



Volume 2026 | Number 252 | Thursday, September 10, 2026 | EST. 1887 | ¥350

★ BREAKING NEWS ★ STRAIT OF HORMUZ ★ BREAKING NEWS ★ KUMAMOTO RECOVERY ★

The Bill Arrives: Wages Post Fastest Growth Since 1997 as BOJ Prepares to Act

Today's cartoon captures the reckoning economists say has been building since the yen's July collapse to a 40-year low

By Yuki Saito and Rachel Kim | Economics & Finance Desk

Japanese nominal wages rose 4.7% in July from a year earlier to an average ¥436,401 a month, the fastest pace of growth since January 1997, labor ministry data showed this week — comfortably outpacing economists' forecast of 3.8% and delivering the clearest single data point yet for the reckoning today's editorial cartoon calls "the bill" for years of ultra-loose monetary policy. Inflation-adjusted real wages, the more direct gauge of household purchasing power, rose 2.4% over the same period, the seventh consecutive month of gains and the strongest reading since May 2021.

The strength was not confined to bonus payments alone, a distinction economists say matters considerably for how durable the Bank of Japan is likely to judge the trend. Special earnings — mostly one-time summer bonuses — jumped 6.3% in July after a revised 4.7% gain in June, but base pay, the steadier component wage-setters and the BOJ watch most closely for evidence of a genuine structural shift, also rose meaningfully, a combination several economists described this week as removing one of the last credible arguments for the central bank to delay a rate increase it has spent months signaling.

The inflation rate used to calculate the real-wage figure rose to 2.2% in July from 1.9% in June, the first reading above 2% this year — itself a data point the BOJ will weigh alongside the wage growth, since a central bank raising rates is, at its core, responding to the relationship between the two rather than to either figure in isolation.

Yet the wage data arrives paired with an uncomfortable companion statistic this newspaper considers essential context rather than a footnote: household spending fell for an eighth consecutive month in July, and private consumption was flat across the second quarter. That gap — stronger paychecks, still-cautious spending — leaves economists genuinely divided over how much of the wage recovery is translating into the kind of durable domestic demand the Takaichi government has cited as its ultimate policy objective, as opposed to households simply absorbing higher nominal income into savings or debt repayment while remaining wary of committing to larger purchases amid a cost-of-living period that has now stretched past three years.

The wage gains also remain unevenly distributed in ways the headline figure does not capture. Only about 17% of Japan's workforce belongs to a labor union and directly benefits from the coordinated spring wage negotiations known as shunto; the remaining 83%, including the great majority of part-time, contract and small-company workers, see wage growth filter through more slowly, if at all, according to labor economists this newspaper consulted. This year's shunto round, concluded by the Japanese Trade Union Confederation, known as Rengo, in July, produced a weighted average increase of roughly 5.25% among major unionized firms — the highest rate in 34 years — but the confederation's own leadership has cautioned publicly that translating those gains into comparable increases across smaller, non-unionized employers remains the more difficult and far less certain half of the wage story.

The wage data lands alongside mounting evidence that the currency crisis dominating this newspaper's coverage for the past week has entered a new phase. The yen, which touched roughly 164 per dollar in late July — its weakest level in some four decades — has clawed back to around 155 to 156 in recent sessions, a recovery Finance Ministry data confirmed this week was achieved substantially through direct intervention: a record \$99 billion spent defending the currency between July 30 and Aug. 26 alone, financed in part by the largest one-month drop in Japan's foreign exchange reserves on record, down \$79.6 billion in August.

Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda said last week that the central bank would debate a rate increase at its upcoming policy meetings, including this month's, language markets have interpreted as a clear signal that the Sept. 17-18 gathering is now more likely than not to produce action rather than another wait-and-see hold. An economic adviser to Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi went further in comments to reporters this week, saying the central bank is likely to hike this month and deliver a further increase by January — remarks that mark a notable shift within an administration that has, until recently, favored a more dovish approach to monetary policy than the current moment appears to demand.

BOJ board member Hajime Takata added his own voice to the hawkish chorus this week, saying the central bank should raise rates "nimblely" in response to rising inflation — language that traders read as further confirmation that this month's meeting is more likely to produce action than another delay, and a notably direct choice of word from a sitting board member speaking roughly a week ahead of a live policy decision.

Today's cartoon by staff artist Taro Suzuki renders the underlying mechanics in the paper's characteristically unsparing style: a mountain of yen notes collapsing under the weight of "years of ZIRP" — zero interest rate policy — as carry-trade investors who borrowed cheaply in yen to fund investments elsewhere now scramble to unwind those positions, repatriating capital and adding fresh upward pressure on the currency even as the Bank of Japan governor, rendered mid-effort at a rate-hike lever, works to manage the transition without breaking something else in the process.

Not every recent move in the yen has been intervention. Analysts have cautioned that a sharp spike earlier this month more likely reflected traders repricing the odds of a BOJ hike following Ueda's own hawkish public comments than any fresh Ministry of Finance operation — a distinction this newspaper considers important, and one its editorial page explores at length today, given how much market behavior now depends on correctly reading which force is driving which move.

JAPAN POLITICS

Bessent's Wager: Washington Bets Its Own Credibility on Yen Stability

Treasury Secretary's public dare to short sellers reflects a US-Japan currency partnership now central to both governments

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

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's public posture through the yen crisis has hardened in recent days into something closer to an open dare. "I am the house now, so when we intervene with the Japanese yen, I have pretty good insight into what the Japanese, what the Bank of Japan is going to do, what Japanese policymakers are going to do," Bessent told an audience at Southern Methodist University's Cox School of Business this week, according to a Bloomberg report of the remarks. "And you can bet against me if you want."

The comment, delivered by a former hedge fund manager turned Treasury secretary, was Bessent's most direct public claim yet to an informational edge over currency traders still testing the durability of the yen's recovery. He framed the advantage explicitly in those terms — "the advantage I have is asymmetric information" — when responding to questions about the risk a sitting Treasury secretary takes on by intervening directly in currency markets rather than leaving the yen's trajectory to private participants alone.

The remarks arrive against the backdrop of a genuine political controversy that has trailed the intervention since its first days. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, the Massachusetts Democrat, sent Bessent a letter dated Aug. 13 pressing for details on the operation's size, execution rate and current value — questions Bessent's Aug. 27 written response largely declined to answer directly, instead devoting much of the letter to correcting what he described as a factual error in Warren's framing. Warren's letter had suggested American taxpayers could ultimately bear the cost if Japan were "unable to repay" the Treasury; Bessent's response noted, pointedly, that no credit had been extended to Japan in the transaction at all. "Japan owes Treasury nothing," he wrote. "There is therefore no risk that Japan will fail to repay a debt that does not exist."

Warren did not let the exchange pass quietly. "Tough couple weeks for Sec. Bessent," she wrote on social media following his response, citing what she characterized as a string of recent setbacks including criticism of a separate Treasury bond-buyback program from what she called his own mentor. The public sparring between a sitting senator and Treasury secretary over the technical mechanics of a currency operation is itself a measure of how unusual this summer's intervention has been, according to several Washington trade and finance specialists this newspaper consulted, who noted that yen intervention rarely generates this degree of domestic American political attention.

The technical mechanics Bessent has confirmed publicly are themselves notable: the Treasury's initial July 31 operation involved selling euros from the Exchange Stabilization Fund to purchase yen, rather than deploying dollars directly — a structuring choice currency specialists say reflects standard Treasury practice for this kind of operation but one that added a layer of complexity to public efforts to characterize what, exactly, the department had done. Bessent has said the operation was conducted under statutory authority that "expressly authorizes the secretary, with presidential approval, to deal in foreign exchanges in support of orderly exchange agreements," and Japan's Finance Ministry has separately indicated it may draw on the Federal Reserve's foreign and international monetary authorities repo facility, which allows approved central banks to obtain short-term dollars by temporarily exchanging Treasury securities, in any future operations.

JAPAN POLITICS

Three Days Out, Okinawa Race Turns on Economy Over Bases

New poll shows cost-of-living concerns dominating a race once defined by Futenma opposition

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

With three days remaining before Okinawa Prefecture votes for governor, a new Ryukyu Shimpo/JX Press poll has confirmed what this newspaper's campaign coverage has suggested for days: the race between incumbent Denny Tamaki and challenger Genta Koja is turning substantially on household economics rather than the base-relocation dispute that has anchored Okinawan politics for a generation.

Nearly 47% of respondents to the poll, conducted Aug. 28-30, named the economy, employment and rising prices as their top voting concern, compared with just 16.6% who cited U.S. bases and security. The survey found Tamaki and Koja running neck and neck, with roughly half of respondents still undecided heading into the campaign's final days.

The shift marks a striking departure from the pattern that has defined Okinawan gubernatorial politics since well before Tamaki's own father-figure predecessors first ran on base-opposition platforms decades ago. Both campaigns have adjusted their closing messages accordingly: Tamaki has leaned into his record managing disaster response and steady governance, while Koja has paired his support for the Futenma relocation with an economic-development package explicitly designed to make the base question feel secondary to concrete material benefits.

Local election officials in Naha say early voting has proceeded smoothly, with turnout tracking modestly ahead of the equivalent point in the 2022 cycle — a trend both campaigns have claimed as favorable to their own chances without either providing internal data to substantiate the claim publicly.

Full coverage continues on Page 4.

BUSINESS

What Fastest-Since-1997 Wage Growth Means for the BOJ Decision

Economists say the wage data removes one of the last remaining obstacles to a September rate increase, strengthening the case that Governor Ueda has been building for months.

The timing, arriving just over a week before the BOJ's policy meeting, leaves the central bank with what several analysts describe as about as clean a data-driven justification for tightening as it is likely to receive.

— Full report, Page 6

JAPAN POLITICS

Reshuffle Enters Final Week as Katayama's Currency Role Grows

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's government entered the final week before her Cabinet reshuffle with Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama's role in managing the currency crisis now the dominant storyline shaping speculation about who stays and who goes.

Government officials familiar with the planning describe the currency story as having, if anything, simplified the reshuffle calculus by reinforcing the case for continuity in the ministry's most senior post at precisely the moment its occupant's direct familiarity with the intervention's mechanics has become most valuable.

TODAY'S TOP STORIES, CONTINUED

Inside the Carry Trade Unwind Reshaping Global Currency Markets

Today's cartoon puts a name to the mechanism now driving much of the yen's recovery

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

For years, the trade was simple enough to explain in a sentence: borrow cheaply in yen, where interest rates sat near zero, and invest the proceeds in higher-yielding assets elsewhere, pocketing the difference. That trade — the yen carry trade — helped keep the currency weak even as Japan's own economic fundamentals arguably justified a stronger one, and its unwind, now underway in earnest, is doing as much to explain the yen's recent recovery as any single BOJ decision or Ministry of Finance intervention.

The mechanics of an unwind are, in principle, the mirror image of the trade itself: as Japanese rates rise and the gap with US and other major economies narrows, the profit margin that made borrowing yen attractive shrinks, prompting investors to close their positions, sell the foreign assets they bought, and buy back yen to repay what they borrowed. Each step in that sequence adds independent upward pressure on the currency, on top of whatever intervention or rate-driven demand is separately pushing it higher.

Currency strategists describe the unwind as self-reinforcing in ways that make it difficult to predict how far it runs. A stronger yen makes the carry trade less attractive for remaining holders, prompting further unwinding, which strengthens the yen further still — a dynamic that contributed to some of the sharpest single-session currency moves markets have seen in years during comparable unwind episodes in the past.

Japanese officials have offered no public estimate of how much carry-trade positioning remains to be unwound, though several market participants this newspaper consulted described the bulk of the move as likely having already occurred given the scale of the yen's recovery from July's lows.

The unwind's effects have rippled well beyond currency desks. Emerging-market assets that had benefited from yen-funded carry positioning have seen selling pressure of their own in recent weeks, a spillover pattern several global macro strategists describe as the clearest evidence yet of how large the underlying carry-trade positioning had grown during the years of near-zero Japanese rates. Japanese institutional investors with their own yen-funded overseas positions have faced a comparable, if smaller-scale, adjustment as the currency's appreciation erodes the yen value of unhedged foreign holdings.

The trade's mechanics reward patience during calm periods and punish crowding during volatile ones, a dynamic that has repeated itself across several prior yen carry-trade unwind episodes over the past two decades, each time catching at least some portion of the market by surprise despite the pattern's familiarity. What distinguishes the current unwind from smaller, more contained episodes, according to currency strategists this newspaper consulted, is the sheer duration of the preceding carry-trade buildup: nearly a decade of near-zero Japanese rates gave the trade unusually long to compound, meaning even a partial unwind carries the potential to move markets by a larger absolute amount than shorter buildup periods historically have.

