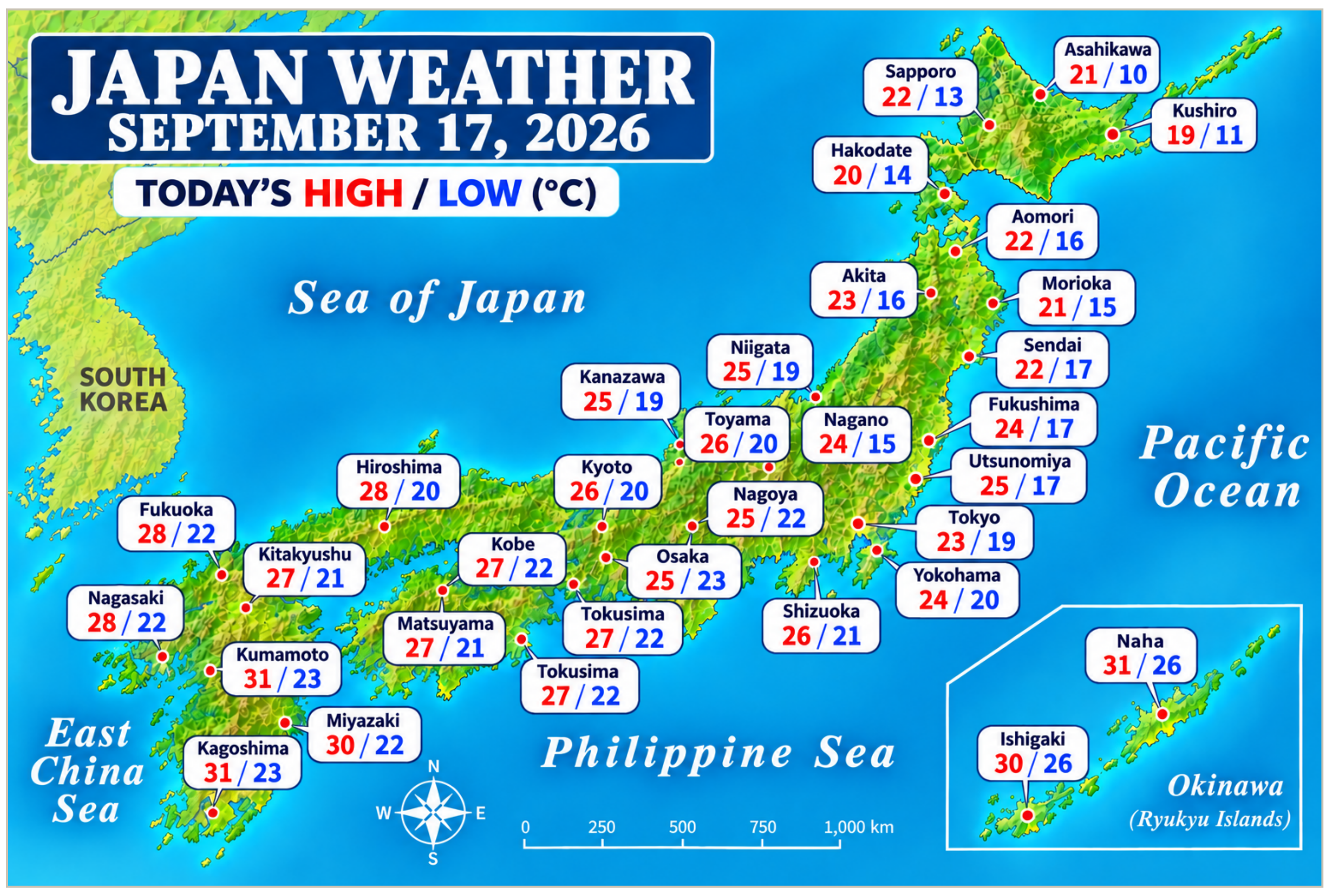
The more immediate hazard is rain rather than wind. Forecasters have raised the possibility of torrential rainfall at warning level on Sunday in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba and Yamanashi, and on Monday across Kanto-Koshinetsu, Shizuoka, Aichi and Mie.

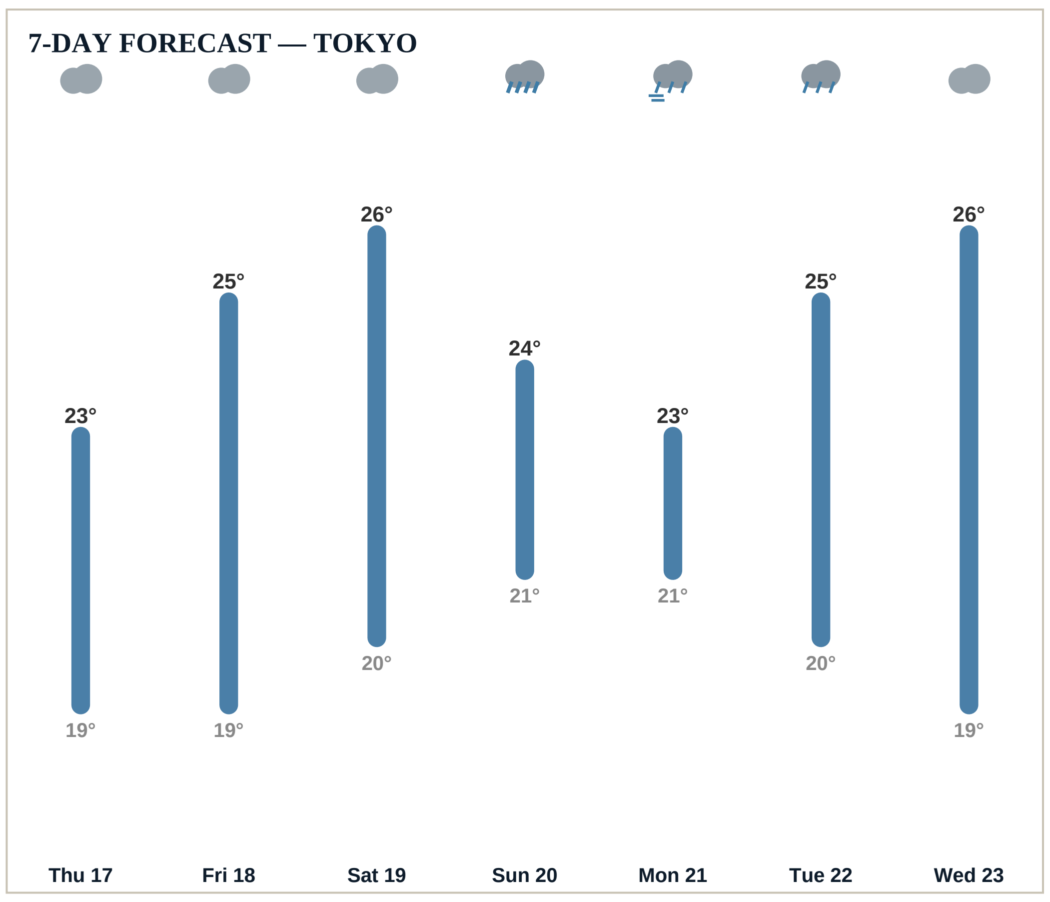
The mechanism behind that is the autumn rain front, which has been stalled near Honshu for much of September and is expected to be stimulated by the

WEATHER & SOCIETY

23°C

Tokyo — Cloudy after overnight rain, high 23°C; Typhoon No. 25 may approach Kanto on Monday





TOKYO METROPOLITAN AREA — Thursday, September 17, 2026

Morning: Rain and thunderstorms in places until around dawn, easing through the early hours. Around 20°C at 7 a.m. Sunrise 5:25 a.m.

Afternoon: Cloud persisting after the rain stops, with little brightness and a high near 23°C. Temperatures will not rise easily with the front still close to the region.

Evening: Mostly cloudy, around 21°C by 9 p.m. Sunset 5:46 p.m.

Overnight: Cloudy, low 19°C. An umbrella remains worth carrying, particularly before the morning commute.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

The autumn rain front moves away from Honshu on Thursday, and the country divides into three. From Hokkaido through northern Tohoku, high pressure brings clear autumn weather. In Kanto, cloud lingers after the rain stops and temperatures stay low for the date. West of Tokai there will be many sunny intervals, with the caution that sudden showers are possible.

Summer-like warmth returns across Kyushu and Okinawa, where readings of 30°C and above are expected, while Kanto sits several degrees below the seasonal average because of its proximity to the departing front.

WARNINGS AND ADVISORIES

The Japan Meteorological Agency continues to warn about prolonged rain and insufficient sunshine since early September across southern Tohoku and the Pacific side of eastern Japan, with effects on agricultural crops now being reported. Soils in several areas remain saturated, and rain that would ordinarily be unremarkable can bring landslide risk on ground already carrying water.

The Izu Islands may see heavy rain accompanied by thunder on Thursday. Rough seas and very strong winds are expected around the Ogasawara Islands from Friday afternoon into Saturday.

Warning-level torrential rain is possible on Sunday in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba and Yamanashi, and on Monday across Kanto-Koshinetsu, Shizuoka, Aichi and Mie, as the autumn rain front is stimulated by moist air drawn north ahead of Typhoon No. 25.

TYPHOON NO. 25 (DUJUAN)

Typhoon No. 25, named Dujuan, developed from a tropical depression at around 9 p.m. on Wednesday. As of 3 a.m. Thursday it was near the Mariana Islands with a central pressure of 996 hectopascals, a maximum wind speed of 20 metres a second and a large radius. It is expected to strengthen.

The forecast track brings it toward the Ogasawara Islands on Friday and Saturday, raises the possibility of severe conditions in the Izu Islands around Sunday, and may bring it closest to the Kanto region around Monday the 21st, Respect for the Aged Day.

Forecast confidence at four days is moderate and the track may shift. Households in the areas named should check hazard maps and evacuation routes before the weekend rather than during it, and travellers should allow for disruption to flights, ferries and expressways over the holiday.

UV INDEX & AIR QUALITY

UV Index: 3 (Moderate) in Tokyo under persistent cloud, 7 (High) in Okinawa and southern Kyushu under clearer skies. Air Quality Index: Good nationwide. Pollen: Negligible, with autumn ragweed present in places inland.

TODAY'S HIGH / LOW BY REGION (°C)

Hokkaido — Sapporo 22/13, Asahikawa 21/10, Kushiro 19/11, Hakodate 20/14: clear autumn weather under high pressure, the coolest days and nights in the country.

Tohoku — Aomori 22/16, Akita 23/16, Morioka 21/15, Sendai 22/17, Fukushima 24/17: fine in the north, more cloud in the south where the sunshine deficit persists.

Chubu & Hokuriku — Niigata 25/19, Toyama 26/20, Kanazawa 25/19, Nagano 24/15, Nagoya 25/22: sunny intervals with the chance of a sudden shower, particularly inland during the afternoon.

Kanto — Utsunomiya 25/17, Tokyo 23/19, Yokohama 24/20, Shizuoka 26/21: cloud after morning rain, with temperatures held down by the departing front.

Kansai — Kyoto 26/20, Kobe 27/22, Osaka 25/23: mostly cloudy with rain in places, brighter later in the day.

Shikoku — Tokushima 27/22, Matsuyama 27/21: sunny intervals, with showers possible in the hills.

Chugoku & Kyushu — Hiroshima 28/20, Kitakyushu 27/21, Fukuoka 28/22, Nagasaki 28/22, Kumamoto 31/23, Miyazaki 30/22, Kagoshima 31/23: summer-like warmth returning, with Kumamoto and Kagoshima the warmest readings on the mainland.

Okinawa — Naha 31/26, Ishigaki 30/26: mostly sunny under high pressure, with occasional showers. The likelihood of strong winds or heavy rain on the main island from the typhoon is low on Thursday.

SEVEN-DAY OUTLOOK FOR TOKYO

Friday, Sept. 18: High 25°C, low 19°C. Cloud with brighter intervals. Bank of Japan policy decision.

Saturday, Sept. 19: High 26°C, low 20°C. Mostly cloudy, warmer. Asian Games opening ceremony in Aichi-Nagoya.

Sunday, Sept. 20: High 24°C, low 21°C. Rain, locally heavy. Warning-level rainfall possible.

Monday, Sept. 21: High 23°C, low 21°C. Rain and strong wind as Typhoon No. 25 makes its closest approach. Respect for the Aged Day.

Tuesday, Sept. 22: High 25°C, low 20°C. Rain easing to cloud.

Wednesday, Sept. 23: High 26°C, low 19°C. Cloud with sunny intervals. Autumn Equinox Day.

Thursday, Sept. 24: High 26°C, low 19°C. Mostly fine.

EXTENDED OUTLOOK (September 18-24): the holiday weekend carries the greatest uncertainty in this forecast. A shift of 100 kilometres in the typhoon's track changes both the rainfall totals and the wind strength over Kanto materially, and the figures for Sunday and Monday should be treated as provisional.

THE AUTUMN RAIN FRONT

The front that has sat near Honshu for most of September is the boundary between the retreating Pacific high, which brings summer air from the south, and the cooler continental air building to the north. Where the two meet, moisture is lifted and rain forms in bands that can persist for days.

Its departure on Thursday is temporary. The typhoon approaching from the south will push warm, moist air back toward the boundary over the weekend, which is the mechanism behind the warning-level rainfall now forecast for Sunday and Monday.

A storm does not need to make landfall to cause flooding. Several of Japan's most damaging recent rain events were produced by exactly this configuration, with the heaviest falls occurring hundreds of kilometres from the centre of the system.

EARTHQUAKE

An earthquake of magnitude 4.8 struck southern Ibaraki Prefecture at around 12:07 a.m. on Thursday, registering a maximum seismic intensity of 3 in parts of the Kanto region. There was no tsunami risk.

ALMANAC

Today's sunrise: 5:25 a.m. Today's sunset: 5:46 p.m. Day length: 12 hours 21 minutes, shortening by roughly two minutes a day as the autumn equinox approaches on the 23rd. Moon: waxing crescent, approaching first quarter. Typhoon No. 25 central pressure at 3 a.m.: 996 hectopascals.

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moist air the typhoon draws north ahead of it.