Retail investors in Japan itself have not been immune to the adjustment. Japanese households that built substantial positions in higher-yielding foreign-currency deposits and investment products during the years of domestic near-zero returns — a popular strategy marketed widely by Japanese brokerages throughout the 2010s and early 2020s — now face a version of the same unwind pressure institutional carry traders are navigating, with several major securities firms reporting a measurable pickup in inquiries about unwinding long-standing foreign-currency positions as the yen's rally has accelerated.

Central bank officials outside Japan have watched the unwind with their own particular interest, given how directly Japanese carry-trade flows have, in recent years, helped fund purchases of everything from US Treasuries to emerging-market corporate debt. A sufficiently rapid unwind, several officials at other central banks have noted in background briefings this newspaper has reviewed secondhand through market participants, carries at least theoretical potential to tighten global financial conditions in ways that extend well beyond the yen's own bilateral exchange rate against the dollar.

Kumamoto Recovery Continues as Region Marks Seven Weeks

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Kumamoto Prefecture's earthquake recovery continued steadily this week, with officials reporting that livelihood-recovery grant processing remains on schedule even as the region separately absorbs cleanup from last week's heavy rain emergency.

The scale of what the prefecture continues recovering from remains sobering by any measure. The magnitude-7.1 earthquake that struck at 4:27 p.m. on July 28 ultimately caused 396 casualties, including 39 fatalities, and damaged 31,951 houses, of which 1,449 were completely destroyed, according to the most recent joint damage assessment from the national and prefectural disaster-response headquarters. At the disaster's peak, nearly 10,000 residents sheltered across 506 evacuation centers; as of the most recent count, roughly 3,100 people remained displaced across 72 shelters still operating more than six weeks after the quake.

The national government has released more than ¥170 billion in combined contingency and reserve funding to support the recovery — an initial ¥24 billion tranche in the disaster's immediate aftermath, followed by a further ¥147.8 billion drawn from fiscal 2026 reserve funds as the scale of housing and infrastructure damage became clearer. Prefectural officials say the bulk of that funding is now flowing through the livelihood-recovery grant system this newspaper has tracked closely, with processing timelines described as broadly on schedule despite the additional administrative burden of simultaneously managing the rain emergency's own damage claims.

The Digital Agency's AI-assisted damage-assessment tool, known internally as Government AI GENAI, remains deployed across affected municipalities under an emergency provision period the agency has now extended through Sept. 30, having originally been scheduled to run for only about three weeks from its late-July rollout. Agency officials describe the tool — one of 16 AI applications currently available to disaster-response staff, three of which were developed specifically in response to requests from Kumamoto-area local governments — as having meaningfully accelerated the pace at which damage claims can be processed and cross-referenced against property records.

Water infrastructure has posed a persistent secondary challenge throughout the recovery. A dedicated Well Water Response Team, established in mid-August to help residents whose private wells were damaged and who lack connections to public water systems, continues assessing damage and coordinating well-restoration contractors. Separately, portable water-recycling shower units known as WOTA BOX, developed by a Japanese water-technology startup and deployed primarily at evacuation shelters, had reached roughly 120 units in service as of mid-August through a combination of local government and private-sector cooperation.

International assistance has continued arriving even as the news cycle has moved on to other stories. Taiwan's government raised more than NT\$300 million, roughly \$9.4 million, through a dedicated donation account, with Taipei's Ministry of Foreign Affairs separately committing NT\$5 million in direct assistance; the city of Kaohsiung donated care supplies to a nursing home in Yatsushiro, one of the hardest-hit municipalities. United States Forces Japan airlifted 16 tons of drinking water from Yokota Air Base to a Japan Self-Defense Forces camp in Kumamoto Prefecture in the disaster's early days, material that JSDF personnel then distributed to storage sites serving affected residents.

Prefectural tourism officials said advance bookings for the autumn Silver Week holiday period remain encouraging, a sign officials read as evidence that the region's dual recovery has not significantly deterred domestic travelers. Kumamoto Castle, illuminated nightly since shortly after the earthquake as what local officials describe as a deliberate symbol of the recovery underway, has become an informal gathering point for the volunteer effort, which drew more than 1,290 registered volunteers in the disaster's first weeks alongside roughly 230 police officers dispatched from Hyogo Prefecture to assist with search operations.

The overlap between the earthquake recovery and last week's separate rain emergency has not gone unnoticed within the agency's own leadership. Officials described the current moment as an informal stress test of whether Japan's newest disaster-response infrastructure, built rapidly for the earthquake, can flex quickly enough to cover a second, unrelated hazard arriving in the same season — a question they said will inform how the agency designs its next generation of tools regardless of how the current dual-track response ultimately concludes.

Local business owners in the most affected districts continue describing an uneven recovery, with retailers and restaurants that suffered primarily structural damage generally further along in reopening than those whose losses were concentrated in inventory or equipment awaiting insurance settlements that several owners describe as moving slower than the physical reconstruction itself.

Infrastructure repair has, in some cases, moved faster than residents initially expected. Highway operator NEXCO West Japan completed emergency repairs to sections of the Kyushu Expressway damaged in the quake within days in several instances, work road engineers and disaster-recovery specialists have cited as evidence of how thoroughly Japan's infrastructure-repair protocols have been refined since the 2016 Kumamoto earthquakes, the region's last major seismic disaster and one whose lessons prefectural officials say have directly shaped this year's response.

WORLD & NATION IN BRIEF

North Korea Expands Uranium Enrichment Site, IAEA Says

The International Atomic Energy Agency said this week that North Korea has begun operating an expanded annex at its Kangson enrichment site, a development the Vienna-based nuclear watchdog is monitoring closely alongside the ongoing trilateral military exercise involving Japan, the United States and South Korea.

BOJ Meeting Now Eight Days Away as Hike Bets Solidify

Interest-rate futures continued pricing in a high probability of a Bank of Japan rate increase at the Sept. 17-18 meeting this week, with traders citing the combined weight of the wage data, hawkish board-member comments, and the ongoing currency intervention story as reinforcing the case for tightening.

Shipbuilding Cooperation Advances Alongside Regional Tensions

General Assembly Week Approaches Amid Crowded Global Agenda

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

World leaders converging on New York later this month will do so against a backdrop crowded with the currency story, the Canada-US trade dispute, and the ongoing Gulf conflict, with Japanese diplomats expected to use the session to renew Tokyo's Security Council reform push while also seeking bilateral discussions on the currency coordination question directly with American counterparts.

Security planning around the session is expected to be unusually extensive this year given the combination of active conflicts and heightened economic tensions among major economies that will color the diplomatic backdrop.

Japanese officials say they are also preparing for an unusually heavy schedule of bilateral sideline meetings, with the currency intervention story, the Canada-US trade dispute, and the Gulf conflict all likely to draw questions from counterparts regardless of the formal agenda each session addresses. Foreign Ministry planners describe this year's preparation as more intensive than in recent cycles, reflecting how many simultaneously live stories now intersect with Japan's own diplomatic priorities.

Prime Minister Takaichi's own attendance plans remain in flux given the coming Cabinet reshuffle's compressed timeline, with officials declining to confirm whether she will travel to New York personally or send Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi to lead Japan's delegation in her place — a decision several diplomats describe as unusually late to remain unsettled this close to the session's opening, though not unprecedented given how crowded the prime minister's domestic calendar has become this particular September.

Beyond the formal speeches, General Assembly week has increasingly become a venue for substantive bilateral diplomacy conducted on the margins, with dozens of leaders and foreign ministers packing brief meetings into the crowded schedule. Japanese officials say they have been working to secure bilateral sessions with counterparts from key Indo-Pacific and European allies well beyond the formal agenda, with particular interest in direct conversations with European officials given the currency intervention's implications for how other advanced economies think about their own potential future interventions.

Security planning around the session is expected to be unusually extensive this year given the combination of active conflicts and heightened economic tensions among major economies that will color the diplomatic backdrop.

Gaza Cease-Fire Talks Continue as Mediators Report Incremental Progress

Wire Reports

Negotiations aimed at stabilizing the Gaza cease-fire continued this week, with mediators reporting incremental progress on humanitarian access even as disagreements over the truce's longer-term terms remained unresolved heading into General Assembly week.

Regional mediators say the coming weeks, coinciding with the United Nations' high-level session in New York, are likely to bring renewed diplomatic pressure on all parties given the concentration of foreign ministers and heads of state the session will draw to a single venue. Diplomats involved describe the process as continuing to move in increments rather than through any single decisive breakthrough, a characterization that has held for several weeks even as the broader framework has, by most accounts, avoided outright collapse.

The cease-fire itself, brokered under a 20-point framework announced by the United States and signed by Israel and Hamas in October 2025, has now held for nearly a year in the narrower sense that large-scale hostilities have not resumed, even as implementation of the agreement's later phases has proceeded considerably more slowly than its architects initially outlined. Late last month, mediators from Egypt, Qatar, Turkey and the United States finalized a roadmap for the agreement's next phase, under which Hamas has agreed in principle to disarm and surrender weapons in stages in exchange for a phased Israeli withdrawal — though Israel has not publicly committed to the latest proposal, and Hamas has said it will not implement its own commitments unless Israeli forces first fulfill theirs.

Humanitarian conditions inside Gaza remain a central point of friction in the talks. Aid organizations operating in the territory continue to report that humanitarian truck crossings run well below the volumes the original agreement specified, even as the flow has improved measurably from the war's final months. Diplomats familiar with the current round of talks say humanitarian access, rather than the more politically fraught disarmament and governance questions, remains the area where mediators see the most realistic prospect for near-term, concrete progress.

Japanese officials, who have played a comparatively modest direct role in the mediation itself, have continued reiterating Tokyo's support for the broader framework and its own financial contributions to reconstruction planning, a position consistent with Japan's traditional preference for supporting Middle East diplomacy through humanitarian and reconstruction funding rather than direct mediation involvement.

Humanitarian conditions inside Gaza remain a central point of friction in the talks.

Gulf Tanker Conflict Approaches Seventh Month Mark

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

The maritime conflict in the Persian Gulf continues to generate a steady toll of struck, damaged and diverted vessels, with maritime security firms noting no meaningful change in the underlying pattern despite this week's currency and trade headlines dominating other coverage.

For Japan, which imports the overwhelming majority of its crude through the strait, the conflict's shipping toll remains the most direct point of economic contact with a war being fought thousands of miles away.

Maritime insurers say war-risk premiums for Gulf transits have continued their gradual upward drift, a cost that flows through shipping rates to landed fuel prices with a lag of several weeks. Japanese refiners said this week they continue receiving contracted cargoes without disruption, and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry reiterated that no drawdown of strategic petroleum reserves is under active consideration given that physical supply through the strait remains intact despite the conflict's now seven-month duration.

Analysts covering the conflict note that the pattern of claim-heavy, confirmation-light reporting that has characterized much of the fighting continues largely unchanged, with independent verification of specific vessel strikes remaining difficult given the practical challenges of confirming naval engagements in contested waters.

Maritime security firms tracking shipping traffic through the strait say vessels registered under flags of convenience — Panama, Liberia, the Marshall Islands and Malta chief among them — continue dominating the list of affected ships, a pattern that has held constant regardless of which side's claims have driven a given week's additions to the running tally of struck, damaged or diverted vessels.

Insurance markets have adjusted accordingly over the conflict's now seven-month duration, with war-risk premiums for Gulf transits continuing their gradual upward drift even as the rate of increase has moderated compared with the sharper jumps recorded during the conflict's most intense early months. Japanese shipping companies with vessels transiting or near the strait say they have not altered their routing in response to recent claims, a decision executives at two of the largest lines attributed to insurance arrangements that already price in the conflict's baseline risk rather than any assessment that recent developments represent a qualitatively different threat level.

Energy security specialists who have tracked the conflict since its outset in February note that Japan's response has followed a consistent pattern throughout: public statements emphasizing vigilance and coordination readiness, paired with a deliberate reluctance to take any visible unilateral step — such as an early strategic reserve drawdown — that could be read as signaling alarm disproportionate to the actual state of physical crude supply through the strait, which has not yet been meaningfully disrupted despite the conflict's persistence.

Japan's Security Council Push Continues Ahead of General Assembly

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

Japanese diplomats are expected to renew Tokyo's decades-long push for Security Council reform when world leaders gather in New York, continuing coordination with Germany, India and Brazil under the so-called G4 framework even as officials acknowledge near-term structural change remains unlikely.

Japan's case rests on familiar arguments: its status as the U.N.'s second-largest historical financial contributor, its peacekeeping record, and the argument that a Council whose permanent membership still reflects 1945's geopolitical map no longer adequately represents the world it is meant to help govern. Skeptics, including officials from several smaller U.N. member states, argue that any expansion of the permanent Council membership risks simply adding a new tier of entrenched interests rather than genuinely democratizing the body's decision-making structure.

Japanese diplomats acknowledge the criticism but argue that the current structure's persistent dysfunction is itself the stronger argument for change, a position officials say they intend to press again during this year's session regardless of the reform push's well-documented history of limited near-term traction.

The G4 nations' coordination has itself evolved over the two decades since the group first formed, from an initial push for a specific, jointly-drafted reform resolution toward a looser, more flexible alignment in which each country presses its own case while avoiding direct contradiction of the others' positions. That evolution reflects, diplomats involved say, a pragmatic acknowledgment that a single unified reform proposal has proven no more successful at overcoming permanent-member resistance than four separate national campaigns pursued in loose coordination.

China and Russia, both permanent Security Council members, have historically expressed reservations about specific aspects of the G4 reform push, with Beijing in particular voicing consistent opposition to Japan's own bid given the two countries' broader strategic rivalry — a dynamic that gives Japan's campaign a genuinely uphill diplomatic character distinct from, and in some respects more difficult than, the reform arguments India, Germany and Brazil separately advance.

India and Brazil under the so-called G4 framework even as officials acknowledge near-term structural change remains unlikely.

Nearly 6 Million Vacant Homes Projected by 2043, Report Warns

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Japan could have nearly 6 million vacant dwellings, or akiya, sitting empty by 2043, according to a new projection that would represent more than 8% of the country's total housing stock, underscoring a structural consequence of the demographic decline this newspaper's editorial page has examined at length in recent editions.

Real estate economists note the akiya trend runs in parallel with, rather than in contradiction to, Tokyo's own record-high condominium prices, reflecting an increasingly bifurcated market in which central urban demand remains robust even as rural and regional housing stock sits abandoned.

The 2043 projection, drawn from an extrapolation of current demographic and housing-formation trends, would represent a meaningful acceleration from the roughly 9 million vacant dwellings the government's most recent nationwide housing survey identified as of 2023, a figure that already included a substantial share of properties classified as akiya specifically — abandoned, structurally deteriorating homes with no active market listing or occupant.

Municipal governments in the most affected rural regions have experimented with a range of responses, from subsidized demolition programs to akiya-matching services connecting vacant properties with prospective buyers or renovators, though officials acknowledge these efforts have so far done comparatively little to meaningfully alter the trajectory the new projection describes.

The akiya phenomenon's roots run deeper than simple population decline alone. Japan's inheritance system, under which property frequently passes to multiple heirs who must reach unanimous agreement before a vacant home can be sold or demolished, has left a substantial share of the country's abandoned housing stock in a state of unresolved joint ownership that neither market forces nor municipal intervention can easily untangle. Legal reforms in recent years have attempted to address the inheritance-registration gap specifically, requiring heirs to formally register inherited property within a set period, though the reforms apply only to inheritances occurring after the rule took effect and do not retroactively resolve the accumulated backlog of unregistered properties from prior decades.

Regional economists note the akiya trend carries fiscal implications for municipal governments well beyond the properties themselves, since abandoned homes generate no property tax revenue while continuing to require at least nominal municipal oversight for safety and blight-prevention purposes — a quiet drain on already-strained rural municipal budgets that compounds the broader demographic pressure this newspaper's editorial page has examined at length.

The akiya phenomenon's roots run deeper than simple population decline alone.

JAPAN NEWS

Katayama's Ministry Points to Wage Data as Vindication of Currency Strategy

Finance minister frames intervention and coming rate hike as coordinated response to cost-of-living crisis

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama's ministry pointed to this week's wage data — the fastest growth since 1997 — as evidence that the government's currency strategy is beginning to deliver the household relief it was designed to produce, even as opposition lawmakers continue pressing for greater transparency around the scale of Treasury sales that funded August's intervention.

Katayama, whose retention through the coming Cabinet reshuffle is now considered all but certain given her direct role managing the currency story, used a briefing this week to link the intervention, the anticipated BOJ rate increase, and the government's food consumption tax cut as three coordinated elements of a single cost-of-living response rather than three separate policy tracks.

Katayama's own institutional background has taken on renewed significance amid a currency crisis this technical. She became Japan's first female finance minister when Prime Minister Takaichi appointed her on Oct. 21, 2025, capping a career that began in 1982 when she joined the Ministry of Finance directly out of the University of Tokyo's law faculty — a rare path for a woman into the ministry's ranks at the time — and eventually took her to a senior position within the influential Budget Bureau higher than any woman had previously reached. She later studied at France's École Nationale d'Administration before entering elected politics, winning a House of Representatives seat in 2005 and moving to the House of Councillors in 2010.

That career-bureaucrat background distinguishes Katayama from many recent Japanese finance ministers, whose paths into the role more typically ran through private-sector business, journalism or service as a political secretary rather than through the ministry's own institutional hierarchy. Colleagues and former ministry officials describe her as unusually comfortable with the technical mechanics of exactly the kind of large-scale currency intervention this newspaper has covered all week — a background several economists say has shaped both the confidence and the relative reticence with which she has managed public communication around the operation compared with her more voluble American counterpart.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, asked about the wage data Tuesday, called it encouraging but cautioned that a single indicator does not fully resolve pressures that have shaped Japanese politics for three years, a characterization consistent with the government's messaging throughout the currency episode.

Opposition lawmakers, while broadly welcoming the wage data, continued pressing Katayama's ministry this week for a fuller public accounting of the intervention's cost, with several Diet members specifically requesting clarity on how the Treasury sales interact with Japan's broader foreign reserve management strategy going forward. Ministry officials have declined to provide a detailed breakdown beyond what the monthly reserve data already discloses, citing longstanding practice regarding intervention-related transactions.

Business groups have generally welcomed the government's framing of the three policies as coordinated rather than separate, with several major industry associations issuing statements this week crediting the combined approach with providing a more coherent signal to markets than a series of disconnected measures might have offered.

Katayama's ministry faces a genuinely compressed calendar in the weeks ahead: the Sept. 17-18 BOJ meeting, continued monthly reserve disclosures that will show whether August's pace of intervention has continued into September, and the coming Cabinet reshuffle all converge within roughly the same three-week window, a sequencing several ministry officials describe privately as more demanding than any comparable stretch in recent memory.

Whether Katayama's technical fluency with the currency operation translates into durable public confidence in the government's broader economic management remains, political analysts say, a genuinely open question distinct from the more immediate matter of her Cabinet retention. Her appointment as the ministry's first female leader carried its own symbolic weight regardless of the currency crisis that has come to dominate her first year in the role, and how she is ultimately judged may depend as much on how this particular episode resolves as on the historic nature of the appointment itself.

Economy Eclipses Bases as Top Concern in New Okinawa Poll

Tamaki and Koja running neck and neck with three days left, new survey finds

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

A new Ryukyu Shimpo/JX Press poll conducted Aug. 28-30 has confirmed a shift this newspaper's campaign coverage has tracked for weeks: cost-of-living concerns, not the decades-old dispute over US military bases, now dominate Okinawan voters' thinking heading into Sunday's gubernatorial election.

Nearly 47% of respondents named the economy, employment and rising prices as their top concern, more than double the 16.6% who cited bases and security. The poll found incumbent Denny Tamaki and challenger Genta Koja running neck and neck, with roughly half of respondents still undecided — a margin both campaigns have described as leaving the race genuinely open heading into its final days.

The poll's full crosstabulated breakdown by age has not been published in detail, but political analysts covering the race say the broader pattern is consistent with what regional pollsters have observed anecdotally for several election cycles: younger Okinawan voters, who have come of age entirely within the post-2010s tourism-driven economy, tend to show less direct attachment to the base-opposition framing that defined their parents' and grandparents' generation's politics, while older voters remain more likely to weigh the base question heavily regardless of the current economic climate. Analysts caution this generational pattern is a longer-running trend rather than something this particular poll newly discovered, but say it likely helps explain why a single survey can show economic concerns so far outpacing base-related ones in the topline figures.

Tamaki, 66, seeking a third term, has shifted his campaign's public emphasis toward medical care and social welfare policy in recent weeks, a recalibration analysts attribute partly to the polling and partly to lingering criticism following a March boat-capsizing incident during protests against the Henoko base relocation that killed two people, including a student on a school trip. Tamaki's campaign has sought to reframe that criticism by emphasizing his administration's broader crisis-management record, pointing specifically to its handling of the Kumamoto-adjacent disaster-preparedness questions and, more recently, the national currency turbulence this newspaper has covered extensively — evidence, his campaign argues, that steady governance and base-relocation opposition are not mutually exclusive commitments.

Koja, 42, a former Naha deputy mayor backed by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner the Japan Innovation Party, supports the Futenma-to-Henoko relocation plan and the planned return of US military land south of Kadena Air Base under the 2013 consolidation framework, positions he has paired with a heavier campaign focus on economic development and reducing Okinawa's reliance on tourism alone. His campaign has emphasized diversifying the prefecture's economic base beyond tourism, arguing the current administration's sustained focus on base-relocation opposition has come at the cost of pursuing other available avenues for economic development more aggressively.

The LDP's sweep of all four Okinawa constituency seats in February's Lower House election looms over the race as a warning sign for Tamaki's camp, even as the All Okinawa coalition backing him — the Constitutional Democratic Party, the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party — has worked to consolidate support through the campaign's closing stretch. That February result marked the first time in years that LDP-backed candidates had won every one of Okinawa's directly-elected Lower House seats, a shift some analysts read as evidence of exactly the economic-anxiety-driven realignment now showing up in this week's gubernatorial polling, and others read as a more contingent result specific to that election's particular candidates and turnout dynamics.

Both campaigns have devoted their final week disproportionately to get-out-the-vote mechanics rather than new policy messaging, a strategic choice campaign officials on both sides attribute to polling that shows most voters have already settled on a preference, leaving turnout among softer supporters as the more decisive variable than persuasion of undecided voters at this late stage. Early voting data from Naha's election administration shows turnout tracking modestly ahead of the equivalent point in the 2022 cycle, a trend both campaigns have claimed as favorable to their own chances without either providing internal polling to substantiate the claim publicly.

Tamaki Presses for Greater Currency Intervention Transparency

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Yuichiro Tamaki, leader of the Democratic Party for the People, continued pressing the government this week for fuller disclosure of the currency intervention's mechanics, framing the request as consistent with his party's technically grounded, cooperative-but-independent opposition approach rather than as criticism of the intervention's substance.

The DPP leader, whose party secured a decisive third-term mandate for him in a leadership vote last week, has built his political identity substantially around fiscal and monetary policy expertise from his years at the Ministry of Finance, giving the transparency push added credibility among colleagues even within the ruling coalition.

Tamaki's approach has drawn a measured response from government officials, who have generally declined to characterize the request as adversarial given his party's stated preference for policy-by-policy cooperation over blanket opposition. Several DPP lawmakers have suggested the transparency push could form the basis of a formal Diet committee inquiry should the ministry continue declining to provide additional detail voluntarily, though Tamaki himself has not yet endorsed that specific escalation.

Tamaki's third-term mandate, secured in a leadership vote last week by a decisive margin over his internal challenger, gives him a renewed platform to press the transparency question with the full weight of his party's institutional apparatus behind him, rather than as a personal initiative that risked being read as one faction's priority within a still-consolidating party. The DPP's growth in recent electoral cycles — from a minor party to a genuine, if still secondary, force in Japanese opposition politics — has been built substantially on exactly this kind of technically literate policy critique, distinguishing the party from opposition rivals whose objections to government economic policy have more often taken the form of broader ideological opposition than specific, mechanism-level questions.

Political analysts note that Tamaki's currency-transparency push carries a secondary function beyond its stated policy goal: reinforcing the DPP's core electoral brand ahead of the 2028 Upper House election, where the party will need to demonstrate it can translate its reputation for technical competence into a durable share of the vote beyond the protest-vote dynamics that boosted several opposition parties in recent cycles. Whether the strategy succeeds in that broader sense will likely become clearer only well after the immediate currency-transparency question is resolved one way or the other.

The ruling coalition has so far treated the DPP's requests as a manageable irritant rather than a serious political threat, according to people familiar with LDP leadership's internal assessment, though several officials acknowledge that a formal committee inquiry, should Tamaki ultimately pursue one, would force the government into exactly the kind of detailed public accounting of intervention mechanics it has so far successfully avoided providing.