A storm does not need to make landfall to cause flooding. Warm, wet air pushed against a stationary front produces bands of intense rain hundreds of kilometres from the centre, and several of Japan's most damaging recent rain events have worked that way.

The ground is not in good condition to receive it. The Meteorological Agency has warned repeatedly this month about prolonged rain and insufficient sunshine along the Pacific side of eastern Japan and in southern Tohoku, and soils in several areas remain saturated from earlier in September.

Saturated ground sheds water rather than absorbing it, which raises river levels faster, and it also raises the risk of landslides on slopes that have already taken on weight.

Silver Week travel plans are the practical casualty. Forecast confidence at four days is moderate, and the track may shift, but the holiday falls precisely in the window when the storm is closest.

Households in the areas named should be checking hazard maps and evacuation routes now rather than on Sunday evening, and travellers should expect the possibility of disruption to flights, ferries and expressways.

Ogasawara and the Izu Islands, which sit directly in the path and depend on shipping for supply, face the sharpest immediate impact from Friday afternoon.

SOCIETY

Volcano Committee Warns of Magmatic Eruption Risk at Mount Tokachi

An emergency meeting reviews an alert already raised to level 3, with large-scale volcanic earthquakes named as the signal to watch

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

The Coordinating Committee for Prediction of Volcanic Eruptions held an emergency meeting on Mount Tokachi in Hokkaido, where the eruption alert has been raised to level 3, according to Nihon Nogyo Shinbun.

"If there is a clear increase in large-scale volcanic earthquakes, there is a risk of magmatic eruption," the committee said.

That sentence describes a specific transition. Much volcanic activity is driven by groundwater flashing to steam in contact with heat, which produces explosions capable of throwing rock but which does not involve fresh magma reaching the surface.

A magmatic eruption is a different event. Molten rock rising through the conduit carries far more energy, sustains activity for longer and can produce lava, pyroclastic flows and heavy ashfall.

The signal the committee has named is the one volcanologists rely on, because magma moving through rock fractures it, and fracturing rock generates earthquakes. A clear increase in large-scale volcanic earthquakes is the seismic signature of magma on the move.

Alert level 3 restricts access to the mountain itself and warns residents nearby to prepare. It sits below the levels that require evacuation of inhabited areas.

Mount Tokachi has a documented history of significant eruptions, including a destructive event in 1926 in which a mudflow generated by melting snow reached settlements below with heavy loss of life, a case still cited in Japanese hazard planning.

The mountain sits in a region of hot spring resorts and hiking trails, and the practical effect of an alert is felt first by tourism operators who must close routes at the start of the autumn colour season.

Volcanic forecasting remains probabilistic. The committee can describe the conditions under which risk rises; it cannot supply a date.

What it can do, and has done, is tell the public which observation would change the assessment, which is the most useful thing a scientific body can offer while an eruption remains possible rather than imminent.

SOCIETY

SOCIETY

Yodo-go Hijacker Shiro Akagi Believed to Have Died in Pyongyang

A support group disclosed the information and authorities have confirmed it, closing another chapter of a case open since 1970

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

Shiro Akagi, one of the hijackers of Japan Airlines Flight 351 in 1970 and the subject of an international wanted notice ever since, is believed to have died in Pyongyang, according to Mainichi Shimbun and Sankei Shimbun. A support group disclosed the information and authorities have confirmed it.

The hijacking, known in Japan by the aircraft's nickname Yodo-go, remains one of the defining criminal cases of the post-war period.

On 31 March 1970, members of a radical student faction seized the Tokyo to Fukuoka flight armed with swords and pipes, and demanded to be flown to North Korea. The aircraft stopped at Fukuoka and then at Gimpo in South Korea, where the hijackers were briefly misled into believing they had reached Pyongyang.

A vice minister of transport, Shinjiro Yamamura, boarded the aircraft as a substitute hostage so that the passengers could be released, a decision that has been retold in Japan for half a century as an example of official courage.

The hijackers reached North Korea and were allowed to remain. Several married, some of their spouses having been recruited abroad in circumstances that later fed into the separate and far larger question of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean agents.

That link is why the group's members have never been treated as a historical curiosity in Japan. Investigators have pursued them for decades partly for the hijacking and partly for what they might know about the abductions.

Members have died in North Korea over the years, and others have sought to return to Japan on terms the government has refused. The remaining group has aged into its seventies and eighties.

Confirmation of a death in Pyongyang removes one of the few remaining paths to direct testimony about events in the 1970s and 1980s.

For the families of the abducted, every such confirmation is another door closing on the possibility of learning what happened to their relatives.

The case has also outlasted the political movement that produced it. The faction's belief that a hijacking could advance a revolution in Japan looks now like an artefact of a specific and vanished moment, which is what it has looked like for most of the intervening fifty-six years.

SOCIETY

Truck Strikes City Bus From Behind in Kobe, Injuring Passengers

Investigators are examining whether brake fade on a downhill stretch contributed to the collision in Nada Ward

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

A truck collided with the rear of a city bus in Nada Ward, Kobe, injuring a number of passengers, according to Sankei News. Investigators are examining whether a loss of braking effectiveness on a downhill stretch contributed to the crash.

The condition described, known as brake fade, occurs when brakes used continuously on a long descent heat to the point where they stop working properly. Friction material loses grip as it overheats, and in hydraulic systems the fluid itself can boil, producing a pedal that travels to the floor without slowing the vehicle.

Heavy vehicles are particularly exposed because their mass converts into far more heat on a descent than a car's.

The standard defence is engine braking: selecting a lower gear so the engine restrains the vehicle and the service brakes are used intermittently rather than continuously. Drivers are trained in it, and most heavy trucks carry auxiliary retarders or exhaust brakes intended for exactly this situation.

Kobe's geography makes the question locally relevant. The city occupies a narrow strip between the Rokko mountains and the sea, and many of the roads connecting hillside districts to the coastal flat are steep and carry a mix of commercial and bus traffic.

A bus struck from behind is among the more dangerous configurations for passengers, who are seated facing forward without restraints and are thrown against the seat backs in front of them.

Establishing the cause takes time. Investigators will examine brake components for evidence of overheating, the vehicle's maintenance records and the tachograph data showing speed and braking behaviour on the approach.

If the finding is mechanical failure, attention will move to inspection and maintenance. If it is operational, to training and schedule pressure on the driver.

Those two answers lead to different remedies, which is why the investigation matters beyond the individual case.

Brake fade on a descending grade, the possible cause cited by Sankei News, occurs when sustained braking heats the components beyond their effective range, and it is the reason long descents carry signage advising drivers to use lower gears.

SOCIETY

Doctor Dies in Apartment Fire in Kishiwada

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

A male doctor who lived in an apartment building in Kishiwada, Osaka Prefecture, died in a fire at the property, according to Sankei News.

Fires in multi-unit residential buildings present a particular danger because smoke moves through shared corridors and stairwells faster than occupants can leave by them.

Japanese building standards for apartment blocks require fire-resistant construction, compartmentation intended to contain a fire within the unit where it starts, and in most buildings automatic detection.

Those measures protect the building and its other residents effectively. They protect the occupant of the room where the fire begins far less, because the time available there is measured in a small number of minutes.

Residential fire deaths in Japan concentrate overwhelmingly in fires that start at night and among people living alone, for reasons that are unfortunately simple: nobody wakes them, and nobody carries them out.

Detectors in bedrooms have been mandatory in Japanese homes for some years, and fire authorities have spent a decade urging households to replace units installed during the initial rollout, whose batteries and sensors reach the end of their service life after about a decade.

Investigators will work back from the point of origin to establish the cause, a process that typically takes days for a single-unit fire.

Apartment fires in Japan are investigated jointly by police and fire authorities, with the cause typically established over several days through examination of the origin point and the electrical and heating equipment in the unit.

Fire deaths concentrate among older residents and among those living alone, a pattern the fire service has documented consistently and that shapes where prevention efforts are directed.

Kishiwada sits in southern Osaka Prefecture, and the fire drew a response from the municipal fire service whose investigation will determine whether any building safety questions arise.

SOCIETY

Four Pupils Fall Ill During a School Science Experiment in Toyooka

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Four pupils became unwell during a science experiment at a junior high school in Toyooka, Hyogo Prefecture, and three were taken to hospital, according to Sankei News. All have since recovered.

School laboratory incidents in Japan are uncommon but not rare, and they cluster around a small number of predictable causes: fumes in a room with inadequate ventilation, heating that produces more vapour than expected, and chemicals handled at concentrations higher than the lesson plan assumed.

The response protocol is well established. Ventilate, move pupils out, account for everyone, and send anyone showing symptoms to hospital for observation even when the exposure appears minor, because the effects of some inhaled substances develop over hours.

That is what appears to have happened here, and the outcome — all four recovered — is the outcome the protocol is designed to produce.

The wider question for education authorities is the one that follows any such incident: whether the experiment was appropriate for the age group, whether the room's ventilation was adequate, and whether the supervising teacher had the training and the assistance to manage a class of thirty around open chemistry.

Practical science teaching is worth defending. Pupils who have only read about a reaction understand it less well than pupils who have watched one, and the case for hands-on laboratory work in schools is strong.

Keeping it requires the conditions that make it safe, which in ageing school buildings frequently means the fume extraction equipment rather than the lesson plan.

School science experiments in Japan follow curriculum guidelines that specify permitted materials and required precautions, and incidents of this kind prompt review of whether those guidelines were followed and whether they are adequate.

That three of the four pupils required hospital treatment and have since recovered is the outcome the precautions are designed to produce when something goes wrong: rapid response rather than prevention of every possibility.

Hyogo Prefecture's board of education is expected to examine the circumstances, which is the standard sequence following any incident involving pupils during supervised activity.

SOCIETY

Bear Sighted on Mount Takao as Silver Week Approaches

Hachioji has disclosed an August sighting on one of the most heavily walked mountains in the country

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Hachioji has announced that a black bear was sighted on Mount Takao in August, and has urged caution ahead of the Silver Week holidays, according to Mainichi Shimbun.

Mount Takao is not a remote peak. It sits at the end of a railway line from Shinjuku, receives an enormous number of visitors every year, and is the mountain on which a great many Tokyo residents do their only hiking.

A bear sighting there is a different kind of news from a bear sighting in the Tohoku uplands, because the people on the trails are overwhelmingly casual walkers rather than experienced hikers.

Asiatic black bears are widely distributed through the mountains of Honshu, and encounters have increased across Japan over recent years as the animals range further in search of food and as depopulated buffer zones between forest and settlement disappear.

Autumn is the season of highest risk, because bears feed intensively before winter and because acorn and beech mast failures push them toward orchards, rubbish and the edges of towns.

The advice is the same everywhere and worth repeating before a holiday weekend. Make noise on the trail, carry a bell, walk in groups, do not carry open food, do not leave rubbish, and if a bear appears, back away while facing it rather than running.

Encounters at close range are the dangerous ones, and most of those begin with a surprised animal rather than an aggressive one.

Hachioji's decision to publicise an August sighting in mid-September is a reasonable precaution given what the coming weekend will bring to the trails, weather permitting.

Mount Takao draws several million visitors a year, among the most of any mountain in the world, and its proximity to central Tokyo means many of them arrive with no expectation of encountering wildlife larger than a monkey.

Bear sightings in the Tokyo area have been rare historically, and Hachioji's announcement of an August sighting ahead of the Silver Week holiday reflects a precautionary judgment about a period when visitor numbers peak.

SOCIETY

Magnitude, Intensity, and Why Japan Reports Both

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Every earthquake report in Japan carries two numbers, and confusing them is the most common error in reading them.

Magnitude describes the energy released where the rock broke. There is one magnitude per earthquake, and the scale is logarithmic, so each whole step represents roughly a thirty-fold increase in energy.

Seismic intensity, the shindo scale, describes how hard the ground shook at a particular observation point. One earthquake produces many intensity readings, from 7 at the worst-affected location down to nothing at all a few hundred kilometres away.

The Japanese intensity scale runs from 0 to 7 with 5 and 6 each split into lower and upper, which gives ten steps in all. It is measured by instruments rather than estimated from damage.

Intensity is the number that matters to a household, because it describes the experience. Intensity 3, recorded across Kanto in Thursday's early-hours earthquake, is felt by most people indoors and rattles crockery. Intensity 5 lower is where unsecured furniture begins to move.

Depth is the variable that most often surprises people. A shallow magnitude 5 directly beneath a city can shake harder than a deep magnitude 7 far offshore.

Ground conditions do the rest. Soft sediment amplifies motion, which is why the Kanto plain, built on exactly that, records higher intensities than the harder ground of the surrounding hills.

The agency's system computes intensity automatically from a dense national network of sensors and issues it within roughly a minute and a half, along with the separate determination of whether a tsunami is possible.

Magnitude describes the energy released at the source and is a single figure for the whole event; intensity describes the shaking at a particular place and varies with distance, depth and local ground conditions.

Japan's ten-step intensity scale, running from 0 to 7 with 5 and 6 each divided into lower and upper, is the measure that determines emergency response, since it describes what people and structures actually experienced.

SOCIETY

What the Five Volcanic Alert Levels Actually Require

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

Japan's volcanic alert system has five levels, and each is defined by the action expected rather than by the scientific description of the activity.

Level 1 means the volcano is normal, though visitors may still be warned about the immediate area of a crater. Level 2 restricts approach to the crater. Level 3, where Mount Tokachi now sits, restricts access to the mountain itself and tells residents nearby to prepare.

Level 4 requires vulnerable residents to evacuate and everyone else to prepare to do so. Level 5 requires evacuation.

The structure is deliberate. Earlier systems described hazard in scientific terms and left municipalities to translate them into instructions, which produced inconsistency between neighbouring towns facing the same mountain.

Tying each level to a defined action removes that step. A mayor does not have to interpret a description of seismicity; the level itself carries the required response.

The cost of the design is that raising a level has immediate economic consequences for hot spring resorts, hiking businesses and transport operators, which creates pressure not to raise it.

Japan's monitoring network is dense by international standards, with continuously observed volcanoes instrumented for seismicity, ground deformation, gas emission and thermal change.