Defense Ministry Monitors North Korea Enrichment Expansion

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Japan's Defense Ministry said it is monitoring the IAEA's report of an expanded enrichment annex at North Korea's Kangson site alongside the ongoing trilateral military exercise involving Japan, the United States and South Korea, now in its final days.

Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi's expected retention through the coming Cabinet reshuffle continues to draw added significance from the crowded regional security backdrop, with officials describing Japan's own defense posture as proceeding on a trajectory set well before this week's specific developments.

Koizumi's ministry has continued advancing previously announced defense-spending increases and expanded industrial cooperation with Washington on munitions production and shipbuilding capacity, initiatives officials describe as unaffected in their planning by the specific timing of North Korea's enrichment announcement even as the broader security environment it reflects reinforces the case for continued investment.

Defense analysts note that Koizumi's approach has remained consistent throughout his tenure — incremental capability-building favored over dramatic policy shifts — an approach that continues to draw general support from defense planners even as some lawmakers periodically argue for a faster pace of buildup given the accumulating regional security developments.

Koizumi, widely regarded within the LDP as a future prime ministerial contender given his political lineage and public profile, has used the Defense portfolio to build a reputation distinct from the more ideologically charged security debates that have periodically divided the party's own ranks, favoring technical, budget-focused announcements over the kind of assertive rhetorical positioning some of his predecessors employed. That approach has generally served him well politically, according to LDP officials, even as it has occasionally drawn quiet criticism from lawmakers who would prefer the ministry articulate a more explicit strategic response to specific regional developments as they occur, rather than folding each new development into a steady, previously-set trajectory.

The trilateral exercise now underway with the United States and South Korea, already extended in scope once this year following North Korea's earlier destroyer commissioning, is expected to conclude within the coming days, with defense officials from all three countries declining to specify whether the enrichment report will factor into after-action assessments or future exercise planning.

Japan's own defense spending trajectory, set on a path toward roughly 2% of GDP under commitments made in prior years, continues advancing on schedule according to Defense Ministry budget officials, with the ministry's shipbuilding and munitions-production cooperation with Washington representing one of the more visible, if not necessarily the largest by budget share, components of that broader spending increase.

Health Minister Remains Noncommittal on Pricing Reform Timeline

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Health, Labour and Welfare Minister Kenichiro Ueno remained noncommittal this week on whether Chuikyo medical-pricing reform legislation will move forward this autumn, with his own position in the coming reshuffle still considered among the least settled of any senior Cabinet post.

Pharmaceutical industry groups continue lobbying actively on the question, with multinational drugmakers generally favoring reforms that would speed reimbursement of novel therapies, while domestic generic manufacturers have urged caution about changes to pricing formulas governing a substantial share of prescriptions dispensed nationally. Health ministry officials, speaking on background, describe the reform question as unlikely to be resolved before the reshuffle itself clarifies whether Ueno remains in position to see any legislative push through to completion.

The Chuikyo system — the Central Social Insurance Medical Council, which sets the price the national health insurance system pays for individual drugs and treatments — has operated largely unchanged in its basic structure for decades, even as the volume and complexity of novel therapies moving through Japan's regulatory approval process has grown substantially. Reform advocates argue the current pricing-negotiation process, which can take considerably longer for certain drug categories than comparable systems in other advanced economies, increasingly disadvantages Japanese patients relative to peers in markets where newly approved treatments reach pharmacy shelves faster.

Ueno's own noncommittal public posture reflects a genuinely difficult political calculation rather than simple indecision, according to people familiar with the ministry's internal deliberations: any reform ambitious enough to meaningfully address the reimbursement-speed complaints from multinational drugmakers risks provoking resistance from domestic generic manufacturers and, more consequentially, from the broader coalition of stakeholders invested in the current system's cost-containment functions, which have helped keep Japan's overall health spending growth more moderate than several comparable advanced economies despite the country's rapidly aging population.

Patient advocacy groups, particularly those representing patients with rare diseases, have grown more vocal in recent weeks, with several organizations specifically calling for faster review cycles that would let newly approved treatments reach patients without the extended delays that have periodically characterized the current pricing-negotiation process. Whether their advocacy translates into legislative momentum before the reshuffle settles the ministry's leadership question remains, health policy specialists say, genuinely uncertain.

Pharmaceutical industry groups continue lobbying actively on the question.

JAPAN-U.S. RELATIONS & SPORTS

Investment Framework Consultations Continue Amid Currency Backdrop

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

Trade Minister Ryosei Akazawa's ministry said follow-up consultations on the \$550 billion US-Japan investment framework are proceeding this week as previously scheduled, with officials on both sides characterizing the sessions as routine continuation of ongoing coordination rather than a response to the currency story.

The framework's investment tranches remain, officials say, unaffected in their contractual terms by the yen's recent strengthening, even as the currency's movement changes how the dollar-denominated commitments translate back into Japanese corporate financial reporting.

Japanese firms participating in the framework's semiconductor and pharmaceutical tranches have begun updating internal currency assumptions for the first time since the agreements were signed, according to people familiar with several companies' planning, a routine but previously unnecessary exercise given how stable the yen had remained through the framework's first year of implementation. Akazawa's ministry said it does not expect the currency's movement to affect the pace or scale of committed investment, though officials acknowledge the framework's architects did not specifically design its terms around a scenario of rapid yen appreciation.

The framework's structure — a series of investment tranches into semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, critical minerals, shipbuilding, energy and artificial intelligence — was negotiated against a very different currency backdrop than the one now prevailing, when the yen traded consistently weaker and Japanese capital exporting to dollar-denominated projects benefited from a favorable exchange-rate tailwind that made each committed dollar of investment somewhat cheaper in yen terms. A materially stronger yen inverts that calculus, at least modestly, for Japanese firms whose framework commitments were costed and approved by their own corporate boards under exchange-rate assumptions set well before this week's currency move.

Trade analysts also note a structural asymmetry in how the two governments are likely to experience the currency shift politically. In Washington, a stronger yen against the dollar has historically drawn less domestic political attention than a weaker one, since it does not feed the kind of competitiveness complaints that a cheap yen periodically provokes among American manufacturers. In Tokyo, by contrast, the currency's direction remains a live domestic political question given its direct bearing on both the cost-of-living debate driving the food tax cut and the export-earnings picture underpinning corporate Japan's recent stock market strength.

Akazawa's ministry has signaled it does not intend to raise the currency question proactively in this week's consultations with Washington, preferring to remain familiar with Japan's negotiating posture, according to people familiar with the framework's existing mechanisms, on the theory that a government managing multiple live emergencies benefits more from personnel and process stability than from the kind of message change a reshuffle would otherwise send.

Trade analysts also note a structural asymmetry in how the two governments are likely to experience the currency shift politically.

Hanshin's Cushion Holds With Three Weeks Left in NPB Regular Season

SoftBank dominant in Pacific League; Seibu and Nippon-Ham still deadlocked for second

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

The Hanshin Tigers carried their 2.5-game Central League lead over the Yomiuri Giants into the season's final stretch, sitting at 69-52-1 for a .570 winning percentage, with the pennant race entering what both clubs describe as its most consequential final weeks.

In the Pacific League, the Fukuoka SoftBank Hawks' commanding position atop the standings has left the more compelling drama one tier down, where the Saitama Seibu Lions and Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters remain locked in a tight contest for sole possession of second place with the season's final weeks approaching.

Attention across both leagues continues turning to how contending clubs manage pitching staffs and roster health down the stretch, with several front offices favoring more conservative usage patterns for key relievers as they position for a Climax Series run.

Hanshin's pitching staff has anchored its season-long success, built around a rotation that has combined veteran stability with several breakout performances from younger arms, while Yomiuri's offense has carried the club through stretches where its own pitching has been less consistent. Head-to-head season series will carry particular weight if the standings remain this tight heading into the final weeks, since NPB's tiebreaker procedures give priority to a club's record against direct rivals before falling back on broader run-differential metrics.

In the Pacific League, SoftBank's front office has reportedly begun weighing rest for key contributors against the value of maintaining sharp form heading into a postseason the club is already effectively positioned for, a luxury neither Seibu nor Nippon-Ham can afford given how tightly they remain matched for second place with the season's final weeks approaching.

Hanshin's title chase carries particular resonance this year given the club's history: the Tigers' most recent Central League championship, won in 2023, ended what was at the time a 18-year league title drought and triggered scenes of celebration across Kansai that remain a touchstone reference point for Hanshin fans whenever the club enters a pennant race this tight. Manager Atsunori Inaba, in his current tenure guiding the club, has generally favored a conservative bullpen-management approach that several beat reporters covering the team describe as reflecting lessons learned from the physical toll a title chase can take on relief pitching staffs across a full season.

Yomiuri, for its part, continues to lean on a roster this newspaper's sports desk has described throughout the season as offensively potent but pitching-dependent in ways that have made the club's game-to-game results more volatile than Hanshin's more balanced approach. Giants management has reportedly explored bullpen reinforcements through September roster expansion rules, though the club's front office has publicly downplayed any suggestion that the current staff cannot sustain a full stretch-run push without outside additions.

Attendance figures across both leagues have told a notable story this season, with games directly involving the top contenders in each league drawing crowds well above recent-year averages, a trend broadcasters say has translated into some of the strongest television ratings for late-season NPB games in years — evidence, several league officials argue, that Japan's professional baseball audience remains considerably more engaged by a genuinely competitive pennant race than by any single individual player's pursuit of personal statistical milestones.

The Hanshin Tigers carried their 2.5-game Central League lead over the Yomiuri Giants into the season's final stretch.

Aki Basho Opens Sunday as Sumo Rides Inbound Tourism Boom

Two yokozuna headline the field as the sport's popularity surge draws increasingly on overseas visitors

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Sumo's autumn tournament opens Sunday at Tokyo's Ryogoku Kokugikan for a fifteen-day run, with the Japan Sumo Association describing ticket demand as unusually strong for an opening weekend that also coincides with Okinawa's gubernatorial election.

The sport is enjoying what several sumo journalists describe as another popularity boom, though unlike past surges this one owes considerably more to inbound tourism than to any single dominant Japanese star, with overseas visitors increasingly filling seats at tournaments throughout the year.

Two yokozuna — Onosato and Hoshoryu, both of Mongolia — sit atop September's banzuke, with three ozeki rounding out the sport's upper ranks in a field several sumo journalists describe as unusually deep this year in terms of realistic championship contenders.

Attention in the sport's press corner continues to focus on Aonishiki, the Ukrainian-born wrestler whose rapid ascent through the ranks has drawn particular international attention and, Japan Sumo Association officials say, contributed meaningfully to overseas ticket demand specifically for this tournament.

The tournament's opening bout, as tradition dictates, begins mid-afternoon Sunday, with the day's most anticipated matchups reserved, as always, for the tournament's final bouts each evening when the sport's highest-ranked wrestlers compete. Sumo journalists covering the upper ranks describe this September's field as unusually deep in realistic championship contenders beyond the two yokozuna themselves, with several ozeki and top-ranked maegashira wrestlers entering the tournament with recent strong results.

The Japan Sumo Association has expanded English-language programming and ticketing accessibility for international visitors in recent tournament cycles, changes officials describe as responding to organically grown overseas demand rather than an active courting campaign, given how quickly the sport's international following has expanded independent of any single marketing push.

Onosato's ascent to yokozuna has itself become a significant storyline within Japanese sumo in recent years, with the wrestler's promotion following a run of dominant tournament performances that sumo journalists have compared favorably to some of the sport's more celebrated recent champions. Hoshoryu, the other reigning yokozuna, brings his own notable lineage to September's tournament as the nephew of a previous yokozuna, a family connection Japanese sumo media continue to reference prominently in coverage of his career.

Sumo's autumn tournament opens Sunday at Tokyo's Ryogoku Kokugikan for a fifteen-day run.

Ohtani Confirms He Is Done Pitching for 2026, Will Focus Solely on Hitting

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Shohei Ohtani confirmed Wednesday that he is no longer working toward a return to pitching this season, telling reporters through interpreter Will Ireton that he will instead "be focusing on hitting moving forward" for the remainder of the Dodgers' championship push — the clearest public acknowledgment yet that his two-way workload for 2026 has effectively ended.

"Most likely, no," Ohtani said when asked directly whether he expected to pitch again this season, in his first comments to reporters since Aug. 17. He explained his priority throughout the recent setback had been avoiding a scenario where continued pitching risked his availability as a hitter entirely, adding that he expects his overall performance to improve now that the decision has been made.