None of that produces certainty. The alert level is a statement about the risk that the next hours or days will bring an eruption, not a forecast that one will occur.

Level 3, the current status at Mount Tokachi, restricts entry to the mountain and its approaches, and the

SOCIETY

emergency meeting reported by Japan Agricultural News addressed whether the indicators justify moving toward Level 4, which would require preparation for evacuation of nearby communities.

The committee's finding that a clear increase in large-scale volcanic earthquakes would indicate magmatic eruption risk gives the monitoring stations a specific threshold to watch for.

SOCIETY

Behind the Centenarian Count, the Staff Who Are Not There

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

The number that accompanies 107,677 centenarians, and receives a fraction of the attention, is the shortfall in care workers needed to support the wider ageing population of which they are the visible tip.

Long-term care insurance funds services. It does not produce the people who deliver them.

Care work in Japan pays less than the average across all industries while demanding physical labour, irregular hours and emotional stability under pressure. In a tight labour market, that combination loses recruitment contests against logistics, retail and construction.

The consequence appears as facilities operating below their licensed capacity because they cannot staff the beds, and as home help services with waiting lists in areas where the population needing them is growing fastest.

Successive governments have raised care fees to fund wage increases, and wages have risen. They have not risen enough to close the gap with alternative employment.

Foreign workers have become a structural part of the answer rather than a supplementary one, arriving through technical training programmes and specified skills visas, and the debate about expanding those categories is a debate about care whether or not it is described that way.

Technology is offered as the other answer, and lifting aids, monitoring sensors and record-keeping software genuinely reduce the load. None of them get a person out of bed and into a bath.

Family members continue to supply the largest share of care in Japan, unpaid and uncounted, and the typical carer is a woman in her sixties or seventies looking after a parent in their nineties.

That arrangement is the one the September statistics quietly describe, and the one that becomes harder every year the record is broken.

Care work competes for labour against every other sector facing the same shortage and pays below the national average, which is the gap recruitment efforts run into and the reason foreign workers have been recruited into the sector through an expanding set of visa categories.

SOCIETY

Respect for the Aged Day Arrives With a Storm in the Forecast

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Respect for the Aged Day falls on Monday the 21st, the third Monday of September, and this year it arrives with Typhoon No. 25 potentially approaching Kanto on the same day.

The holiday began as a local observance in a village in Hyogo Prefecture in the late 1940s, spread through the prefecture and was adopted nationally in 1966. Its original name translates as Old Folks' Day, and the change to the present form reflected a preference for dignity over description.

Municipalities mark it with ceremonies, gifts to residents reaching notable ages and visits to people living alone. Silver commemorative items for new centenarians are distributed through local government.

The distance between the sentiment and the demography has widened over sixty years. A holiday created when reaching one hundred was extraordinary now falls in a country with 107,677 such people.

For families, it functions as one of the fixed points in the calendar for visiting elderly relatives, alongside the New Year and the summer Bon period.

Travel is therefore part of the holiday, and it is travel that the forecast threatens. Warning-level rain is possible across Kanto and Tokai on the 20th and 21st, with the typhoon at its closest approach on the holiday itself.

Local authorities running outdoor ceremonies will be watching the track through the weekend, and many will move events indoors or cancel them.

The visits that matter most are the ones to people living alone, and those are also the ones most easily prevented by weather.

The holiday originated in a Hyogo village in 1947 as a local observance and was designated nationally in 1966, and its date was moved to the third Monday of September under legislation creating long weekends.

The centenarian figures announced this week give the holiday a statistical backdrop it did not have when it was established, honouring a group now larger than the population of many municipalities.

SOCIETY

Silver Week Travel Meets an Unfavourable Forecast

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

The September holiday period known as Silver Week is one of the busiest travel windows in the Japanese year, and this year's is forming up against a typhoon.

The name is a borrowing from Golden Week in spring, and the period's length varies from year to year depending on how the September holidays fall against the weekend.

Transport operators plan capacity months ahead. Additional Shinkansen services, extended ferry schedules and higher domestic flight frequencies are all committed well before anyone knows what the weather will do.

Forecast rain at warning level on Sunday across Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba and Yamanashi, and on Monday across a wider band including Shizuoka, Aichi and Mie, sits directly across the return leg of most journeys.

Railways in Japan suspend services on the basis of forecast rather than observed conditions, announcing planned suspensions a day ahead so that travellers can change plans. That practice, adopted after several damaging typhoons, trades inconvenience for safety and has broad public acceptance.

Travellers with fixed accommodation bookings should check cancellation terms now, and those planning island travel to Izu or Ogasawara should assume disruption from Friday.

Tourism operators in affected regions face the loss of one of the three big domestic travel periods of the year, after a September in which rain has already kept visitors away.

Hokkaido, under high pressure and forecast to be sunny, is the one part of the country where the holiday looks likely to proceed as planned.

Weather has an asymmetric effect on holiday travel, redirecting trips toward urban and indoor destinations rather than cancelling them, and hot spring regions retain appeal in poor weather in a way outdoor destinations do not.

A substantial share of Silver Week journeys are grave visits during higan, the equinox observance, which proceed in most conditions because their purpose is not recreational.

SOCIETY

A Month Without Sunshine Is Showing Up in the Fields

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

The Japan Meteorological Agency has continued to warn about insufficient sunshine and prolonged rain across southern Tohoku and the Pacific side of eastern Japan since early September, and agricultural reporting has begun to record the consequences.

Rice is the crop with the least room for error at this point in the calendar. Harvest runs from late August into October depending on region and variety, and it requires dry ground for machinery and dry weather for the grain.

Wet conditions at harvest raise moisture content, complicate drying and increase the risk of grain quality downgrades that reduce the price a farmer receives even when the tonnage is intact.

Vegetables respond faster and more visibly. Leafy crops rot in saturated soil, and the price effects reach supermarket shelves within weeks rather than months.

The sunshine deficit matters independently of the rain. Photosynthesis sets the rate at which fruit sugars accumulate and at which grain fills, and a month of cloud reduces both regardless of how much water reaches the roots.

For an agricultural sector already contending with record bankruptcies among rice farmers, high fertiliser and fuel costs and an ageing workforce, a poor September is not absorbed easily.

The policy backdrop adds a layer of awkwardness. The government has approved a consumption tax cut on food intended to lower prices for households, while the weather works in the opposite direction on the supply side.

A typhoon crossing the same region over the holiday weekend would compound the damage at precisely the wrong point in the harvest.

Rice approaches harvest across most of the country in September, and conditions in the final weeks before cutting affect both yield and the quality grading that determines the price farmers receive.

Japanese agriculture has faced compounding pressure from input costs, an ageing farming population and rice bankruptcies at record pace, and weather events land on that accumulated difficulty rather than on a sector with reserves.

SOCIETY

The Map Every Household Should Look At Before Sunday

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Every municipality in Japan publishes hazard maps showing which areas flood, which slopes are liable to collapse and where the designated evacuation centres are. Most households have received one and few have looked at it recently.

The maps are built from topography, river modelling and historical records, and they distinguish between types of risk that require different responses. River flooding, inland flooding from drainage that cannot cope, storm surge and landslide are shown separately because the safe action differs for each.

For river flooding, moving upstairs in a solid building may be sufficient. For landslide risk, the same action is dangerous and horizontal evacuation away from the slope is required.

Evacuation information also runs on a five-level scale, aligned deliberately with the volcanic and other warning systems so that the numbers mean comparable things.

Level 3 advises older residents and those needing assistance to leave. Level 4 instructs everyone in the designated area to evacuate. Level 5 means a disaster is already occurring and safety can no longer be assured.

Officials repeat one message above all others: do not wait for level 5. By the time it is issued, roads may be impassable and the safest remaining option is often the least good one.

With warning-level rain forecast for Sunday and Monday across a wide band of eastern Japan, the useful preparation is the unglamorous kind — knowing the route, charging a phone, filling a water container and agreeing where the household will meet.

Hazard maps are published by municipalities and identify the areas exposed to flooding, storm surge and landslide under defined scenarios, and they are the document that determines which alert applies to which household.

With Typhoon No. 25 forecast to approach Kanto around the 21st and warning-level rain possible in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba and Yamanashi on the 20th, the map is the thing to consult before the weekend rather than during it.

Municipal alert levels run on a five-step scale, and disaster officials consistently advise acting on Level 3 for those who need time and Level 4 regardless, since Level 5 frequently arrives after safe movement has become impossible.

SOCIETY

The Country’s Oldest Resident Is 114, and the Arithmetic Above 110 Is Brutal

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Japan's oldest person is 114, a figure that sits at the outer edge of documented human survival and that illustrates how quickly the population thins above 100.

There are 107,677 people aged 100 or more in the country. The number aged 110 or more is measured in tens.

Mortality rates rise steeply with each additional year at that extreme, which is why the pyramid narrows to a point rather than tapering gently. Reaching 105 is roughly ten times less likely than reaching 100; reaching 110 is rarer again by a similar order.

Japan has held a disproportionate share of the world's verified oldest people for decades, a reflection of national longevity and of an unusually reliable system of family registration that makes verification possible.

That last point is not trivial. Claims of extreme age elsewhere have repeatedly failed verification for lack of documentation, and Japan's koseki system produces records that demographers trust.

Researchers studying the very old have found fewer simple answers than they expected. Diet, activity and social connection all correlate with longevity in populations, but at the individual level above 105 the strongest observed factors are genetic and, to an uncomfortable degree, chance.

What is consistent is the sex ratio. Roughly nine in ten Japanese centenarians are women, and the imbalance widens further with each additional year.

Supercentenarians, those aged 110 and above, are rare enough that their ages are verified individually rather than statistically, and the country's oldest resident at 114 belongs to a group counted in the dozens rather than the thousands.

Research into Japanese longevity has examined diet, physical activity, social connection and the universal health insurance introduced in 1961 without isolating any single factor as decisive.

Prefectural variation persists, with Shimane, Kochi and Tottori among those recording the highest centenarian rates per head, a pattern that reflects out-migration of younger residents as much as longevity itself.

SOCIETY

The Insurance System Built in 2000 for the Demographics of 2026

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Japan's long-term care insurance system was introduced in 2000, and it was designed with an explicit purpose: to move the care of elderly people out of hospitals and out of the exclusive obligation of families.

Before it, the default arrangement was a daughter-in-law at home or a long hospital admission for a condition that did not require medical treatment.

The system is funded by premiums paid from the age of 40, by public money and by user co-payments, and it pays for home help, day services, equipment and residential care according to an assessed level of need.

It has worked. Services exist, they are used at enormous scale, and the assessment process gives families an entitlement rather than a request.

The pressures on it are arithmetic. Each revision has adjusted premiums, co-payments and the scope of covered services, because the number of people eligible grows every year while the number of contributors does not.

The binding constraint is no longer only money. Facilities that cannot recruit staff operate below capacity, and an entitlement to a service that nobody is available to deliver is an entitlement on paper.

The next revision will have to address the same three levers as every previous one: who pays, how much, and what is covered. The difference is that the room in each of them is smaller than it was.

Long-term care insurance enrols everyone aged 40 and above as contributors, with benefits from 65, and funds services through a combination of premiums, national and local taxation and a user co-payment that has risen for higher-income recipients.

Services are assessed through a certification process that places applicants on a scale of care need, and the boundary between levels determines substantial differences in available support.

Staffing rather than funding has become the binding constraint, with facility capacity expanded but waiting lists persisting in metropolitan areas where the population needing care is largest.

SOCIETY

SOCIETY

Why Bears Come Down the Mountain in Autumn

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

Bear encounters in Japan follow a seasonal rhythm that is well understood and, in poor years, entirely predictable.

Asiatic black bears feed intensively through the autumn to build the fat reserves that carry them through winter dormancy, and the food that matters most is mast: acorns, beech nuts and chestnuts.

Mast production varies enormously between years, and in a failure year the animals must range further to find the calories they need.

Further means down: toward orchards, persimmon trees left unpicked beside empty houses, unsecured rubbish, and the abandoned fields that have replaced the cultivated buffer zones that once separated forest from settlement.

Rural depopulation has widened that interface. A village with fewer people harvests less, maintains less, and leaves more food standing.

The August sighting on Mount Takao disclosed by Hachioji this week is notable for its location rather than its timing. A mountain at the end of a commuter line, walked by enormous numbers of casual hikers, is not where most people expect the subject to arise.

The advice for walkers is unchanged and effective: make noise, carry a bell, travel in groups, keep food sealed, and never approach a cub, because the mother is nearby and will treat proximity as a threat.

Bears feed intensively in autumn to build reserves for winter, and years in which the mountain mast crop of acorns and beech nuts fails send them further afield in search of food, which is when encounters with people increase.

Sightings across Honshu have risen in recent years as bear populations recovered and rural depopulation reduced the human presence that once kept them at a distance from settlements.

Advice for hikers is consistent: make noise, carry a bell, avoid dawn and dusk, and never approach a cub, since the mother is invariably nearby.

SOCIETY

Why the Yodo-go Group Has Never Been Only a Hijacking Case

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

Japanese interest in the hijackers who have lived in North Korea since 1970 has never rested on the hijacking alone. It rests on what happened afterwards.

Several members married Japanese women who travelled to Europe and were subsequently recruited, and Japanese investigators have long held that members of the group were involved in operations that brought Japanese nationals to North Korea.

That connects the case to the abductions issue, which has been the most emotionally charged element of Japanese policy toward Pyongyang for a quarter of a century.

North Korea admitted in 2002 that its agents had abducted Japanese citizens, returned five of them and declared the others dead. Japan has never accepted that account, and successive governments have made the issue a precondition for normalisation.

Each confirmation that a member of the group has died in Pyongyang therefore removes a potential source of testimony, and the families of the abducted are among the first to say so.

Members who have sought to return to Japan have faced the obvious obstacle: they remain wanted for the hijacking, and the Japanese authorities have not offered terms that would permit a return without prosecution.

The result is a small group of people in their seventies and eighties, in a country not their own, holding information that two governments have spent decades disputing.

The nine hijackers who diverted the aircraft to Pyongyang in 1970 were members of a Japanese radical faction, and several of them remained in North Korea for the rest of their lives, with others returning to face trial in Japan.

The group's members were later linked to the abductions of Japanese citizens, which is why the case has never been treated as a closed chapter in Japan's relations with the North.

Confirmation of a member's death in Pyongyang, relayed through a support group and acknowledged by authorities, reduces the number of surviving wanted individuals without resolving any of the questions the case raised.

SOCIETY

A Note on the Numbers in Thursday’s Edition

Compiled by the News Desk

Figures in Thursday's edition are drawn from the sources named in each report, and several deserve a word about what they measure.

The centenarian count of 107,677 is compiled by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare from resident registration data ahead of Respect for the Aged Day, and it counts people who will have reached 100 by the relevant date rather than those who reached it during the year.

Standard land prices are assessed as of 1 July by prefectural governments and published in September. They are valuations rather than transaction records, which makes them steadier and slower to turn than sale prices.

Trade figures are reported by the Ministry of Finance on a customs-clearance basis in yen, so a substantial part of the change in any month's value reflects the exchange rate rather than the volume of goods crossing the border.

Core machinery orders exclude ships and electric power equipment because single large orders in those categories distort the monthly series beyond usefulness.

The gender gap index is published annually by the World Economic Forum and measures gaps between men and women within each country, not the absolute condition of women in it.

Seismic magnitude describes energy at the source; seismic intensity describes shaking at a location. Japanese reports carry both, and the second is the one that describes what people felt.

Figures for the Nikkei, the TOPIX, the dollar-yen rate and Treasury yields are as reported at the close of the sessions named, and intraday movements are described as such where the source reports them.

Trade and machinery order figures are as published by the Ministry of Finance and the Cabinet Office respectively, and the percentage changes are those the ministries report.

Where a Japanese-language source gives a figure in yen for an amount originally reported in another currency, the yen figure is used as reported.

SOCIETY

Why a Rear-End Collision Is So Dangerous for Bus Passengers

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

City buses are among the safest forms of road transport by distance travelled, and the exception is the rear impact.

Passengers sit or stand facing forward without restraints. A collision from behind accelerates the vehicle forward underneath them, and the body follows a fraction of a second later, striking the seat in front or the nearest handrail.

Standing passengers have nothing to brace against except a strap, and the injuries in such incidents are concentrated among them.

Seat belts on route buses are not required in Japan, and for good operational reasons: passengers board and alight constantly over short distances, and belts would be unused most of the time. The trade-off is accepted because low speeds and professional drivers make the risk small.

That calculation changes when the impact comes from a heavy vehicle that has lost its brakes on a descent, which is the scenario investigators are examining in Wednesday's collision in Nada Ward, Kobe.

The remedies lie with the striking vehicle rather than the bus: maintenance regimes, driver training in engine braking, and the automatic emergency braking systems now fitted to new heavy trucks.

Those systems have reduced rear-end collisions substantially where they are fitted, and the rate of fitment across the existing fleet is the number that determines how much difference they make.

A bus carries passengers who may be standing, holding straps or seated without restraints, and a rear impact throws them forward into fixtures and each other with no seatbelt to absorb the force.

Modern buses are built with energy-absorbing rear structures, but a fully laden truck descending a grade carries momentum that exceeds what those structures are designed for.

Kobe's Nada Ward sits between the Rokko mountains and the sea, and roads descending from the mountain side are among the steeper urban grades in the region.

SOCIETY

What Forecasters Mean by Warning-Level Rain

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

Forecasts of torrential rain at warning level for Sunday in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba and Yamanashi, and for Monday across a wider band of Kanto-Koshinetsu and Tokai, use a specific term rather than a descriptive one.

Japanese rainfall warnings are issued against thresholds that differ by municipality, because the amount of rain that causes a problem depends on the local rivers, the drainage and the slopes rather than on a national figure.

An hour of rain that a Hokkaido town absorbs without difficulty will flood a valley in Shizuoka whose rivers are short and steep.

The Meteorological Agency issues advisories first, warnings next, and emergency warnings in the rare cases where the expected event is of a scale seen once in decades.

Municipalities translate those into evacuation information on a five-level scale, and the two systems are aligned so the numbers mean comparable things.

Soil water index, a modelled estimate of how much water the ground is already holding, is the variable that turns ordinary rain into a landslide warning. After a September of prolonged rain along the Pacific side of eastern Japan, that index is elevated across several prefectures.

The practical translation for a household is simple. Rain that would normally be unremarkable can produce a landslide on ground that is already saturated, which is why warnings issued this weekend should be treated as more serious than the rainfall totals alone suggest.

Warning-level rainfall is the threshold at which the Japan Meteorological Agency expects damage rather than inconvenience, and its use in a forecast several days ahead, as tenki.jp has done for the 20th and 21st, is itself a signal of confidence in the pattern.

The autumn rain front stimulated by a typhoon's approach is the mechanism forecasters are describing: warm, moist air fed into a stationary boundary produces sustained heavy rain over the same areas.

The advice is the same as for any warning-level event: know which alert level applies to your area, and act on the earlier tiers rather than the final one.

SPORTS

Former Mitsui Chief Akimi Iijima Nominated to Lead Japanese Baseball

The third consecutive commissioner drawn from the business world takes office on December 7, with an Olympic schedule question waiting for him

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Akimi Iijima, the former president of Mitsui & Co., has been nominated as the next Commissioner of Nippon Professional Baseball and is scheduled to take office on December 7, according to Yomiuri Shimbun's front page and Mainichi Shimbun.

He will be the third commissioner in succession to come from the business world rather than from baseball, the judiciary or diplomacy.

That pattern reflects what the job has become. The commissioner of Japanese professional baseball presides over twelve clubs owned by corporations with divergent interests, and the work is closer to chairing a difficult board than to running a sport.

Broadcasting rights, the distribution of revenue between clubs with very different market sizes, the relationship with Major League Baseball over players who leave, and the sport's declining share of youth participation are all files that arrive on the desk.

The immediate decision waiting for him concerns the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, where baseball is expected to return and where the owners are considering suspending official league matches during the tournament.

That question is genuinely difficult. A pause protects the national team's ability to field its best players, and a national team that wins does more for the sport's visibility than a fortnight of ordinary league fixtures.

It also disrupts a 143-game schedule already compressed around the rainy season, the summer heat and a postseason that runs into November, and it costs clubs home dates they have sold.

A trading company background is relevant to the arbitration such questions require. Mitsui's business is the management of relationships between parties whose interests do not align, which is a reasonable description of the commissioner's office.

Iijima inherits a sport in better commercial health than its pessimists claim. Attendance at several clubs has been strong, the Pacific League's digital distribution has been a success, and Japanese players in the American major leagues generate enormous domestic attention.

The structural concern is at the other end. Fewer children are playing organised baseball, school teams in rural areas are combining to field a side, and the sport's traditional pipeline is narrowing while football and basketball widen theirs.

A commissioner cannot fix that with a policy announcement. What the office can do is direct money and attention toward the youth game, and the December handover is when the direction gets set.

SPORTS

Onosato Falls to Takayasu as the Aki Basho Loses Its Last Unbeaten Yokozuna

A seventh gold star for the veteran, a first defeat for the yokozuna, and Kotozakura alone on four wins going into day five

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Yokozuna Onosato suffered his first defeat of the September tournament on day four, pushed down by Takayasu, who took his seventh kinboshi of a long career, according to Yomiuri Shimbun and Sports Hochi.

Ozeki Kotozakura is the only wrestler left with four straight wins. Kirishima took his third. Aonishiki, back at ozeki and unbeaten through the opening days, also lost for the first time.

Day five begins on Thursday afternoon at Ryogoku Kokugikan.

A kinboshi is awarded to a rank-and-file wrestler who beats a yokozuna, and it is one of the few individual honours in sumo that carries a permanent financial reward: each one adds to the holder's tournament pay for the remainder of his career.

Seven of them is a substantial collection, and for Takayasu it continues a career defined by proximity to the top rather than arrival at it. He has held ozeki, has come close to championships more than once, and has kept competing at a level most wrestlers cannot sustain into their mid-thirties.

For Onosato, a single loss on day four is not a crisis. It is, however, the end of the straightforward path, and yokozuna are judged by a standard that treats anything short of a championship challenge as a disappointment.

The tournament's shape has changed as a result. Four wins from four for Kotozakura puts an ozeki in sole possession of the lead with eleven days remaining, which is early enough to mean little and late enough to matter.

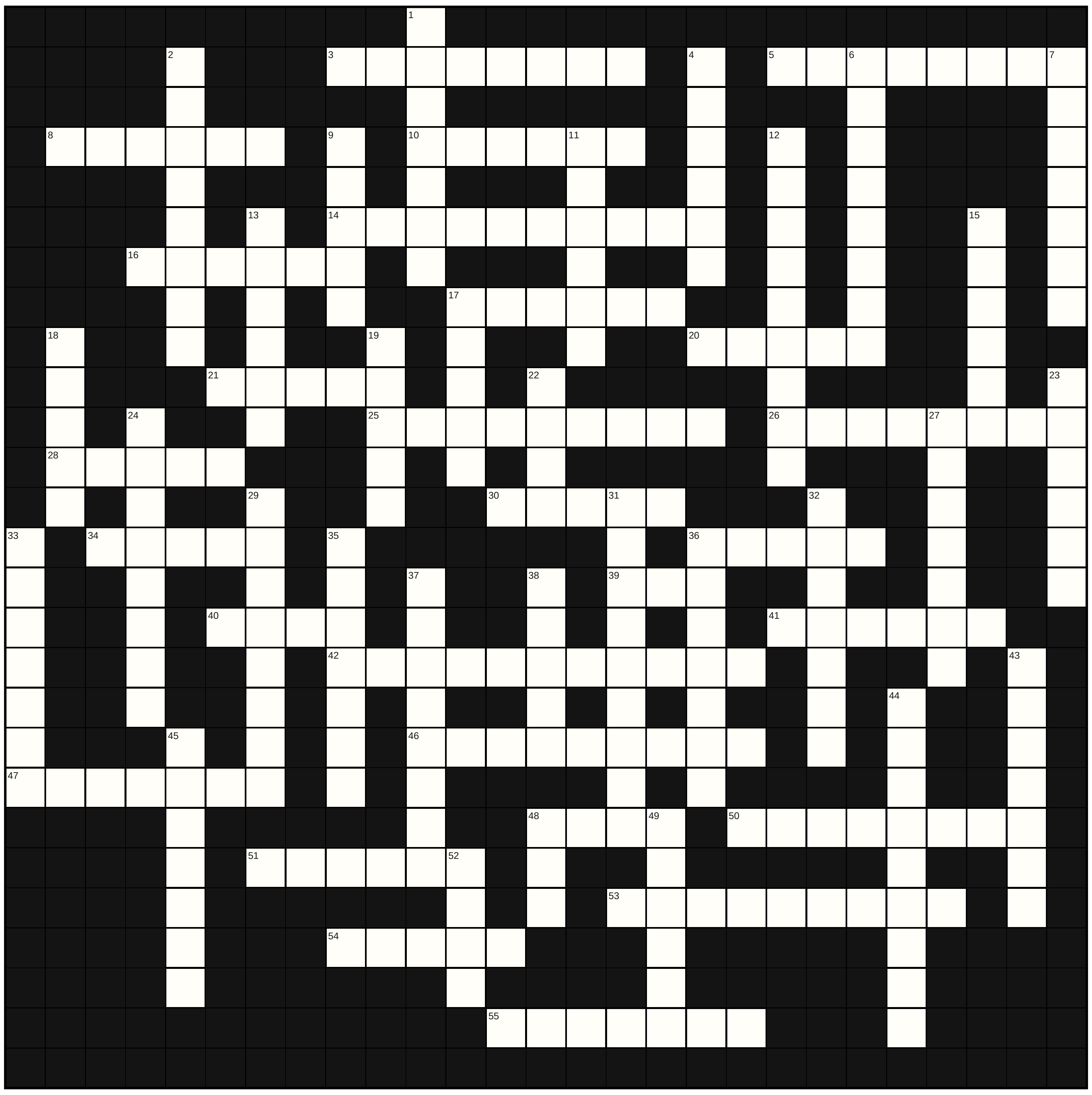
Aonishiki's first defeat is the day's other significant result. His return to ozeki has been among the storylines of the autumn, and the opening days had suggested he might carry it further than expected.

The second week is where the basho is decided. Wrestlers in contention meet each other from around day ten, and the schedule is drawn day by day so that the leaders are matched as the tournament closes.