The confirmation arrives amid a genuinely difficult stretch for the four-time MVP even as a hitter alone. Ohtani has been out of the Dodgers' starting lineup for six of the last seven games, sidelined by a combination of knee, biceps and neck issues that first surfaced before the All-Star break and have resisted a clean resolution since. He has not pitched since July 3.

Manager Dave Roberts described the team's approach as deliberately conservative rather than reactive to any single setback, saying the training staff's approach has been to "build him up slowly" rather than rush his return, characterizing the plan as prioritizing Ohtani's availability for October over maximizing his regular-season workload in September.

Ohtani's most recent appearance came Monday against Cincinnati, when he returned to the Dodgers' leadoff spot and went 0-for-3 with a walk and two strikeouts — a quiet individual line that nonetheless registered as significant given it marked his first game action since Sept. 2, when he struck out four times against St. Louis before the current absence began. Progress toward that return was, by the Dodgers' own account, methodical: Ohtani took two full days without baseball activity before returning to hitting in the indoor batting cage, a session both he and Roberts separately described as encouraging.

His underlying 2026 numbers, compiled across a season increasingly defined by absence as much as production, remain formidable by any ordinary standard: a .279 batting average, 30 home runs, 80 runs batted in and a .906 OPS, ranking fourth among qualified hitters leaguewide in that final category despite the accumulated missed games. Whether he finishes the regular season with enough additional plate appearances to meaningfully add to those totals depends now entirely on how his body responds to the Dodgers' incremental build-up plan over the season's final weeks.

The Dodgers themselves enter Wednesday's game against Cincinnati at 88-57, comfortably positioned atop the National League West and looking toward a third consecutive World Series push. The team's coaching staff has spent recent weeks quietly preparing a postseason pitching rotation built around Yoshinobu Yamamoto, Blake Snell, Tyler Glasnow and Tarik Skubal that does not depend on any contribution from Ohtani on the mound — a contingency this newspaper has reported the organization was building toward even before Wednesday's confirmation made the underlying assumption explicit.

NPB Scoreboard and Standings at a Glance

Compiled by the Sports Desk

CENTRAL LEAGUE — Hanshin Tigers 69-52-1 (.570); Yomiuri Giants 67-55-2 (.549, 2.5 GB); Yokohama DeNA BayStars 57-62-3 (.479, 11 GB); Tokyo Yakult Swallows 53-67-2 (.442, 15.5 GB); Chunichi Dragons 53-71-2 (.427, 17.5 GB); Hiroshima Toyo Carp 49-67-4 (.422, 17.5 GB).

PACIFIC LEAGUE — Fukuoka SoftBank Hawks 75-45-3 (.625); Saitama Seibu Lions 70-52-3 (.574, 6 GB); Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters 71-53-2 (.573, 6 GB); Orix Buffaloes 59-64-2 (.480, 17.5 GB); Chiba Lotte Marines 54-62-3 (.466, 19 GB); Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles 47-74-1 (.388, 28.5 GB).

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

UPCOMING — Aki Basho opens Sunday, Sept. 13, at Ryogoku Kokugikan.

TECHNOLOGY & BUSINESS



Apple's iPhone Duo, shown open. Credit: Apple

iPhone Duo is the most transformational change to iPhone since the original,' Ternus said in Apple's press materials accompanying the announcement. 'With an entirely new design and intuitive experiences, it shows what's possible when hardware and software are engineered together and redefines what it means to use a foldable phone.' The remark doubled as a statement of institutional continuity: Ternus, who previously led Apple's hardware engineering division, used his first keynote to lean into exactly the engineering-integration argument that has defined Apple's product marketing for two decades under his predecessor.

The device itself opens book-style into a single continuous 7.6-inch Super Retina XDR display, with a 5.4-inch display on the cover when closed — sized closer to a compact phone for quick checks without unfolding. Apple said the open device is the thinnest iPhone ever made, built around a titanium hinge structure the company described as engineered for what it called laboratory-tested durability across hundreds of thousands of fold cycles, though Apple did not disclose the specific test methodology or cycle count in Wednesday's presentation materials.

Perhaps the most closely watched engineering detail to emerge from the announcement was the inner display's selfie camera, which Apple has placed beneath the screen itself rather than in a notch or punch-hole cutout. The camera becomes visible only when actively in use, according to Apple's technical briefing materials, allowing the inner display to present as an unbroken, edge-to-edge surface the rest of the time — a solution rival foldable makers have pursued with mixed success and one several technology reviewers covering Wednesday's event described as the single most surprising hardware decision Apple made with the device.

Inside, the iPhone Duo runs on Apple's new A20 Pro chip, the same processor powering the iPhone 18 Pro and Pro Max models announced alongside it, paired with Apple's in-house C2 modem, which the company said is 50% faster and 15% more power-efficient than the previous C1X generation. The device includes a 48-megapixel Fusion main camera, Touch ID built into a side button rather than under the display or in a Face ID housing, and a dedicated Camera Control button for quickly launching the camera app — a control first introduced on standard iPhone models and now extended across Apple's lineup.

Apple said Apple Pencil support is coming to the iPhone Duo, with USB-C Pencil compatibility planned to arrive later this year via software update rather than at launch — a detail that drew some pointed commentary from Japanese technology press covering the announcement, given how central stylus input has become to note-taking and sketching use cases on the device's larger unfolded display. The device ships in two finishes, Star White and a deep navy Apple calls Night Sky, with Ceramic Shield protecting both the front and back of the device when closed.

For the Japanese market specifically, the iPhone Duo's arrival lands amid a domestic smartphone landscape where foldable devices have so far remained a comparatively niche category dominated by Samsung's Galaxy Z series and a small number of domestic manufacturers' own folding models. Industry analysts covering Japan's handset market say Apple's entry, backed by the company's dominant iOS ecosystem share in the country, is likely to do more to legitimize the foldable category among mainstream Japanese consumers than several years of competitor marketing has managed on its own — though the same analysts caution that the price point puts the device well outside impulse-purchase territory even by the standards of Japan's famously premium-tolerant smartphone market.

Japan's three major mobile carriers — NTT Docomo, KDDI's au brand, and SoftBank — are all expected to offer the iPhone Duo through their standard installment financing programs, following the pattern established with every previous flagship iPhone launch in the country. Apple also introduced a direct leasing option for new iPhone purchases globally as part of Wednesday's announcement, a first for the company, which industry watchers say may prove particularly relevant to a device carrying a starting price above ¥360,000 — a figure that exceeds the total cost of many Japanese consumers' most recent full smartphone-and-contract bundle.

Apple also used Wednesday's event to introduce the iPhone 18 Pro and Pro Max, which share the new A20 Pro chip with the Duo and add a 48-megapixel main camera with a variable physical aperture — real adjustable aperture blades rather than the software-simulated depth effects most smartphone cameras rely on — along with a slimmed-down Dynamic Island capable of displaying up to three simultaneous Live Activities. Apple Watch Series 12, now available with a ceramic case option, and a new Apple Watch Ultra 4 were announced alongside a fifth-generation AirPods lineup, rounding out what Apple billed as one of its largest single-event product slates in years.

Wall Street's reaction to Wednesday's announcement proved more measured than the product reveal itself. Apple shares closed the trading session down 0.28%, a modest decline analysts attributed to investor uncertainty about how many consumers will ultimately pay a substantial premium for a folding phone, rather than to any specific disappointment with the hardware Apple demonstrated. Dan Ives, founding partner at research and investment firm Yorkville Ives, told CNBC that the iPhone Duo represented the first genuinely new Apple product category in a decade capable of 'moving the needle' on the company's growth trajectory, comparing its potential significance to the original AirPods launch, while cautioning that translating a compelling keynote demonstration into sustained consumer demand remains a separate and unproven challenge.

Apple Unveils Foldable iPhone Duo; Japan Price Set at ¥364,800

New CEO John Ternus's first keynote introduces Apple's first foldable phone alongside the iPhone 18 Pro, with Japan among the first 70-plus markets to get it on day one

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

Apple unveiled its first foldable iPhone on Wednesday, a book-style device called the iPhone Duo, at a Cupertino event that also marked new chief executive John Ternus's debut keynote address since succeeding Tim Cook at the helm of the company earlier this month. Apple's Japan online store listed the device at ¥364,800 for the base 256GB configuration, with the top-of-the-line 2TB model reaching ¥574,800 — among the most expensive iPhones the company has ever sold in the Japanese market.

Preorders open globally, Japan included, at 9 p.m. Japan Standard Time on Oct. 16, with the device reaching store shelves and pre-order customers on Oct. 23. Japan is among more than 70 countries and regions receiving the iPhone Duo in this first wave, alongside the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, and South Korea. A second wave of roughly 28 additional markets follows on Oct. 30.

Accessory pricing rounded out Wednesday's announcement: Apple's dedicated iPhone Duo Case will sell for \$79 in the United States, with a Folio and Kickstand version at \$129, both supporting MagSafe and Qi2 wireless charging; Japanese pricing for the accessories had not been posted to Apple's Japan storefront as of Wednesday evening. The device ships with iOS 27.1 rather than the base iOS 27 release Apple is pushing to existing iPhones on Sept. 14, a sequencing choice Apple's software engineering team described as necessary to accommodate foldable-specific interface behavior not present in the initial iOS 27 build.

Whether the iPhone Duo meaningfully reshapes Japan's smartphone market — a market this newspaper's own coverage has repeatedly noted remains unusually loyal to the iPhone relative to global Android adoption rates — is likely to become clearer only once the device reaches actual retail shelves next month. For now, Wednesday's announcement gives Japanese consumers roughly six weeks to decide whether Apple's first folding phone, at a price exceeding many of the country's most expensive laptops, represents the kind of transformational device Ternus described from the keynote stage, or simply the latest, priciest entry in an iPhone lineup that already spans a wide range of price points aimed at very different kinds of buyers.

TECHNOLOGY & BUSINESS

Rapidus Order Pipeline Grows as Government Support Nears ¥3 Trillion

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

Rapidus Corp. continues discussions with more than 60 companies interested in designing chips for AI and robotics applications, chief executive Atsuyoshi Koike said this week, as cumulative government support for the venture approaches ¥3 trillion.

The company's production timeline has shown gradual signs of slipping even as funding commitments grow, with some recent guidance pointing to mass production beginning as late as March 2028 rather than the 2027 target cited earlier this year.

Skeptics continue to question whether Rapidus can compress into a few years a manufacturing learning curve that took Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. decades to climb, though customer interest has intensified alongside the broader AI infrastructure boom.

Koike said the venture's Hokkaido fabrication facility remains on track for its next construction milestone despite the broader timeline's gradual slippage, characterizing the delay as reflecting the technical difficulty of the underlying 2-nanometer manufacturing challenge rather than any funding or construction-related shortfall. The company's most recent funding round secured ¥267.6 billion from the government and 32 private companies including Sony Group, Toyota Motor and SoftBank, building on an initial ¥73 billion commitment from eight founding companies when Rapidus was established in 2022.

The venture's basic proposition remains as ambitious as when it was first announced: compress into a handful of years a leading-edge semiconductor manufacturing capability that took Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. and, before it, Intel, decades of accumulated engineering experience and capital investment to achieve. Rapidus executives have consistently argued that partnership with IBM on foundational chiplet technology, combined with the government's willingness to underwrite losses during the venture's early years, gives Japan a realistic path to closing that gap faster than organic industry development alone could achieve — a claim that remains, by the nature of the challenge, unprovable until actual mass production begins.

Prospective customers evaluating Rapidus, according to people familiar with the discussions, are weighing the venture's technical promise against the practical uncertainty of committing design work to a manufacturing partner without a finished, qualified production line to point to — a chicken-and-egg dynamic common to first-of-its-kind foundry ventures but one that carries particular weight given how conservative the semiconductor design industry has historically been about switching manufacturing partners for its most advanced, highest-value chip designs.

Rapidus Corp. continues discussions with more than 60 companies interested in designing chips for AI and robotics applications.

Tokyo Chip Stocks Extend Rally as Currency Story Adds Volatility

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

Technology shares on the Tokyo Stock Exchange extended their multi-week rally this week even as the strengthening yen introduces a fresh variable for exporters within the sector, with chip designers, memory makers and AI infrastructure suppliers continuing to price in accelerating global demand for computing hardware.

Fund managers continue cautioning that the rally's underlying narrowness — concentrated in a relatively small band of AI-infrastructure-linked names — leaves it more vulnerable to a sharp reversal than headline index gains alone would suggest.