The tournament runs at Ryogoku through the 27th.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Today's Professional Puzzle — Constructed by James O'Neill — 58 Words



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

ACROSS

3. Gold star for beating a yokozuna (8)
5. Finance minister who stays (8)
8. Trading house the commissioner once led (6)
10. Shinto sacred site (6)
14. Only wrestler still unbeaten after four days (10)
16. Akimi ___, next baseball commissioner (6)
17. Foreign minister kept in post (6)
20. Second-place club SoftBank is watching (5)
21. Swept 3-0 in women's volleyball (5)
25. Islands the typhoon approaches first (9)
26. City that issued the bear warning (8)
28. Shiro ___, Yodo-go suspect reported dead (5)
30. Fed chairman who said inflation has lasted too long (5)
34. Autumn fish arriving at the counter (5)
36. Broader gauge at 4,061.72 (5)
39. Deputy prime minister staying on (3)
40. Rugby final opponent on Saturday (4)
41. LDP secretary-general reappointed (also today's cartoonist) (6)
42. One of 107,677 (11)
46. Policy Research Council chairman reappointed (9)
47. Hyogo city with a science experiment incident (7)
48. Japan's legislature (4)
50. Ryoya ___, whose single broke a 4-0 deadlock (8)
51. 1970 hijacking incident (6)
53. Where the hijacker is said to have died (9)
54. Party entering the cabinet under a cooperation agreement (5)
55. Economic minister keeping his file (7)

DOWN

1. Yokozuna who took his first loss (7)
2. Fuel averaging 169.90 yen a litre (8)
4. Typhoon No. 25's name (6)
6. Veteran who beat the yokozuna on day four (8)
7. Authority without one is a speech (7)
9. Mount ___, bear sighting site (5)
11. Average that rebounded to 63,923 (6)
12. Lectern label in today's cartoon (9)
13. ___ Week, facing a typhoon (6)
15. Chamber of commerce hit by embezzlement (6)
17. Hideki ___, new Diet Affairs chairman (5)
18. Equinox week observance (5)
19. Cover being dropped from fire insurance (5)
22. Kobe ward where a truck hit a bus (4)
23. Chief cabinet secretary retained (6)
24. Prime minister whose second cabinet took office (8)
27. Prefecture where a magnitude 4.8 quake struck (7)
29. New LDP General Council chairman (8)
31. Where the new cabinet was photographed (9)
32. Skating pair on the torch relay (7)
33. August trade balance of 1.1056 trillion yen (7)
35. T20 event starting Thursday (7)
36. Mount ___, under an eruption alert (7)
37. Opponent Japan beat in Group A (8)
38. ADB president warning of uncertainty (5)
43. Table sport joining the Games (7)
44. ___ orders slipped 3.7% in July (9)
45. Defence minister retained (7)
48. Index that closed at 51,461 (3)
49. ___ Stadium, site of Japan's 2-0 win (6)
52. Club SoftBank beat in ten innings (4)

SPORTS

SoftBank Reach Eight Straight and Cut the Magic Number to Two

Kurihara's tenth-inning single beats Orix 4-0 and puts a third consecutive pennant within reach on Thursday

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

The Fukuoka SoftBank Hawks beat the Orix Buffaloes 4-0 in ten innings on Wednesday for their eighth consecutive win, their longest run of the season, reducing their magic number for the Pacific League pennant to two, according to Nishisupo.

Ryoya Kurihara broke the deadlock with a timely single in the tenth.

If SoftBank win on Thursday and second-place Seibu lose, the Hawks take a third consecutive Pacific League title.

A scoreless game into the tenth is a particular kind of pressure, and the team that breaks first in those games is usually the one with the deeper bullpen. SoftBank's has been the strength of their season.

Eight straight wins in September is how pennants are settled in Japanese baseball. The league's compressed schedule leaves little room to recover from a bad fortnight at this stage, and a run of this length effectively removes the chasing team's opportunity.

Seibu have been the better story of the second half, playing at a pace few expected after a slow start, and they have run out of calendar rather than form.

The magic number itself is a piece of arithmetic that becomes emotionally significant once it reaches single figures: the number of combined Hawks wins and Lions defeats required to make the title mathematically certain.

Winning the pennant does not end the season. Japan's postseason routes the top three clubs in each league through the Climax Series, and the pennant winner's advantage is a bye into the final stage plus a one-game head start.

That structure means a team can win 85 games over six months and still watch another club represent the league in the Japan Series, an outcome that has occurred often enough to keep the format permanently controversial.

For SoftBank, the immediate matter is Thursday, and a clinching that would arrive with eleven days of the regular season still to play.

SPORTS

Japan Open the Asian Games With a 2-0 Win Over Hong Kong at Toyota Stadium

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Japan beat Hong Kong China 2-0 at Toyota Stadium in their opening Group A match of the Asian Games men's football tournament, according to NTV News. Their second match is against Kyrgyzstan on Sunday the 20th.

South Korea beat Qatar 4-1 in the same round of fixtures.

The men's football tournament at the Asian Games is an age-restricted competition, which makes it a development event rather than a senior international one. For Japan it functions as a step on the path toward the next Olympic cycle.

Winning the opening match without conceding is the requirement at this stage. Group matches against sides of varying quality reward efficiency rather than spectacle, and a two-goal margin achieved without difficulty is the outcome a coach wants.

Playing the tournament in Aichi gives the squad home crowds at venues the players know, and Toyota Stadium is among the better football-specific grounds in the country.

South Korea's margin against Qatar is the result worth noting on the other side of the draw. The rivalry runs through every age group, and both federations treat the Asian Games as a competition they are expected to win.

The football tournament began before the opening ceremony on the 19th, a scheduling convention that reflects the number of matches a football competition requires.

Toyota Stadium in Aichi is among the largest football venues in the country and sits in the city whose automotive industry anchors the host region, which made it a natural choice for Japan's opening fixture.

Asian Games men's football is an under-23 competition, which distinguishes it from the senior tournaments and means the squads are drawn from players on the way up rather than established internationals.

South Korea's 4-1 win over Qatar in the same round of fixtures sets up the rivalry that has defined this competition for decades, with the two countries' under-23 sides meeting in finals more often than any other pairing.

SPORTS

Japan Sweep Nepal as the Women Begin a Search for a First Gold in 48 Years

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Japan's women's volleyball team beat Nepal 3-0 in their opening Asian Games match, winning 25-8, 25-12 and 25-11, according to Daily Sports. Japan are seeking a first Asian Games gold in the event in 48 years.

Yoshino Sato and Yukiko Wada were among the players featured in the coverage of the win.

The scoreline reflects the gap between Japan and the lower-ranked teams in the draw, and matches of this kind serve a limited purpose beyond allowing a coach to distribute minutes and settle a rotation.

The tournament's difficulty arrives later, against China and against a South Korean side that has traditionally matched Japan closely in this competition.

Forty-eight years without a gold medal in a sport Japan once dominated is a long shadow. Japanese women's volleyball was a global power in the 1960s and 1970s, with an Olympic title and a coaching methodology that other countries copied.

The modern game has moved toward height and power in ways that have not favoured Japan, and the national programme has responded by emphasising defence, speed of transition and serve receive, which is where its matches are won.

The men's team has already secured qualification for the Los Angeles Olympics through the Asian Championship, giving Japanese volleyball a stronger position than it has held for a generation.

Japanese women's volleyball dominated the sport internationally in the 1960s and 1970s, winning Olympic gold in Tokyo in 1964 and again in Montreal in 1976, and the search for a first Asian Games gold in 48 years reaches back to that era.

A 3-0 win with sets of 25-8, 25-12 and 25-11 establishes the gap between Japan and the opponents it will face in the group stage; the knockout rounds against China, South Korea and Thailand are where the competition begins.

The domestic V.League has professionalised over recent years, improving the training environment available to national team candidates and supplying the players named in Daily Sports' coverage.

SPORTS

Nadeshiko Follow an 8-0 Opening With a Group Still to Navigate

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Japan's women's football team began the Asian Games with an 8-0 win over Thailand, a result that says more about the distance between the sides than about the state of Japanese women's football.

Nadeshiko Japan remain one of the strongest sides in Asia and have been since their World Cup win in 2011, a victory that arrived months after the earthquake and tsunami and that has shaped how the team is regarded at home ever since.

The domestic professional league established in 2021 was intended to convert that visibility into a durable structure, and it has produced steadier employment for players and a more consistent pathway from school football.

The persistent gap is in the number of girls playing at all. Participation has risen but remains far below the equivalent figures in the countries Japan competes against for titles.

Tournament football also rewards a settled squad, and the Asian Games fall outside the international windows that oblige clubs to release players, which means the composition of a squad here is not necessarily the composition of a squad in a qualifying campaign.

Group stage matches against opponents of this level are therefore about rhythm and combinations rather than assessment.

The examination comes in the knockout rounds, where North Korea and China are the likely obstacles.

Goal difference frequently decides qualification from tight groups, and banking an eight-goal cushion in the opening match gives the squad room to rotate across

SPORTS

a compressed schedule.

Japan's women's programme carries a pedigree few in Asia can match, built on the 2011 World Cup title and sustained since by a domestic league and youth structure that has continued producing internationally competitive players.

The knockout rounds are where the tournament's genuine contenders separate, and host advantage tends to matter most in the tight fixtures decided by fine margins.

SPORTS

Teqball and Cricket Join the Programme as the Games Build Toward Saturday

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Competition at the Asian Games continues to expand ahead of Saturday's opening ceremony, with teqball men's doubles, women's singles and mixed doubles on Thursday's schedule and the Twenty20 cricket tournament beginning the same day.

Beach volleyball and indoor volleyball qualifying continue, and the football tournaments are already into their group stages.

The Asian Games programme is far broader than the Olympic one, which is its chief characteristic and the reason it matters to countries whose strongest sports are absent from the Olympic schedule.

Cricket's inclusion reflects the demography of the continent rather than the host country's interests. The sport's Asian heartland accounts for the overwhelming majority of its global following, and Twenty20 is the format that fits a multi-sport schedule.

Teqball, played on a curved table with a football, is among the newer additions and sits in the category of sports seeking the visibility that a continental games can provide.

For Aichi and Nagoya, the practical consequence is a fortnight of venues in constant use across a region that agreed to host on the basis of using existing facilities rather than building new ones.

Japan's medal expectations are concentrated in swimming, athletics, judo, wrestling, gymnastics and the racket sports, most of which begin after the ceremony.

Teqball, played on a curved table with football techniques, is among the newest additions to a programme that has always been broader than the Olympic one, and its inclusion reflects the Games' willingness to admit sports with regional followings.

Cricket's T20 format has grown across South Asia and beyond, and its presence gives the competition a following in countries whose engagement with other events is limited.

Competition beginning before the opening ceremony is standard practice for a Games of this size, since the number of events cannot be fitted into the period after it without extending the whole schedule.

SPORTS

Kitaguchi to Throw as the Athletics Programme Waits for Next Week

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Haruka Kitaguchi is scheduled to compete in the javelin at the Asian Games, where the main athletics programme begins on the 23rd with race walking.

Kitaguchi set a Japanese record of 68.92 metres this week, her first national record in three years, a mark that places her among the world's leading throwers and confirms a return to her best form.

The javelin rewards a combination of speed, rotational power and technique that is unusual in Japanese athletics, where distance running has historically absorbed most of the attention and most of the development funding.

Her success has changed that balance at the margins. Field events in Japanese schools now have a competitor to point to, which is how participation in a specialist event grows.

The scheduling of athletics late in the Games is conventional. Track and field is the centrepiece of the second week, and the race walk opens it because the road events need cooler conditions and empty streets.

Race walking is also, quietly, one of Japan's strongest disciplines, with a record of world-level results built on the same methodical approach to technique that characterises the country's marathon programme.

Kitaguchi's event falls within that second week, and she will carry the expectation that comes with holding the national record.

Kitaguchi enters on the strength of a national record of 68.92 metres set earlier this month, the first Japanese mark in the event to fall in three years, and the home crowd will expect a performance to match.

The athletics programme begins on the 23rd with race walking, the discipline in which Japan has produced consistent international success, before the track and field events that follow.

Weather affects javelin distances more than most events, with headwind and tailwind altering flight substantially, which is why the forecast for the athletics days will be watched by coaching staff as closely as by spectators.

SPORTS

The Torch Relay Reaches Its Final Days Before Saturday

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

The Asian Games torch relay is under way through the host region, with images of runners carrying the flame featured on Thursday's front pages.

The relay is the part of a multi-sport games that belongs to people who will never buy a ticket. It passes through towns that host no events, and it allows a prefecture to participate in something whose venues are concentrated in two cities.

The tradition is borrowed from the Olympic movement, and like most borrowed ceremonies it has acquired local characteristics: school groups along the route, local specialities at the handover points, and runners chosen for community service rather than athletic achievement.

Aichi and Nagoya have built their hosting around existing venues, which keeps costs down but reduces the visible legacy of the kind that new construction leaves behind.

A relay is one of the few ways to spread the experience geographically without spending money on buildings.

The flame arrives at the stadium for Saturday's opening ceremony, by which time several sports will already have completed multiple rounds of competition.

Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara, the figure skating pair known to the public as Rikuryu, carried the flame on a leg photographed for Yomiuri Shimbun's front page, continuing the practice of drawing relay participants from across Japanese sport rather than from the Games' own disciplines.

Torch relays have become the standard prelude to multi-sport games, and their routes and participants are chosen to say something about the host region beyond its capacity to stage competition.

The relay's final legs concentrate in the host region before the flame reaches the opening ceremony on Saturday, the point at which the ceremonial phase gives way entirely to competition.

Kabuki actor Kankuro Nakamura's earlier leg through Nagoya's Nakamura Ward drew on the same logic, weaving a figure from traditional performing arts into an event whose substance lies elsewhere.

SPORTS

Ohtani Resumes Batting Work as Sasaki Return Is Discussed

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Shohei Ohtani has begun resuming batting work, and a return to the mound for Roki Sasaki has been under discussion this week, according to Sponichi.

Both situations follow the same logic that governs every late-season return in baseball: the calendar shrinking against the medical timetable.

For a hitter, the progression from tee work to soft toss to live pitching is measured in days and can be accelerated if the swing looks right. For a pitcher, the build-up is measured in weeks of increasing intensity, and it cannot be accelerated without accepting risk.

That asymmetry is why Ohtani's return to the batting order has always been the easier of the two questions he presents, and why his two-way career has been organised around protecting the arm rather than the swing.

Sasaki's case is different again. A pitcher whose value rests on velocity has less margin to pitch through discomfort, and a club with postseason ambitions has an incentive to be conservative in September.

For Japanese viewers, the schedule is the familiar September routine of breakfast television and highlight packages, and the two players between them account for a substantial share of it.

Neither situation has produced a confirmed date.

Tee work isolates the swing from pitch recognition and timing, and it establishes whether the movement can be executed without aggravating the injury before the reactive elements are added.

Sasaki's return to pitching, if it proceeds this week, would restore an arm to a rotation that has absorbed sustained attrition through the season and is planning for the postseason.

Both timelines remain contingent on how each player responds, the standard qualification attached to any rehabilitation schedule announced before it is completed.

SPORTS

Japan Meet Fiji in the Pacific Nations Cup Final on Saturday

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Japan reached the Pacific Nations Cup final with a comfortable win over the United States in the semi-final and face Fiji on the 19th.

Fiji are the measure of where Japanese rugby stands. They are a tier-one side by results if not always by fixture list, and their combination of physical power and improvisation has troubled far better-resourced teams.

Japan's game is built on the opposite qualities: structure, speed of ruck, defensive organisation and a set piece drilled to compensate for a size disadvantage against most opponents.

That approach produced the World Cup results in 2015 and 2019 that changed the sport's domestic standing, and the domestic league established afterwards has given the national programme a base it previously lacked.

The Pacific Nations Cup remains the competition in which Japan can play meaningful matches against sides of comparable standing without waiting for a World Cup cycle.

A final against Fiji is the fixture the tournament exists to produce, and Saturday's result will say a good deal about how the next cycle is likely to go.

Fiji's rugby is built on a running game and offloading skill that no other nation quite replicates, and Japanese sides that have beaten them have done so by controlling possession and denying the space in which that game thrives.

The Pacific Nations Cup has become the competition in which Japan measures itself against the Pacific island nations and the United States between World Cups, and a final against Fiji is the fixture it exists to produce.

Japan's own World Cup runs in 2015 and 2019 established a style based on tempo and fitness, and the current squad's performance against the United States in the semi-final suggested that approach remains intact.

A win on Saturday would give the national side a title in a year that has otherwise been about rebuilding toward the next World Cup cycle.

SPORTS

Kashiwa and Kobe Carry a Crowded Calendar Into Asian Competition

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Kashiwa Reysol met Jeonbuk and Vissel Kobe played Port in the opening round of East Division fixtures in Asian club competition this week.

Japanese clubs enter these matches with a structural handicap that has nothing to do with the quality of their squads. The J.League season runs through the calendar year while the Asian competition runs across two, which leaves Japanese sides playing continental knockout ties in the middle of a domestic run-in.

Korean and Middle Eastern opponents arrive at different points in their own seasons, and the mismatch of preparation has shaped Japanese results in the competition for years.

Travel compounds it. A midweek fixture in the Gulf followed by a weekend league match is a scheduling problem no amount of squad depth solves completely.

The prize is worth the difficulty. Continental success brings a place at the Club World Cup, revenue that reaches a Japanese club's budget in a way domestic prize money does not, and the recruitment advantage that follows visibility.

Kobe and Kashiwa both carry squads capable of progressing, and both will be judged on whether they can do it without damaging their league positions.

The J.League's calendar and the continental one have never aligned cleanly, and clubs that progress deep into Asian competition frequently see domestic form suffer under the combined load.

Squad depth determines how well a club manages that, and the J.League's salary structure limits how far any club can insulate itself against fixture congestion.

Jeonbuk are among Korean football's most decorated clubs, and the Japan-Korea club rivalry is among the competition's most consistently contested, while Port represent a Thai league that has improved markedly as it professionalised.

Continental success carries genuine commercial value through prize money and qualification for the Club World Cup, which has grown considerably in scale.

SPORTS

Pausing a Season for an Olympic Fortnight Is Harder Than It Sounds

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Nippon Professional Baseball is weighing whether to suspend official matches during the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, a decision the incoming commissioner will inherit.

The precedent exists. Japanese baseball paused for the Tokyo Games, and the national side won the gold medal that the pause was designed to make possible.

The costs were absorbed then because the Games were at home and the calendar had already been disrupted by the pandemic. Neither condition applies to Los Angeles.

A 143-game season has to fit between late March and early October, around a rainy season that removes dates in June, summer heat that limits day games and a postseason that runs into November.

Removing two weeks from that means playing more doubleheaders, extending the season later into autumn, or reducing the number of games, and each option has a financial consequence for clubs that sell tickets by the date.

Against that sits the argument for the national team. Japanese baseball's international results have been the sport's most effective marketing for two decades, and a squad without major league players is already at a disadvantage without also lacking its domestic stars.

The decision also touches the relationship with Major League Baseball, whose own participation in Olympic baseball has never been settled and whose calendar will not pause.

Owners meeting on the question are balancing a fortnight of revenue against the sport's visibility among the children who are, at present, choosing other games.

NPB suspended its season for the Tokyo Games in 2021, allowing a full-strength squad that won the gold medal, and that precedent is the reference for the current discussion.

Major League Baseball has consistently declined to pause its own season, which means Japanese players established there would remain unavailable regardless of what NPB decides.

SPORTS

Scoreboard and Fixtures

Compiled by the Sports Desk

BASEBALL — Fukuoka SoftBank Hawks 4, Orix Buffaloes 0 (10 innings). SoftBank's eighth consecutive win, their longest run of the season. Ryoya Kurihara's timely single broke a scoreless game in the tenth. The Hawks' magic number for the Pacific League pennant stands at two.

SUMO, AKI BASHO DAY FOUR — Yokozuna Onosato beaten by Takayasu, the veteran's seventh kinboshi. Ozeki Kotozakura alone on four wins. Kirishima to three wins. Aonishiki beaten for the first time. Day five at Ryogoku Kokugikan on Thursday; the tournament runs through the 27th.

SPORTS

ASIAN GAMES, MEN'S FOOTBALL — Japan 2, Hong Kong China 0, at Toyota Stadium, Group A. South Korea 4, Qatar 1. Japan meet Kyrgyzstan on Sunday the 20th.

ASIAN GAMES, WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL — Japan 3, Nepal 0 (25-8, 25-12, 25-11). ASIAN GAMES, WOMEN'S FOOTBALL — Japan 8, Thailand 0.

ASIAN GAMES, THURSDAY — Teqball men's doubles, women's singles and mixed doubles. Twenty20 cricket begins. Beach volleyball and indoor volleyball qualifying continue. Opening ceremony Saturday the 19th; the main athletics programme opens on the 23rd with race walking.

RUGBY — Japan beat the United States in the Pacific Nations Cup semi-final and play Fiji in the final on Saturday the 19th. VOLLEYBALL — Japan's men have qualified for the Los Angeles Olympics through the Asian Championship.

FOOTBALL, ASIAN CLUB COMPETITION — Kashiwa Reysol played Jeonbuk and Vissel Kobe played Port in East Division fixtures this week.

BASEBALL, ADMINISTRATION — Akimi Iijima, formerly president of Mitsui & Co., nominated as Commissioner of Nippon Professional Baseball, taking office December 7.

ASIAN GAMES (Sept. 16-17): Men's football, Group A, Japan 2-0 Hong Kong China, at Toyota Stadium; South Korea 4-1 Qatar. Women's volleyball, Japan 3-0 Nepal (25-8, 25-12, 25-11). Women's football, Japan 8-0 Thailand (opening fixture, previously reported). Teqball and cricket T20 begin Sept. 17. Opening ceremony Sept. 19.

UPCOMING: Men's football, Japan v Kyrgyzstan, Sept. 20. Athletics programme opens Sept. 23 with race walking. Rugby Pacific Nations Cup final, Japan v Fiji, Sept. 19. Aki Basho continues through Sept. 27.

SPORTS

What a Magic Number of Two Means, and What It Does Not

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

A magic number counts the combinations of results that would make a title mathematically certain. SoftBank's figure of two means any two of the following: a Hawks win, or a defeat for second-placed Seibu.

Win on Thursday while Seibu lose, and the pennant is decided the same evening.

The number is calculated from the remaining schedule rather than from current form, which is why it can appear while a chasing team is still theoretically able to catch up. Mathematics closes the door before the standings do.

In Japanese baseball the pennant is not the season's conclusion. The Climax Series sends the top three clubs in each league into a postseason, with the pennant winner receiving a bye to the final stage and a one-game advantage in it.

That advantage is real but not decisive, and league champions have been eliminated by clubs that finished well behind them over six months.

The format was adopted to preserve interest in September for more clubs and to produce additional postseason revenue, and it succeeds at both. It also means that a team can dominate a league and not represent it in the Japan Series.

Supporters of the winning club tend to regard this as an injustice in the years it happens to them and as excitement in the years it does not.

A magic number counts down the combination of a club's own wins and its rival's losses needed to clinch, and a number of two means any two such events, in any order, settle the pennant.

With SoftBank playing and Seibu playing on the same day, the arithmetic can resolve in a single evening, which is why Thursday's fixtures carry more weight than their position in a 143-game season would suggest.

What it does not settle is anything beyond the pennant. The Climax Series admits the top three clubs in each league, and the pennant winner's advantage there is a single game in the Final Stage rather than a bye.

SPORTS

An Ozeki Alone at the Front Is a Position With Its Own Pressure

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Kotozakura's four straight wins leave him alone at the top of the September tournament, which is a good position and a demanding one.

Ozeki is the rank immediately below yokozuna and the only one from which promotion to the top is possible. The conventional standard is roughly thirty-three wins across three consecutive tournaments, with championships or championship-level performances among them.

Sumo's promotion committee is not bound by that arithmetic, and it has declined to promote wrestlers who met it while occasionally advancing wrestlers who did not.

The rank also carries the kadoban rule: an ozeki who records a losing tournament is demoted if he fails to win eight of fifteen in the next one. No other rank carries a comparable threat.

That combination shapes how ozeki wrestle. Eight wins is survival, and a wrestler who has secured them by day ten is in a different psychological position from one who has not.

Leading a tournament outright from day four means eleven days of being the man everyone else is scheduled against, and the second week's matchmaking is drawn specifically to test the leaders against one another.

Onosato's defeat by Takayasu on Wednesday removed the yokozuna's unbeaten record and opened the tournament, and the beneficiary is the ozeki who has not yet dropped a bout.

Sumo's scheduling keeps the highest-ranked wrestlers apart until the second week, which means Kotozakura's four wins have come against opponents ranked below him, and his unbeaten record establishes competence rather than superiority.

The ozeki rank carries a specific protection and a specific pressure: a demoted ozeki regains the rank automatically with ten wins in the following tournament, but an ozeki who leads a tournament outright is judged against the standard of the rank above.

With Hoshoryu absent and Onosato now carrying a loss, the tournament's championship is more open than the presence of a yokozuna in the field would normally allow.

SPORTS

Seven Gold Stars and a Career Spent Near the Summit

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Takayasu's defeat of Onosato was his seventh kinboshi, and the figure is a fair summary of a long career conducted just below the very top.

A kinboshi is awarded only to a maegashira, a rank-and-file wrestler, who beats a yokozuna. Wrestlers holding ozeki or the titled ranks are not eligible, which means that a collection of seven is assembled over years of competing at the level where such matches occur.

The reward is permanent. Each gold star adds to a wrestler's tournament pay for the remainder of his career, a structure that recognises the difficulty of the achievement rather than the outcome of a single day.

Takayasu held ozeki himself, has come close to a championship on more than one occasion, and has continued competing at a level that most wrestlers cannot sustain into their mid-thirties.

Sumo is unusually hard on longevity. There is no off-season of consequence, six tournaments a year each demand fifteen consecutive days of maximum-effort collisions, and injuries accumulate without the surgical intervention common in other sports.

A wrestler still capable of beating a yokozuna after that many years is demonstrating something the record books measure only indirectly.

For the tournament, the result matters because it ended the yokozuna's unbeaten run on day four and left an ozeki alone in front.

A kinboshi, the gold star awarded to a maegashira-ranked wrestler for defeating a yokozuna, carries a permanent salary increment for the rest of the wrestler's career, which is why seven of them describe a career as well as a record.

Takayasu reached the ozeki rank himself earlier in his career before injury returned him to the ranks below, and his continued competitiveness against the sport's summit is what has sustained his following.

Beating an ozeki in promotion contention on the third day and a yokozuna on the fourth is the kind of sequence that shapes a tournament without producing a championship, and it is the veteran's particular contribution.

SPORTS

Eight Straight Wins Is a Bullpen Statistic

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Runs of eight consecutive wins in Japanese baseball are rarely built on hitting. They are built on relief pitching, and SoftBank's run is a case in point.

Wednesday's game was scoreless into the tenth. A team that reaches extra innings without conceding has used four or five relievers, each for a short outing at maximum effort, and has won the game before its offence produced anything.

Japanese bullpen usage differs from the American pattern. Roles are defined more rigidly, the setup man and closer are named positions with attached status, and managers tend to use their best relievers in the situations the roles specify rather than at the highest-leverage moment.

That structure produces consistency at the cost of flexibility, and it works best for teams with depth, which is what SoftBank have spent money to acquire.

The club's financial position permits a roster that other teams cannot match, and the criticism that follows from that is a permanent feature of Japanese baseball discussion.

The counter-argument is that money buys players and not September, and clubs with large payrolls have collapsed in the second half often enough to make the point.

For Seibu, who have played at the best pace in the league since midsummer, the difficulty has been that their surge coincided with an opponent who did not lose.

An extra-inning shutout is the signature of a bullpen that holds a game long enough for the offence to find one run, and Kurihara's timely single in the tenth was the run that a 4-0 final score in ten innings required.

SoftBank's relief corps has been the foundation of a run that has left the Pacific League with considerably less doubt at the top than the Central League carries.

Streaks of eight are rare enough across a 143-game season that they usually coincide with a team playing above its underlying quality, which is a caution rather than a prediction.

SPORTS

Where Japan Expects Its Asian Games Medals

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Japan's medal expectations at a home Asian Games are concentrated in a familiar group of sports, and the pattern has been stable for two decades.

Swimming and athletics supply the largest volume, because they offer the most events. Judo, wrestling and karate reflect both domestic depth and the sports' origins. Gymnastics has been a Japanese strength at every level since the 1960s.

Badminton and table tennis have become genuine strengths rather than aspirations, built on school programmes and on a professional structure that keeps the best players competing domestically.

Baseball and softball are Japanese sports in a way they are not for most of the continent, and the Games offer a title that the Olympic programme does not reliably provide.

The obstacle in the overall medal table is China, whose depth across the full programme has made it the dominant nation at every Asian Games since the 1980s. Competing for the total is not a realistic objective; competing sport by sport is.

Host nations historically improve on their previous performance, helped by familiar venues, no travel and the entry positions that hosting confers in some sports.

The events begin in volume after Saturday's ceremony, with athletics opening on the 23rd.

Judo carries the most weight, as the sport's country of origin, and Japanese competitors operate under an expectation of dominance that no other national programme in any sport quite matches.

Gymnastics carries a comparable legacy from the era of Japanese dominance in the late twentieth century, and swimming has produced consistent international competitiveness across multiple Olympic cycles.

China remains the overwhelming favourite in the overall medal table, a position built across more disciplines than any competitor matches, and the Asian Games' breadth beyond the Olympic programme favours that depth.