Chip designers, memory makers and testing-equipment suppliers have all posted gains this week, with several analysts noting that Japan's exposure to the global AI investment cycle runs considerably deeper than the handful of headline names dominating trading commentary, extending through specialty chemical makers and advanced packaging materials companies whose role in the AI supply chain has drawn renewed investor attention this year. Trading volume across the sector remained elevated, consistent with the broader pattern of unusually concentrated market-moving stories this newspaper has tracked all week.

Foreign institutional investors have played an outsized role in the rally's continuation, according to Tokyo Stock Exchange flow data reviewed by this newspaper, with several major overseas funds reportedly increasing allocations to Japanese technology names specifically on the thesis that the country's semiconductor supply-chain position — spanning materials, equipment and specialty manufacturing rather than leading-edge logic chips alone — offers differentiated exposure to global AI infrastructure spending relative to the more crowded, higher-valuation US technology trade.

Domestic retail investors, by contrast, have shown more mixed enthusiasm, with brokerages reporting continued but not accelerating participation in AI-linked names even as headline indices post fresh multi-week highs — a divergence some strategists read as evidence that Japanese retail sentiment remains more anchored to the currency and rate-policy story dominating other coverage than to the technology sector's own separate rally.

Fund managers continue cautioning that the rally's underlying narrowness.

SoftBank Navigates Currency Shift Alongside Continued AI Bet

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

SoftBank Group shares remained among the most actively traded on the Nikkei 225 this week, with founder Masayoshi Son's aggressive AI infrastructure bet continuing to drive outsized swings even as the strengthening yen adds a new layer of complexity to the conglomerate's substantial dollar-denominated holdings.

SoftBank's exposure to the AI investment cycle runs through several distinct channels simultaneously: its Vision Fund portfolio of AI-focused startups, its ownership stake in chip designer Arm, and a growing set of direct investments in data-center and computing infrastructure. Each of those channels carries its own currency sensitivity, and analysts covering the conglomerate say the yen's rapid appreciation has complicated near-term earnings forecasting in ways the company's own guidance has yet to fully address.

Investors remain divided on how to value SoftBank's sprawling portfolio, which spans everything from direct chip-design investments to large minority stakes in infrastructure companies still years from profitability. Bulls argue the conglomerate's willingness to make large, long-term bets has historically been rewarded over sufficiently long time horizons; skeptics counter that the currency's move adds a fresh source of valuation uncertainty on top of the questions already surrounding the sector's elevated multiples.

Son's own public comments about the conglomerate's AI strategy have grown increasingly expansive in recent quarters, framing SoftBank's various investments as components of a unified long-term thesis around artificial general intelligence infrastructure rather than a portfolio of individually justified bets — a framing some analysts find genuinely compelling as a description of the conglomerate's strategic logic and others view as a retrospective narrative imposed on what remains, in practice, a highly diversified and not always tightly coordinated set of holdings.

Credit rating agencies have continued monitoring SoftBank's overall leverage picture closely given the scale of capital the conglomerate has committed across its various AI-related investments, though none has taken recent rating action specifically tied to the currency's movement, treating it as one input among many in an already complex credit profile rather than a standalone trigger for reassessment.

SoftBank Group shares remained among the most actively traded on the Nikkei 225 this week.

Fastest Wage Growth Since 1997 Reshapes Rate-Hike Calculus

Data removes one of the last obstacles to BOJ action, economists say

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Japan's wage growth data, showing the fastest pace of increase since 1997, has fundamentally reshaped how economists assess the Bank of Japan's path into this month's Sept. 17-18 policy meeting, with several describing the data as removing one of the last credible arguments for delay.

Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda has repeatedly signaled that further rate increases depend on confirmation that Japan's wage-price dynamic remains intact — a condition this week's data appears to satisfy about as clearly as any single indicator plausibly could.

Corporate treasurers at major exporters said they continue reviewing hedging strategies in light of both the wage data and the currency's sustained strength, with several describing the current environment as requiring more active currency-risk management than the relatively stable years preceding this summer.

Domestic-facing sectors, by contrast, have generally welcomed the wage data without the same currency-related complications weighing on exporters, with retail and services companies citing improved consumer confidence as translating into steadier same-store sales figures over the past several weeks. Labor economists caution that the fastest-since-1997 headline figure reflects an aggregate across industries and firm sizes that likely conceals meaningful variation, with wage growth at large, unionized employers generally outpacing gains at smaller firms less able to absorb higher labor costs.

Small and medium-sized enterprises, which together employ the large majority of Japan's private-sector workforce, face a genuinely more difficult version of the wage-growth story than the headline national figures suggest. Many smaller employers, already squeezed by years of rising input costs they have struggled to fully pass through to customers, report that matching the pace of wage increases seen at major listed companies would require margin compression many describe as unsustainable absent either further government support or a more decisive improvement in their own pricing power.

The Bank of Japan's own internal wage analysis.

Tokyo Stocks Steady as Traders Digest Wage Data and Currency Moves

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 held broadly steady this week as traders weighed the wage data against continued strength in the yen, with government bond yields remaining near multi-decade highs as investors price in a near-certain rate increase later this month.

Trading volume remained above recent averages, a pattern floor traders attributed to the unusual concentration of market-moving stories developing simultaneously rather than in the more sequential fashion markets have typically digested comparable news in the past.

The broader Topix index, weighted by market capitalization rather than share price, posted a comparatively modest gain, a divergence from the Nikkei's own performance that analysts attribute to the narrow, AI-driven leadership concentrated among a relatively small number of high-priced index constituents. Foreign investor flows into Japanese equities have remained a subject of close attention this week, with several overseas funds reportedly increasing allocations specifically on the view that a normalizing rate environment strengthens the longer-term investment case for Japanese assets.

Sector performance across Monday's session reflected the week's competing crosscurrents clearly: technology and chip-linked names extended their rally, financial stocks gained on the improved outlook for lending margins a higher rate environment would eventually deliver, while exporters broadly lagged the index amid the currency's continued strength. That sector rotation, several trading desks noted, has become a fairly reliable pattern across recent sessions as the market continues digesting the same underlying currency and rate story from slightly different angles day to day.

Options market positioning continues to reflect genuine uncertainty about the path ahead, with implied volatility on Nikkei options elevated relative to historical averages even as the index itself has traded in a comparatively narrow range this week — a combination several derivatives strategists describe as consistent with a market bracing for a potentially significant single-day move around the BOJ's policy announcement rather than expecting the current calm to persist unchanged through the meeting.

Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 held broadly steady this week as traders weighed the wage data against continued strength in the yen.

Exporters Brace as Yen Strength Tests Earnings Assumptions

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Sony Group and Toyota Motor continue adjusting guidance commentary in light of the yen's sustained strength, with both companies' most recent quarterly results having been shaped substantially by a weaker-currency tailwind that now appears to be reversing in earnest.

Toyota's own six-month currency planning assumption of ¥150 to the dollar, adopted specifically to manage volatility, faces its most direct test yet given the currency's continued move toward, and in recent sessions past, that level.

Sony's more diversified business mix — spanning entertainment, gaming and financial services alongside its traditional electronics operations — has historically provided somewhat greater insulation from currency swings than Toyota's more concentrated automotive export exposure, though analysts note that Sony's own semiconductor and imaging-sensor businesses retain meaningful dollar-denominated revenue exposure of their own. Both companies are expected to address the currency's effect directly when they next update investors, with analysts widely expecting downward revisions to full-year currency assumptions across much of corporate Japan's export sector in the coming weeks.

Toyota's exposure runs particularly deep given the scale of its North American manufacturing and sales operations, where dollar-denominated revenue translates back into yen for consolidated reporting purposes at whatever rate prevails when results are finalized. Every yen of appreciation against the dollar mechanically reduces the yen value of that translated revenue, a dynamic that has flattered Toyota's reported profits throughout the weak-yen years and now works precisely in reverse as the currency strengthens — without necessarily reflecting any change in the company's actual underlying vehicle sales volumes or operational performance.

Smaller and mid-sized Japanese exporters, lacking the scale to maintain the kind of sophisticated currency-hedging programs major companies like Sony and Toyota employ, face a comparatively more acute version of the same adjustment, according to trade finance specialists this newspaper consulted, with several describing a noticeable uptick in hedging-related inquiries from smaller manufacturing clients since the currency's rally began in earnest.

Markets at a Glance

Compiled by the Business Desk

NIKKEI 225: holding near 66,400. YEN: trading around 155-156 per dollar, strongest since February. JAPAN 10-YEAR JGB YIELD: near multi-decade highs. BOJ RATE: 1.00%, hike odds high for Sept. 17-18 meeting.

REAL WAGES: fastest growth since 1997. FX RESERVES: down record \$79.6 billion in August. UPCOMING: Okinawa gubernatorial election and Aki Basho sumo tournament both Sept. 13; BOJ policy decision Sept. 17-18.

UPCOMING: Okinawa gubernatorial election and Aki Basho sumo tournament both Sept. 13; BOJ policy decision Sept. 17-18.

Kyoto Moves to Restrict New Short-Term Rentals, Following Shinjuku

Second major city in a week to curb minpaku expansion amid resident complaints

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Kyoto is preparing to effectively prohibit new private lodging operations in residential areas and other parts of the city, following Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward in curbing short-term rental expansion as complaints over noise, smoking, garbage and rule-flouting operators continue to intensify.

The move places Kyoto alongside Shinjuku, which this newspaper reported last week plans to ban more than half of new vacation rentals citywide, as the second major Japanese tourist destination in a matter of days to move toward restricting minpaku growth — a trend real estate analysts describe as the clearest sign yet that the political tolerance for unmanaged short-term rental expansion has genuinely shifted.

Some traditional Kyoto townhouse owners have pushed back, arguing that short-term rental income has been essential to maintaining historic properties that would otherwise be difficult to sustain through long-term residential leasing alone, a tension city officials say they are attempting to address through the specific geographic scope of the restriction rather than a blanket citywide ban.

City officials say the restriction's design draws directly on lessons from Shinjuku's own rollout, with Kyoto planners specifically studying which enforcement mechanisms proved most effective at curbing the noise and trespassing complaints that have dominated public hearings in both cities. Kyoto's tourism board, while supportive of the restriction, has raised its own concern about the effect on the city's total accommodation capacity during peak travel seasons, given how meaningfully short-term rentals have expanded lodging supply beyond what the city's traditional hotel stock alone could accommodate.

Real estate agents specializing in Kyoto's historic districts say inquiries about minpaku-configured properties have already begun slowing in anticipation of the restriction, a shift some describe as likely to redirect investment capital toward either traditional long-term rental conversion or, in a smaller number of cases, outright sale of properties whose owners had specifically purchased them for short-term rental income.

Kyoto's minpaku boom traces back to the mid-2010s, when a combination of surging inbound tourism, a hotel construction pipeline that struggled to keep pace with visitor growth, and relatively permissive early national regulation created strong financial incentives for property owners to convert traditional machiya townhouses and ordinary apartments alike into short-term rental units. That early growth phase proceeded with comparatively little municipal oversight, according to city planning officials, a gap that allowed operator quality to vary widely and left neighborhood associations in the most affected districts to absorb the resulting noise, waste-disposal and unfamiliar-visitor complaints largely on their own for years before city hall moved to intervene systematically.

Suica Penguin's 20-Year Reign Nears End as JR East Names Finalists

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

JR East has unveiled three finalists to become the new image character for its Suica transportation IC card, as the long-serving Suica Penguin prepares to "graduate" in March after more than two decades as the face of the service.

The mascot transition has drawn considerable public attention given the penguin's ubiquity across Japan's rail network for more than 20 years, with commuters and character-goods collectors alike weighing in on JR East's finalist selection through the company's public feedback channels.

JR East has not disclosed the specific criteria used to narrow the field to three finalists, though company officials said the selection process incorporated both internal design review and informal public sentiment gathered over recent months. The eventual successor will inherit a merchandising and branding role that has, over two decades, made the Suica Penguin one of the most recognizable transit-system mascots in Japan, appearing on everything from station signage to a long-running line of character goods sold at kiosks throughout the network.

The penguin's original design, introduced alongside the Suica card's 2001 launch, was chosen at the time specifically for its ability to convey a card that moves smoothly and independently through the transit system — a design rationale JR East has referenced repeatedly in retrospectives marking the character's various service anniversaries. Over more than two decades, the penguin has appeared in seasonal variations, promotional tie-ins and a dedicated merchandise line substantial enough that dedicated character-goods shops carrying Suica Penguin products remain fixtures in several major Tokyo-area stations.

JR East has framed the March transition as a deliberate, celebratory send-off rather than an abrupt retirement, with company officials indicating plans for commemorative programming in the character's final months of service, though specific details have not yet been announced. The company's decision to solicit meaningful public feedback in selecting a successor, rather than simply unveiling a replacement character fully formed, reflects what marketing specialists describe as a broader recognition within JR East of how genuinely attached commuters and collectors have become to the outgoing mascot over its two-decade run.