CULTURE

Higan Approaches, and With It the Week Japan Visits Its Dead

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

The autumn equinox falls next week, and with it the seven days of Higan, the Buddhist observance built around the days when light and darkness are equal.

The word refers to the far shore, the state beyond suffering, and the observance rests on the idea that the boundary between this world and the next is at its thinnest when the sun rises due east and sets due west.

In practice it is the week when families clean graves, replace flowers, burn incense and stand for a few minutes in a cemetery talking quietly about people who are no longer there.

Ohagi, sweet rice covered in red bean paste, is made and offered and eaten. The autumn version takes its name from the bush clover that flowers at this time of year; the identical spring sweet is called botamochi after the peony.

That distinction survives in a country that has abandoned a great many other seasonal formalities, which suggests something about the durability of observances attached to food.

The equinox itself is a public holiday, one of only two in the Japanese calendar determined by astronomy rather than by legislation, and its date is fixed each year by calculation rather than convention.

Higan is also a demographic event now. In a country with 107,677 people over the age of 100, the family graves being cleaned this week are visited by people who are themselves elderly, and the question of who maintains a grave when a family line contracts has become a practical problem for temples.

Grave closure, in which remains are removed and a plot returned, has grown into a small industry.

None of that is visible in the cemeteries next week. What is visible is buckets, ladles, chrysanthemums and families standing in the particular silence that belongs to the hour.

Higan, the seven-day period centred on the equinox, is observed twice a year, and the word refers to the far shore, the side of the river separating this world from the next, with the equinox's balance of day and night long read as a moment of nearness between them.

CULTURE

A Sunless September Complicates the Autumn Colour Forecast

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Autumn colour forecasts are a fixture of the Japanese season, published like weather maps and followed by a domestic tourism industry that plans around them.

They are also, this year, being drawn up against unhelpful conditions. Leaves turn in response to shortening days and falling temperatures, and the intensity of the colour depends on the difference between daytime warmth and night-time cold, on sunshine during the turning period, and on adequate but not excessive moisture.

September has supplied the moisture and withheld the sunshine across the Pacific side of eastern Japan, and the Meteorological Agency has warned repeatedly about a shortage of sun in southern Tohoku.

Cloud during the turning weeks tends to produce colour that is duller and browner than a clear autumn delivers, and heavy rain strips leaves before they reach their best.

Warm autumns delay the turn, which pushes peak viewing later and compresses the window for the mountain resorts whose season is short in any case.

Hokkaido turns first, usually from late September in the high country around Daisetsuzan, and this year

CULTURE

the island has had the clearest weather in the country.

Kyoto's turn, which draws the largest crowds, comes in the second half of November, and there is a great deal of weather between now and then.

For the hot spring towns beneath Mount Tokachi, where the volcanic alert has restricted access, the timing is doubly unfortunate.

Colour change responds to a combination of falling temperatures and sunshine, with cold nights and bright days producing the most vivid results, which is why a month of overcast conditions across southern Tohoku and the Pacific coast of eastern Japan works against it.

The koyo front moves opposite to the spring cherry blossom front, following falling temperatures southward, and peak timing varies by elevation as much as latitude.

CULTURE

Autumn Festivals Proceed, With One Eye on the Forecast

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

September and October are the months of the autumn festival across most of Japan, when shrines mark the harvest with processions that in many towns are the largest public event of the year.

The form varies by region. In some places a portable shrine is carried through the streets by dozens of people; in others enormous wheeled floats are hauled by teams and turned at corners with a violence that draws crowds specifically to watch the corners.

The organisation behind them is a neighbourhood association rather than a temple or a company, and the same shrinking demography visible in the centenarian statistics reaches the festivals through the number of people available to carry the weight.

Towns have responded by inviting participation from outside the immediate parish, by adding wheels where shoulders once sufficed, and in some cases by holding the festival every second year.

Weather is the other constraint. A typhoon approaching Kanto over the holiday weekend will decide the fate of several events, and the decision usually falls to a committee of local men standing in a car park on the morning itself.

Festivals that are cancelled are rarely rescheduled, because the date is tied to the shrine calendar rather than to convenience.

For rural towns that have lost their schools and their shops, the autumn festival is often the one occasion in the year when people who have moved away come back, which is why the decision to cancel one is taken more heavily than the weather alone would suggest.

Processions carrying portable shrines through neighbourhood streets require substantial numbers of participants, and maintaining that participation in depopulating areas has become the festivals' principal difficulty.

Some communities have combined festivals across districts, shortened routes or opened participation to residents without the traditional connections, changes older participants have not always welcomed.

With Typhoon No. 25 forecast to approach over the long weekend, organisers across Kanto face the decision every autumn festival committee dreads, between proceeding under rain and postponing an observance whose date has religious meaning.

CULTURE

Why the September Holidays Are Called Silver

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Golden Week, the run of holidays at the end of April and the beginning of May, took its name from the film industry, which borrowed a broadcasting term for a period of peak attendance.

Silver Week is the derivative, coined for the September cluster of Respect for the Aged Day and the autumn equinox, and the metallic hierarchy carries the obvious implication that the second period is the lesser one.

It is also less reliable. Golden Week falls in the same place each year; the September holidays move, and the run of consecutive days can be long or short depending on the calendar.

The silver of the name has acquired a second association that its inventors did not intend, since silver is also the standard Japanese euphemism for old age. Priority seats on trains are silver seats, and the industries serving elderly customers are described as the silver market.

For a holiday period built around Respect for the Aged Day, the double meaning has proved convenient enough that nobody has tried to correct it.

Travel companies price accordingly, hotels in the mountain and hot spring regions sell out months ahead, and the expressways fill in both directions on the same two days.

This year the question is whether any of it happens, with warning-level rain forecast across the Kanto and Tokai regions on the Sunday and Monday.

The name follows Golden Week by analogy, coined when the arrangement of September holidays first produced a comparable run of days off, and it has entered common usage without any formal designation.

Its length varies from year to year with the calendar, depending on whether Respect for the Aged Day and the Autumn Equinox fall close enough to produce a bridging weekday, which is why some years have a Silver Week and others merely a long weekend.

This year the period runs from the weekend through Respect for the Aged Day on the 21st, and the forecast that has developed around it, with a typhoon approaching Kanto on the holiday itself, is the kind that reshapes rather than cancels plans.

CULTURE

The Cultural Calendar Turns Toward Autumn

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Autumn in Japan is conventionally described with a set of ready-made phrases: the autumn of reading, the autumn of appetite, the autumn of the arts. They survive because they are broadly accurate.

The season is when museums open their major exhibitions, when orchestras begin subscription series, and when the school and municipal culture festivals fill gymnasiums with displays of calligraphy and choral singing.

The practical reason is climate. Summer in Japan is too hot for anything that involves walking between venues, and the weeks between the end of the heat and the beginning of the year-end rush are the only reliable window.

Sport competes for the same weeks, and this year the Asian Games in Aichi and Nagoya will absorb a substantial share of attention through to the beginning of October.

Regional theatres and galleries plan around that. A city hosting a continental games discovers that its hotels, its transport and its volunteers are committed elsewhere for a fortnight.

For audiences, the compensation is a dense few weeks in which more is available than anyone can attend, which is the ordinary condition of a Japanese autumn and the reason the phrases persist.

The autumn equinox on the 23rd anchors the period, with the higan observance drawing families to grave sites, and autumn shrine festivals running through the following weeks in communities across the country.

Kabuki's autumn season, the autumn of reading campaign and the foliage forecasts that follow form a calendar that has organised Japanese cultural life for longer than any of its individual elements have existed in their current form.

The Asian Games opening ceremony on Saturday adds an element the calendar does not usually carry, placing a major international event in a season normally given to domestic observance.

This year's forecast, with a typhoon approaching Kanto over the long weekend and a month of overcast weather already behind the eastern Pacific coast, will shape which of these observances proceed as planned.

CULTURE

The Autumn of Reading Arrives With Its Annual Campaign

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Autumn is the publishing industry's season in Japan, and the reading campaign that accompanies it is among the longest-running public promotions in the country.

Schools mark it with morning reading periods, libraries with displays, and publishers with the release schedule that carries them to the year end.

The industry the campaign supports has been contracting for two decades. Magazine circulation has fallen furthest, bookshops have closed in enormous numbers, and towns without a single bookshop are now common enough to have generated their own municipal responses.

Manga is the exception, and a large one. Digital distribution has expanded a readership that print alone could not reach, and the export performance of Japanese comics and their animated adaptations has become a genuine industrial story.

Second-hand chains and library lending have absorbed part of the shift, and the argument about whether either harms authors' incomes recurs each year without resolution.

What the season still produces reliably is the display table: new hardbacks, seasonal essay collections and the reissues that publishers time for a period when people are indoors more and the evenings are longer.

For a fortnight in Aichi and Nagoya this year, the competition for attention will be a continental sports festival, which is an unusually difficult opponent for a book.

Reading Week in the autumn dates to 1947, established in the immediate postwar period on the principle that a country rebuilding needed to read, and it has been observed every year since with a campaign coordinated by publishers and libraries.

The phrase associating autumn with reading predates the campaign considerably, drawing on the season's cooler evenings and longer nights as the natural time for it.

Japan's publishing industry has faced the same pressures as its counterparts elsewhere, with print sales declining and digital formats growing, and the annual campaign is one of the ways it maintains public attention on books as objects.

CULTURE

The Season Arrives at the Fish Counter Before It Arrives Anywhere Else

By Grace Park | Food & Restaurant Columnist

The Japanese autumn is announced commercially rather than meteorologically, and the announcement is made at the fish counter.

Pacific saury is the traditional herald, grilled whole with salt, served with grated daikon and a wedge of citrus, and eaten in enormous quantities in September and October. Its catch has been poor for years as the fish have moved north and offshore, and the price has moved accordingly.

What was once the cheapest fish of the season is now an occasional purchase in many households, which is a small but genuine change in the shape of an ordinary autumn.

Mushrooms follow, and matsutake sit at the luxury end of a category otherwise defined by affordability. Most households encounter the season through shimeji, maitake and eringi rather than through anything traded by weight at prices comparable to meat.

Chestnuts, sweet potato, persimmon and new rice complete the list, and the arrival of new rice is the moment the rice question becomes domestic rather than political.

After three years in which the price of rice has been a national argument, the harvest now being gathered under an unhelpful sky carries more weight than usual.

The government's approved cut in the consumption tax on food, which takes effect in April 2027, will not touch any of this season's prices.

What will touch them is the weather over the holiday weekend, the state of the ground beneath the rice, and whether a typhoon crosses the Pacific coast during the harvest.

Sanma, the Pacific saury, is the fish most associated with early autumn, and its arrival at the counter has for years been accompanied by reports of declining catches and rising prices as the shoals move further offshore.

Salmon, mackerel and the first of the season's shellfish follow, and the fish counter's turnover from summer to autumn species is a calendar households read without needing to be told.

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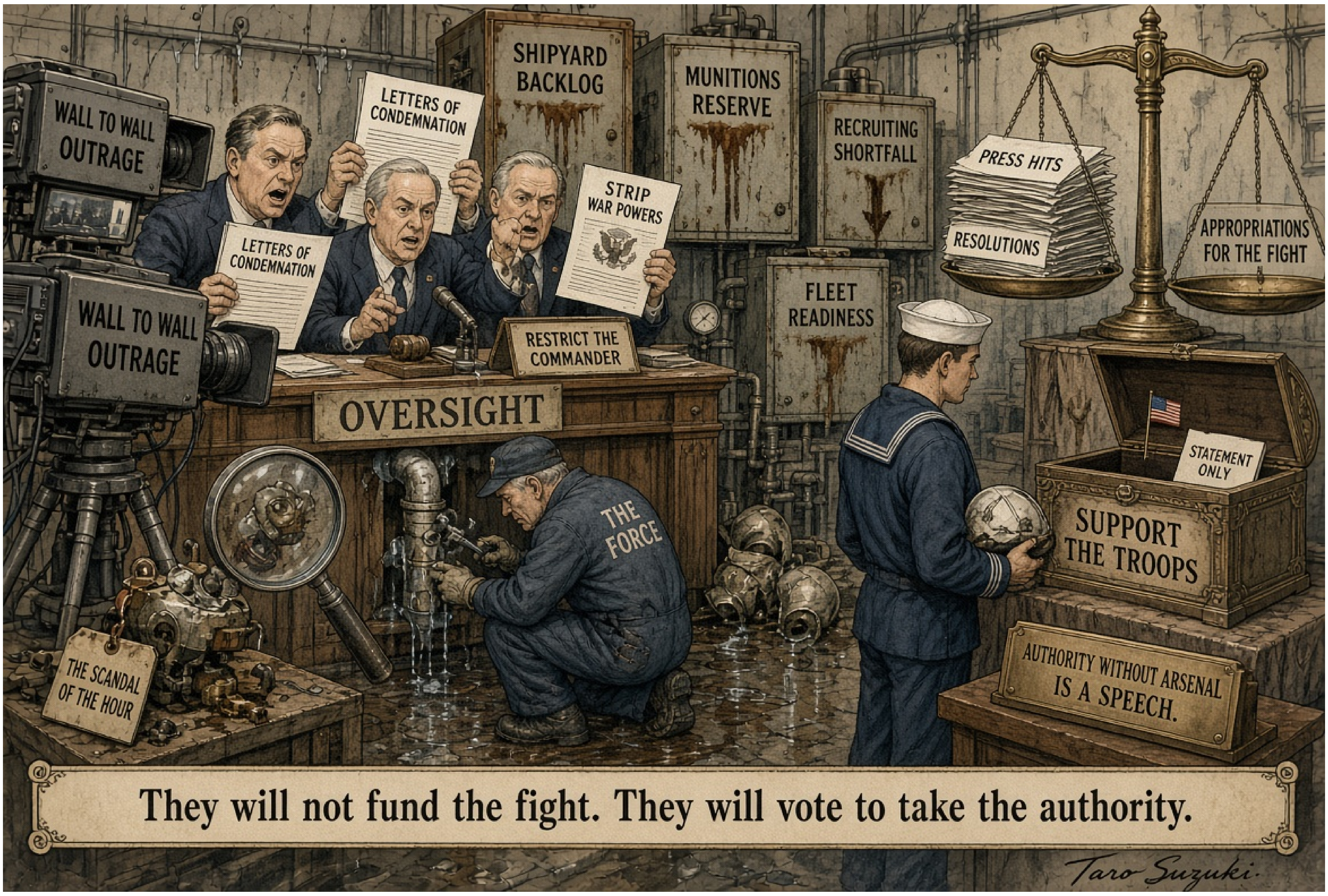

"They will not fund the fight. They will vote to take the authority."
Cartoon by Taro Suzuki

EDITORIAL

Authority Without an Arsenal Is a Speech

By Samantha Ortiz | Editorial Page Editor

Taro Suzuki's cartoon on this page shows three legislators at a lectern marked OVERSIGHT, holding up letters of condemnation and a resolution to strip war powers. Behind them, filing cabinets labelled SHIPYARD BACKLOG, MUNITIONS RESERVE, RECRUITING SHORTFALL and FLEET READINESS are leaking onto the floor, where a maintainer in overalls marked THE FORCE is trying to fix a pipe with a hand tool. A sailor stands holding a cracked helmet. A crate marked SUPPORT THE TROOPS contains a card reading STATEMENT ONLY. On the scales, press hits and resolutions pile up on one pan; the pan marked APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE FIGHT is empty. The caption reads: They will not fund the fight. They will vote to take the authority.