Character mascots occupy an unusually significant role in Japanese corporate branding more broadly, with transit operators, local governments and businesses across virtually every sector maintaining dedicated mascot characters that often generate meaningful independent merchandise revenue well beyond their original promotional purpose. The Suica Penguin's transition will be watched closely within that broader industry, marketing analysts say, as a test case for how successfully a genuinely beloved, long-serving mascot can be retired and replaced without alienating the loyal following the outgoing character built over twenty-plus years.

JR East has unveiled three finalists to become the new image character for its Suica transportation IC card, as the long-serving Suica Penguin prepares to "graduate" in March after more than two decades as the face of the service.

Osaka Metro to Retire Magnetic Tickets for QR Codes by 2031

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Osaka Metro plans to abolish magnetic paper tickets in favor of QR code-based fare systems around fiscal 2031, as declining magnetic-ticket use and the ongoing cost of maintaining conventional ticket gates accelerate the broader shift toward digital fare systems already underway across Japan's rail networks.

The transition mirrors similar moves by rail operators nationally as IC card and smartphone-based fare payment continue displacing paper tickets, though Osaka Metro officials say a gradual, multi-year timeline is intended to give infrequent riders and visitors adequate time to adjust.

Osaka Metro cited both the declining share of journeys paid with magnetic tickets and the rising maintenance cost of gate hardware built around the older technology as the two primary drivers behind the fiscal 2031 target date. The operator said it will continue accepting cash fare payment at station windows throughout the transition, addressing a concern raised by some elderly riders' advocacy groups about the pace of Japan's broader shift toward cashless and card-based transit payment.

The magnetic-ticket infrastructure Osaka Metro plans to retire represents technology largely unchanged in its basic mechanics since Japan's rail operators first widely adopted it decades ago, and the aging gate hardware built around that technology has become an increasingly expensive maintenance burden as manufacturers reduce production of replacement parts for equipment few operators worldwide still use at scale. Osaka Metro's move follows similar transitions already completed or underway at several other regional Japanese rail operators, though the Osaka system's scale makes this transition among the largest attempted domestically to date.

QR code-based fare systems, already deployed on a trial basis at select Osaka Metro stations, offer the operator a lower-cost alternative to both magnetic tickets and the IC-card infrastructure that has become the dominant fare-payment method in major Japanese cities over the past two decades. Unlike IC cards, which require dedicated card-reading hardware embedded in station gates, QR-based systems can in principle operate with comparatively simpler, cheaper gate technology — an advantage Osaka Metro officials say factored significantly into the operator's decision to pursue this specific technical path rather than simply expanding IC card usage further.

Visitor-focused considerations have also shaped the transition timeline, according to Osaka Metro officials, given how heavily the operator's ridership skews toward international tourists during peak travel seasons — visitors who often purchase magnetic paper tickets for short visits rather than acquiring a rechargeable IC card intended for longer-term use. QR-based digital tickets, purchasable in advance through smartphone apps before a visitor even arrives in Japan, are intended to serve exactly this visitor segment more efficiently than either magnetic paper tickets or IC cards currently do.

Universal Studios Japan Opens Record Halloween Event Today

Park's first 18-and-over horror attraction headlines this year's expanded lineup

By Grace Park | Food & Restaurant Columnist

Universal Studios Japan's 2026 Halloween event opens to the public today in Osaka, featuring what the park describes as a record number of zombie performers alongside its first horror attraction restricted to visitors aged 18 and over, unveiled to media Tuesday ahead of today's opening.

The expanded, more explicitly adult-oriented programming reflects a broader trend among Japanese theme parks toward segmenting Halloween offerings by audience, park officials said, allowing USJ to maintain family-friendly daytime programming alongside more intense evening attractions aimed at older visitors.

USJ's Halloween season has grown into one of the park's most significant annual revenue drivers over the past decade, with the event now running for nearly two months through early November and drawing both domestic repeat visitors and a growing share of inbound tourists specifically timing trips around the seasonal programming. Park officials declined to disclose specific attendance projections for this year's expanded event but described early ticket sales as running ahead of last year's pace.

The new 18-and-over horror attraction represents a notable departure for a theme park that has historically marketed its Halloween programming as broadly family-accessible, if intense in places, rather than explicitly age-restricted. Park officials describe the decision as responding to years of visitor feedback requesting a more genuinely frightening experience than the park's existing attractions, tempered by family-audience considerations, could provide — a gap the new attraction is specifically designed to fill without requiring changes to USJ's broader daytime programming.

Universal Studios Japan's record zombie-performer count reflects a production scale-up park officials describe as the largest single-year expansion of the event's live-actor component in its history, with additional makeup and costume staff brought on for the season specifically to support the larger performer roster. The park has not disclosed the exact number of zombie performers involved, citing competitive sensitivity around production details, but described the increase as measured in the dozens relative to last year's Halloween season.

Competition among Japan's major theme parks for Halloween-season visitor share has intensified in recent years, with Tokyo Disney Resort, USJ and a growing number of smaller regional parks each expanding seasonal programming annually in what industry analysts describe as an increasingly important battleground distinct from the parks' core summer and New Year peak seasons. USJ's decision to segment its offering by audience age, rather than simply making the entire park experience more intense across the board, is being watched closely by competitors as a potential template for how to grow event revenue without alienating family visitors who remain the parks' core customer base.

Universal Studios Japan's 2026 Halloween event opens to the public today in Osaka.

Rice Harvest Proceeds as Wholesale Prices Continue Gradual Decline

By Grace Park | Food & Restaurant Columnist

Japan's autumn rice harvest continues broadly on schedule, with wholesale prices maintaining their gradual decline from the peaks of the multi-year 'Reiwa rice crisis' even as the government's food consumption tax cut continues moving through the Diet.

The combination of falling rice prices, a strengthening yen easing other imported food costs, and now the fastest wage growth since 1997 has produced what several economists this newspaper consulted describe as the most favorable household cost environment in several years, even if cumulative price levels remain above where they stood before the crisis began.

Agricultural cooperatives report that this year's harvest quality has been broadly consistent with recent-year averages across most growing regions, with only isolated pockets of concern in areas that experienced the most significant flooding during last week's rain emergency. Consumer advocacy groups have urged continued monitoring of retail rice prices through the harvest transition, noting that previous cycles of wholesale price relief have not always translated fully or immediately into equivalent savings for households at the retail level.

The Reiwa rice crisis that preceded this year's relief traced its roots to a combination of factors agricultural economists have debated extensively: a genuinely poor 2023 harvest, Japan's decades-old production-adjustment policies that have historically discouraged farmers from expanding rice acreage even amid rising demand signals, and a surge in inbound tourism that added meaningfully to domestic rice consumption at precisely the moment supply had tightened. Untangling how much of this year's price relief reflects genuine supply-side recovery versus simply the passage of time since the crisis's acute phase remains, agricultural economists say, a genuinely contested empirical question.

Government rice-policy officials have faced sustained political pressure throughout the crisis to reconsider the production-adjustment framework more fundamentally, with critics arguing the decades-old system, originally designed to prevent oversupply and protect farmer incomes during an earlier era of declining rice consumption, has left Japan's rice market poorly equipped to respond quickly to genuine supply shocks when they occur. The government has so far resisted more sweeping structural reform, favoring instead the kind of targeted, temporary measures — including the consumption tax cut moving through the Diet — that address the crisis's immediate household-affordability symptoms without reopening the more politically fraught question of the underlying production system.

Rice farmers themselves have offered a notably mixed reaction to the price relief now working through the market, with some welcoming the easing of a crisis that had drawn unwelcome political scrutiny to the industry, and others expressing concern that falling wholesale prices, however welcome for consumers, could erode the improved farm-gate income levels many producers only recently began enjoying after the crisis's earlier price spikes. Agricultural cooperatives say balancing consumer relief against farmer income stability will likely remain a central tension in rice policy discussions well beyond this particular harvest season.

Japan's autumn rice harvest continues broadly on schedule.

REAL ESTATE & CULTURE

Japan's Empty-House Problem Could Reach 6 Million by 2043

New projection puts hard numbers on a demographic trend this newspaper's editorial page has tracked at length

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Japan could have nearly 6 million vacant dwellings sitting empty by 2043, according to a new projection that would represent more than 8% of the country's total housing stock, giving concrete numerical shape to the demographic decline this newspaper's editorial page examined at length in a recent long-form essay.

The akiya trend runs in direct parallel with, rather than contradiction to, Tokyo's own record-high condominium prices, real estate economists note, reflecting an increasingly bifurcated market in which robust central urban demand and rural abandonment proceed simultaneously as two faces of the same underlying demographic and economic geography.

Municipal governments in the most affected rural regions have experimented with a range of responses, from subsidized demolition programs to akiya-matching services connecting vacant properties with prospective buyers, though officials acknowledge these efforts have so far done little to meaningfully alter the trajectory the new 2043 projection describes.

For Japan's real estate market specifically, the akiya trend has begun attracting a small but growing class of investors betting on eventual conversion or redevelopment value, particularly in rural areas within commuting distance of regional cities where remote-work adoption has modestly increased demand for larger, cheaper properties outside major metropolitan cores. Real estate economists caution that this investment remains a niche strategy relative to the scale of the overall vacant-housing stock, with the vast majority of akiya properties continuing to sit outside any active market interest given their often remote locations, unclear inheritance ownership, or renovation costs that exceed likely resale value.

Banks and regional financial institutions in the most affected prefectures have begun incorporating akiya-related asset devaluation into their own regional economic risk assessments, according to people familiar with several institutions' internal planning, a quiet but structurally significant acknowledgment of how directly the demographic trend now bears on regional financial stability.

Property valuation itself has become an increasingly fraught exercise in the most severely depopulated regions, with real estate appraisers reporting growing numbers of properties whose market value, by conventional valuation methods, comes out at or near zero once demolition and disposal costs are weighed against realistic resale prospects — a category some in the industry have begun informally referring to as "negative-value real estate," property whose owners would, in a strictly economic sense, be better off if it did not exist at all rather than continuing to hold nominal ownership and its associated tax and liability obligations.

Some municipalities have responded by experimenting with programs that actively pay property owners a modest sum to formally relinquish ownership, effectively treating vacant, valueless housing stock as a municipal liability to be actively managed down rather than a private asset to be left to market forces alone. Early results from these programs remain limited in scale relative to the size of the overall akiya stock, though officials in the municipalities that have tried the approach describe it as a meaningful, if incremental, tool worth expanding if initial results continue holding up.

International interest in Japan's akiya stock has grown modestly in recent years, driven substantially by foreign buyers — some Japan-based, some purchasing remotely — drawn by the combination of extremely low acquisition costs and Japan's broader appeal as a place to own a second home or renovation project. Real estate agencies specializing in akiya transactions for foreign buyers describe steady, if still niche, demand, cautioning that renovation costs, unclear utility connections and the practical challenges of managing a remote property in rural Japan mean the segment remains far from a mainstream solution to the broader vacancy crisis this newspaper's editorial page has examined at length.

Japan could have nearly 6 million vacant dwellings sitting empty by 2043.

Tokyo Condo Market Watches Rate Decision Alongside Currency Story

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Tokyo's condominium market, where average prices surpassed ¥140 million for the first time this year, faces a consequential test as the Bank of Japan's rate decision approaches alongside the broader currency story dominating other coverage this week.

Mortgage brokers report increased inquiries from prospective buyers seeking to lock in current borrowing costs ahead of any further rate increase, a pattern that has historically produced a short-term surge in transaction activity followed by a period of adjustment once new rates take hold.

Developers continue to describe the underlying supply constraint — driven by land scarcity, elevated construction costs and persistent labor shortages in the construction trades — as the more durable driver of Tokyo's elevated prices, one that a single rate cycle is unlikely to meaningfully reverse regardless of its effect on near-term buyer behavior. Real estate agencies serving the capital's most desirable wards say foreign buyer interest has remained resilient despite the currency's appreciation, with several citing Tokyo property's continued relative-value appeal compared with other major global cities even after accounting for the yen's recent strengthening.

Construction labor shortages, a persistent drag on new housing supply for years, have shown few signs of meaningful easing despite the broader wage gains this newspaper has covered extensively in recent coverage. Construction trades continue competing for workers against other sectors also raising wages amid Japan's tight overall labor market, a dynamic that has pushed construction labor costs up even faster than the broader wage figures suggest, according to industry associations tracking the sector specifically.