The occasion is a congressional estimate, reported Thursday, putting American spending on the Iran conflict at roughly 5.9 trillion yen, with opposition to the outlay now coming from inside the governing party itself. The war is in its seventh month. The legislature that has watched it is beginning to move, and the direction it is moving is toward restriction rather than provision.

The cartoon's charge is that this is the cheapest available combination: to take the credit for constraining a war while declining to pay for the forces that fight it, and to send a statement where a shipyard was needed.

On the facts of readiness, the charge is sound, and it is worth being specific about why.

A navy is not a fleet of ships. It is a fleet of ships plus the dry docks to repair them, the skilled trades to do the work, the spare parts held against failure, the magazines full of the munitions the ships fire, and the people willing to serve on them. Any one of those constraints binds the whole. A destroyer waiting eighteen months for a maintenance slot is not a deterrent; it is an asset on a balance sheet.

Every one of the labels on Suzuki's leaking cabinets describes a real category of shortfall, and every one of them is fixed by money appropriated years before the fight rather than by authority asserted during it.

Munitions are the clearest case. Modern precision weapons are built on production lines that run at low rates in peacetime because nobody wants to pay for stockpiles that may never be used. Those lines cannot be surged quickly, because the bottleneck is rocket motors, seeker components and the specialised workforce that makes them. Expenditure in a conflict is measured in weeks; replacement is measured in years. Seven months of operations against Iran have drawn down inventories that will take far longer than seven months to rebuild, and the bill for that appears in appropriations, not in resolutions.

Shipbuilding is worse, because the constraint is human. A yard that has lost its welders, its pipefitters and its planners does not recover them by receiving an order. It recovers them by training a generation, which takes a decade, and it only trains them if the order book is long enough to promise a career rather than a contract.

Recruitment is worse still, because it is the one input that cannot be bought outright at any price. Armed forces across the developed world are competing for young people in economies at close to full employment, offering conditions that compare unfavourably with almost any civilian alternative, in societies where the proportion of the population with a family connection to military service falls every year.

So when a cartoonist draws a legislature weighing press hits against appropriations and finding the second pan empty, the drawing is not unfair to the arithmetic.

It is, however, incomplete in two directions, and an editorial page that simply endorsed it would be doing the same cheap thing the cartoon accuses the legislators of doing.

The first incompleteness concerns war powers, and it deserves a fair hearing rather than a dismissal.

The case for legislative control of war is not a case for weakness. It rests on the oldest argument in constitutional government: that the decision to expose a country's citizens to killing and being killed is too consequential to belong to one office, and that a legislature representing the people who will pay and fight is the appropriate body to authorise it.

In the American system that principle has eroded for three-quarters of a century. Presidents of both parties have conducted sustained operations under authorisations written for other conflicts, or under claimed inherent authority, and legislatures have acquiesced because acquiescence is politically safer than a vote that can be blamed later.

A conflict now in its seventh month, conducted without a formal authorisation and costing the equivalent of 5.9 trillion yen, is precisely the case in which a legislature ought to assert itself. Members who believe the country should not be at war with Iran are not obliged to fund a war they oppose in order to prove their seriousness. The appropriation is the constitutional lever. Refusing to pull it is a legitimate use of the power, not an abdication of it.

The honest version of the cartoon's complaint is therefore narrower than the cartoon. It is not an objection to legislators who oppose the war and vote accordingly. It is an objection to legislators who want the war fought, say so in public, and then decline to fund the forces fighting it. That is the combination that produces a cracked helmet and a statement in a crate.

The second incompleteness is that the cartoon lets the executive off entirely. There is no figure in the drawing representing the office that has been conducting this war for seven months without asking for an authorisation it might not receive, and that has presided, across successive administrations of both parties, over the munitions lines, the yards and the recruiting shortfalls now shown leaking.

Readiness deficits are not created by legislatures alone. They are created by executives who prefer visible platforms to invisible sustainment, because a ship christening photographs better than a stockpile of rocket motors, and by budget requests that shortchange spares and depot maintenance in every country that builds armed forces.

A cartoon that indicts only the chamber has told two-thirds of the story. Which brings us to the part that concerns readers of this page most directly.

It is easy, and comfortable, to read Suzuki's panel as a drawing about Washington. It is not only about Washington. The same session of the Japanese Diet now opening will take up two measures that, placed side by side, describe exactly the behaviour the cartoon mocks.

The first is a tax reform outline the Cabinet approved on Tuesday, cutting the consumption tax on food to 1% for two years from April 2027 with an income-linked benefit attached. It costs roughly five trillion yen a year. It has no named funding source. The government that approved it will now defend it in committee, and the opposition, which finds voting against a food tax cut nearly impossible to explain, will press the funding question with less force than it deserves.

The second is a defence spending path toward 3.5% of national output, a target that has moved from the security pages to the financial ones. When ten-year Japanese government bond yields touched 3.035% this week, the highest in roughly three decades, the reporting attributed the selling to the tax cut and the defence target together.

That is the bond market doing arithmetic the Diet has not yet done in public: adding a five trillion yen annual giveaway to a multi-year defence build-up, subtracting no revenue, and pricing the difference.

Japan is therefore in no position to be smug about a legislature that votes for authority and declines to pay. Ours is preparing to vote for both a tax cut and a defence target without saying how either is financed, which is the same evasion with better manners.

The history is not encouraging. Japanese defence spending was held for decades beneath an informal ceiling of 1% of national output, a norm adopted in 1976 and formally abandoned in 1987 while remaining a political fact long afterwards. The 2022 strategic documents set a path toward 2%, and that path was accompanied by a funding debate that was announced, deferred, partially legislated and never resolved. A tobacco tax rise and a corporate surcharge were produced, an income tax component was postponed repeatedly, and the remainder has been carried by bonds and by transfers from reserves.

That is the record against which a 3.5% figure should be read. Japan has not yet demonstrated that it can

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fund 2% honestly. Announcing a larger number without closing the gap on the smaller one is how a country ends up with a strategy document that its own bond market does not believe.

The consumption tax history runs in parallel and is no better. The tax was introduced in 1989 at 3%, raised to 5% in 1997, to 8% in 2014 and to 10% in 2019 with a reduced 8% rate retained for food. Each increase was justified as the price of a welfare system for an ageing society, each was politically expensive, and two of them were delayed by governments that judged the timing unbearable.

To cut the food rate now to 1% is to reverse, for two years, the single hardest-won revenue measure of the past four decades. The two-year limit is presented as prudence. It is better understood as a cliff: in April 2029 a future cabinet must either restore the rate, which will be described by its opponents as a tax increase on food, or extend the cut and find the money permanently.

Households are not wrong to want relief. Food prices have risen hard for three years, rice has been a national argument, and the weak yen has pushed the cost of imported staples up in a way that falls most heavily on the people with the least room in their budgets. A government that ignored that would deserve to lose an election.

The objection is to the method, and the method is the same one the cartoon attacks. Promise the outcome, decline the arithmetic, and let somebody else discover the cost. Relief that is funded is a policy. Relief that is announced and borrowed is a transfer from people who are not yet old enough to vote.

There is an argument on the other side and it should be stated plainly. Japan borrows in its own currency, holds enormous foreign assets, and has run debt ratios for thirty years that were supposed to have produced a crisis and did not. Economists of real standing hold that the constraint on Japanese fiscal policy is inflation rather than solvency, and that a country with idle capacity and a fragile recovery should not choke it with premature consolidation.

That argument was considerably stronger when the ten-year yield was 0.3% than it is at 3.035%. The thing about a constraint that has not bound for thirty years is that its absence is evidence about the past rather than a promise about the future, and the market has spent this month adjusting its own estimate of where the limit sits.

And the capability problem is not hypothetical here either. On Wednesday a Japan Air Self-Defense Force Global Hawk was lost off Tottori. Japan operated three. It now operates two. Production of the type has ended, which means the aircraft cannot be reordered at any price, and a third of a surveillance capability covering the approaches to an archipelago disappeared in an afternoon.

No resolution restores it. No statement of resolve puts a sensor back over the Sea of Japan. A country that has decided, correctly, that it needs to watch its own approaches continuously has to buy, man and sustain the machines that do the watching, and has to buy enough of them that losing one is an incident rather than a strategic event.

The same is true of everything else on the list. Japan's munitions stocks have been a known weakness for years, which is why the co-operation with the United States on munitions production and shipbuilding capacity matters more than the communiqués it generates. Recruitment into the Self-Defense Forces has fallen short of targets in a labour market where every employer is short of young people. Those are appropriation problems and personnel-policy problems, and they are solved slowly or not at all.

The recruiting shortfall deserves more attention than it receives, because it is the one deficit that money alone cannot close quickly. The pool of eighteen-year-olds in Japan shrinks every year as a matter of arithmetic settled two decades ago. Every employer in the country is competing for the same young people, and the Self-Defense Forces are offering a career that involves transfers, separation from family and physical risk, in a society that has spent seventy years being ambivalent about the institution.

Fixing that means pay, housing, childcare, career paths that lead somewhere after service, and a serious effort at retaining the people already trained rather than replacing them. None of it is a procurement line item, and all of it costs money that has to be appropriated by the same chamber now preparing to reduce its own revenue.

The crate marked SUPPORT THE TROOPS containing a card marked STATEMENT ONLY is, for Japan, the most transferable image in the cartoon. It is very easy to say that the men and women of the Self-Defense Forces deserve the country's gratitude. It is harder, and costlier, to house them properly, to pay them competitively and to buy enough of the aircraft they fly that losing one does not remove a third of a capability.

The alliance argument that these columns have made repeatedly applies with full force. The security treaty with the United States is the foundation of Japanese deterrence, and it works because an adversary calculating the cost of an action has to add American capability to Japanese capability and conclude that the sum is more than the prize.

Deterrence is arithmetic performed by an opponent. It is not an argument that can be won by eloquence. The People's Liberation Army does not read Diet resolutions and reconsider; it counts hulls, missiles, sorties and the days a Japanese destroyer spends alongside waiting for parts. North Korea's calculations are cruder still and equally quantitative.

There is a further reason for Japanese seriousness about sustainment that has nothing to do with Japan's own forces. An ally deciding how much risk to accept on another country's behalf also performs arithmetic, and one of the things it counts is how much the other country has been willing to spend on itself. A Japan that funds its own munitions, its own maintenance and its own people is a Japan whose requests in Washington carry weight. A Japan that announces targets and finances them with bonds nobody has explained is asking a partner to take seriously what it has not taken seriously itself.

That is the alliance case for fiscal honesty, and it is stronger than the accounting case. The security treaty is not a subscription service. It is a bargain between two democracies, each of which has to justify the arrangement to its own legislature, and the Japanese half of that justification is a defence budget with an owner and a revenue line.

None of which should be read as an argument that every yen requested by a defence ministry is well spent. Defence procurement everywhere is prone to cost growth, to platforms chosen for prestige, and to programmes that survive because cancelling them is politically harder than continuing. A Diet that scrutinised those decisions rigorously, and funded what survived scrutiny, would be doing exactly what a legislature is for. The failure being described here is not excessive parliamentary control. It is the absence of the kind that involves a vote on money.

This is why the phrase on the plaque in Suzuki's drawing is the right one, and why it should be read in Tokyo as well as in Washington. Authority without an arsenal is a speech. So is a target without a revenue source, and so is a security strategy whose funding line is contested in the bond market before it is contested in the chamber.

What would the honest version look like? In Washington, it would look like legislators deciding whether they want this war fought and then voting consistently with the answer: authorise and fund, or refuse and say so plainly to the constituents who will hear it either way.

In Tokyo, it would look like three things. Name the revenue for the food tax cut, in the outline or in the bill, and let the Diet argue about the source rather than the sweetener. State what the 3.5% path buys, year by year, in munitions, maintenance, personnel and the unglamorous sustainment that does not photograph well. And accept that if the answer to both is that the country will borrow, then somebody should say so from the despatch box rather than letting the ten-year yield say it for them.

There is a version of fiscal seriousness that consists of refusing to spend on defence. There is another that consists of spending and refusing to raise the revenue. Both end at the same place, which is a country that has announced more than it can deliver, and the second is more dangerous because it looks like action.

The new cabinet took office on Thursday with its four senior ministers unchanged and a coalition partner added under a cooperation agreement to secure votes in a chamber where every contested measure will now be counted closely. It is an arrangement built to survive a session. Surviving a session and answering the funding question are not the same task, and only one of them makes the country safer.

Suzuki's sailor is holding a cracked helmet while the resolutions pile up on the scales. The drawing is about the United States. The question it asks belongs to every legislature that has learned it can vote for an outcome and decline to buy it, and that includes the one sitting in Nagatacho.

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