First-time buyers have been disproportionately affected by the sustained price climb, with mortgage brokers reporting a steady lengthening of average loan terms and a growing reliance on multigenerational household financing arrangements to qualify for the loan amounts current prices in the capital's most desirable wards now require. Real estate economists describe a market increasingly bifurcated between buyers with substantial existing household wealth able to absorb the current price environment comfortably, and first-time buyers for whom central Tokyo homeownership has become an increasingly distant prospect absent family financial support.

Developers themselves remain broadly confident about demand fundamentals even as the rate environment shifts, citing persistent land scarcity in central Tokyo, continued corporate relocation activity into the capital, and Tokyo's enduring status as Japan's dominant economic and cultural center as structural demand drivers that a single BOJ rate decision, however significant for near-term transaction volumes, is unlikely to meaningfully alter over any multi-year planning horizon relevant to major residential development projects.

Mortgage brokers report increased inquiries from prospective buyers seeking to lock in current borrowing costs ahead of any further rate increase.

Detective Conan Holds Box Office Lead as Autumn Slate Approaches

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Japan's domestic box office in 2026 remains led by 'Detective Conan: Fallen Angel of the Highway' at roughly ¥13.70 billion, with 'Chiikawa the Movie: The Secret of the Mermaid Island' close behind at approximately ¥12.23 billion, according to rankings current through early September.

Industry watchers continue to note that this year's box office strength remains concentrated in a narrow band of established franchises rather than reflecting a broader recovery across the full range of theatrical releases.

International distribution rights for several of this year's top releases have become an increasingly significant revenue stream in their own right, with both 'Detective Conan' and 'Chiikawa' securing theatrical releases in multiple overseas markets, a pattern industry executives describe as reflecting the growing global commercial viability of Japanese animation well beyond the streaming-driven international fanbase that first drove overseas interest in the medium. Domestic exhibitors say the autumn slate approaching in the coming weeks, including several anticipated franchise entries, could extend the year's strong performance into its final quarter.

The 'Detective Conan' franchise's continued box-office dominance reflects a now three-decade-long run for the long-running manga and anime property, whose annual theatrical film releases have become something close to an institutionalized spring tradition in Japanese cinema, consistently topping domestic box-office charts against new competition year after year. Industry analysts attribute the franchise's remarkable durability partly to its multi-generational audience — parents who grew up with the series now bringing their own children — and partly to production values that have kept pace with, and in some years exceeded, more heavily marketed original theatrical releases.

'Chiikawa,' by contrast, represents a considerably newer entrant to the theatrical box office, having built its audience initially through social media and merchandise before expanding into television and, this year, a major theatrical release. The character franchise's rapid rise illustrates a production and distribution pathway increasingly common in the current Japanese entertainment industry, in which character intellectual property proves its commercial viability through smaller-scale digital and merchandise channels before studios commit the larger capital investment a full theatrical production requires.

Exhibitors note that this year's box-office strength has coincided with, rather than been undermined by, the broader cost-of-living pressure this newspaper has covered extensively, with moviegoing appearing to have retained its status as a comparatively affordable entertainment outing even as households have grown more selective about discretionary spending elsewhere — a resilience pattern some industry analysts attribute to cinema's relatively low per-visit cost compared with other out-of-home entertainment options.

Industry watchers continue to note that this year's box office strength remains concentrated in a narrow band of established franchises rather than reflecting a broader recovery across the full range of theatrical releases.

Sumo's Tourism-Driven Boom Reshapes Who Fills the Seats

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Sumo is enjoying what industry observers describe as another popularity boom ahead of Sunday's Aki Basho opening, but unlike past surges driven by a single dominant Japanese star, this one owes considerably more to inbound tourism, with overseas visitors increasingly filling seats at tournaments throughout the year regardless of which wrestlers currently top the rankings.

The shift has prompted the Japan Sumo Association to expand English-language programming and ticketing accessibility for international visitors, changes officials describe as responding to demand rather than actively courting it, given how organically the overseas interest has grown in recent tournament cycles.

The tourism-driven demand has had measurable knock-on effects for Ryogoku, the Tokyo district surrounding the Kokugikan arena, where restaurant owners and souvenir shops catering to sumo visitors report business volumes well above pre-pandemic levels. Cultural historians note the shift represents a genuinely new chapter for a sport whose domestic audience skewed older and whose ticket sales had, in prior decades, fluctuated primarily with the fortunes of whichever Japanese wrestler currently held the public's attention — a dependency the current tourism-driven demand pattern has made considerably less pronounced.

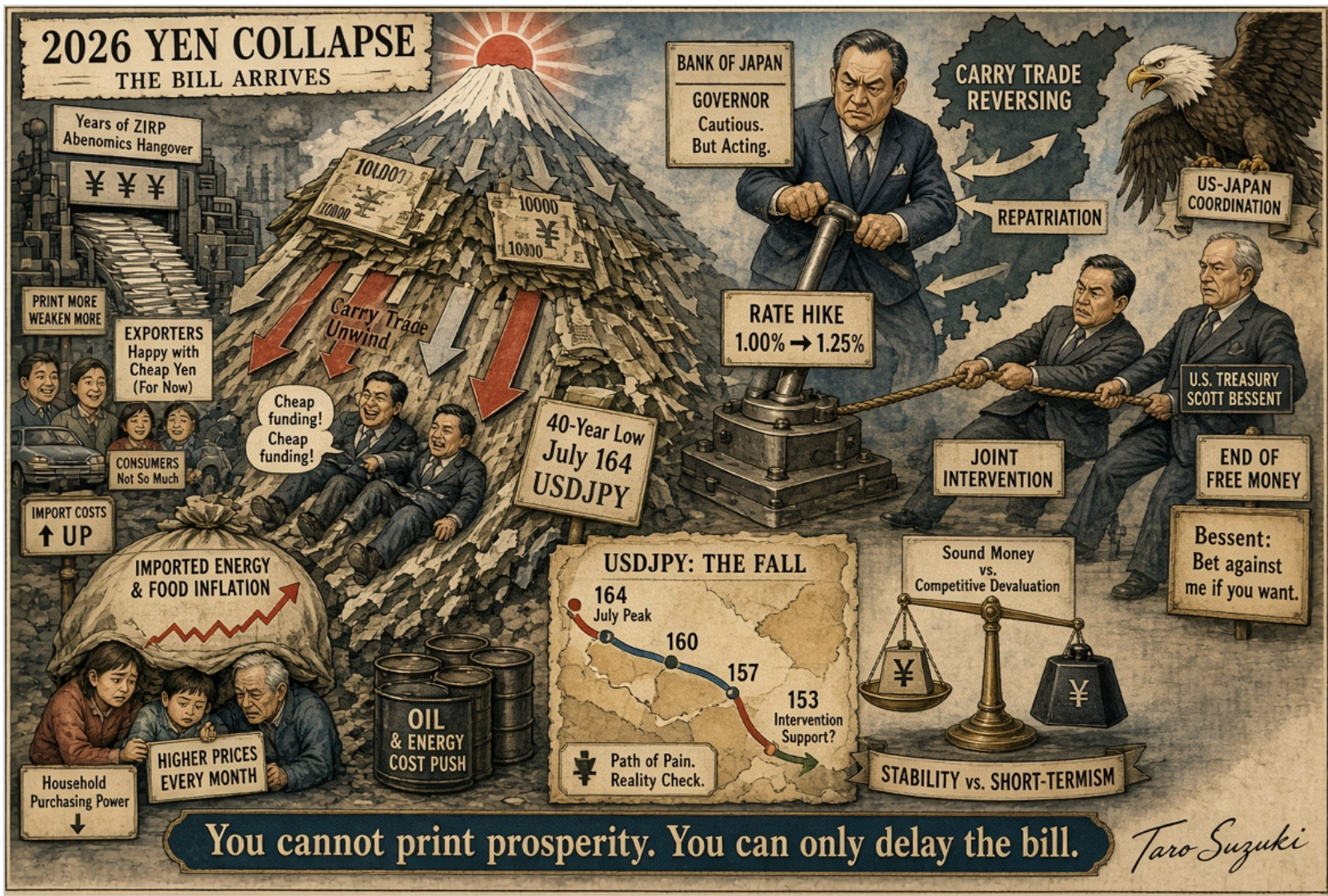
Chanko-nabe restaurants, the hearty stew associated with sumo stables' traditional communal diet, have become an especially visible beneficiary of the tourism surge, with several Ryogoku establishments reporting that international visitors now account for a majority of their business during tournament periods — a reversal from a decade ago, when such restaurants catered predominantly to domestic sumo fans and, occasionally, retired wrestlers themselves. Some stables have begun offering limited public morning-practice viewings specifically in response to visitor demand, a departure from sumo's traditionally closed, insular training culture that stable masters describe as a careful balancing act between welcoming new interest and preserving practices central to the sport's traditional character.

The Japan Sumo Association's broader modernization efforts, including expanded digital ticketing and English-language broadcast commentary options for major tournaments, have proceeded alongside the tourism boom rather than preceding it, according to association officials, who describe the organization as adapting to demonstrated demand rather than attempting to engineer international interest through marketing investment the traditionally conservative organization has historically been reluctant to make.

Not every aspect of the tourism surge has proven uncomplicated for the sport's traditional stewards. Some longtime sumo fans and sport commentators have expressed concern that rising ticket prices, driven partly by tourism-fueled demand, risk pricing out exactly the multi-generational domestic fan base whose sustained loyalty carried the sport through leaner attendance years before the current boom began. The Japan Sumo Association has not signaled any plan to formally reserve ticket allocations for domestic fans specifically, describing the current demand environment as, on balance, a welcome problem after years of more uneven attendance.

Not every aspect of the tourism surge has proven uncomplicated for the sport's traditional stewards.

EDITORIAL & OPINION



TODAY'S CARTOON

"You cannot print prosperity. You can only delay the bill."

You Cannot Print Prosperity. You Can Only Delay the Bill.

Today's cartoon names, in one sentence, the argument this newspaper has been building toward for a week of currency coverage

By Samantha Ortiz | Editorial Page Editor

Today's cartoon, drawn by our own Taro Suzuki, ends with a line simple enough to fit on a banner and true enough to organize an entire editorial around: you cannot print prosperity, you can only delay the bill. Everything else in the image — the mountain of yen notes collapsing under the weight of "years of ZIRP," the exporters cheering while consumers wince, the Bank of Japan governor straining at a rate-hike lever connected by rope to a tug-of-war with Washington, the household hunched over a sack of imported energy and food costs — is really just an illustration of that one sentence, worked out panel by panel across two decades of Japanese monetary policy. This newspaper has spent the past week reporting the individual data points of that reckoning: the yen's collapse to a 40-year low in July, the record joint intervention with the US Treasury, the confirmed sale of tens of billions of dollars in American government debt to fund it, and now, this week, wage growth at its fastest pace since 1997. Today we want to step back from the individual data points and ask the harder question the cartoon poses directly: what, exactly, is the bill, who is being asked to pay it, and was there ever a version of the past twenty-five years in which Japan avoided presenting it altogether?

Start with the honest history, because the cartoon's shorthand — "years of ZIRP" stacked like sandbags beneath a collapsing mountain — compresses into four words a policy story that actually unfolded across five prime ministers, three BOJ governors, and roughly a generation of Japanese economic life. Zero interest rate policy was not, when it began in earnest in the late 1990s and then again more decisively after 2008 and 2013, a reckless indulgence dreamed up by profligate policymakers. It was a response, in each of its iterations, to a genuine and serious problem: a Japanese economy that kept sliding toward deflation, in which falling prices discouraged spending, discouraged spending depressed growth, and depressed growth reinforced the expectation of further price declines in a self-fulfilling loop that conventional interest-rate policy, once rates approached zero, had increasingly little room left to break. Quantitative and qualitative easing, negative rates in their brief and controversial 2016 experiment, yield-curve control after that — each escalation was a response to the previous tool's insufficiency, not a first-choice policy chosen from a menu of equally attractive alternatives. This newspaper is not interested in refighting the academic debates of the 2000s and 2010s about whether Japan's deflationary trap could have been escaped by some cleverer combination of monetary and fiscal policy that avoided the eventual bill altogether. We are interested in the plainer observation that a policy sustained for this long, defending against a problem this serious, was always going to leave a mark on the economy's structure that would eventually need to be addressed — and that the addressing was always going to be uncomfortable, whenever it finally came, because comfortable exits from two-decade monetary experiments are not a thing economic history actually offers.

The specific mark ZIRP left, the one the cartoon renders as a mountain about to collapse, is the carry trade — the practice, engaged in by investors across the world rather than by Japan itself, of borrowing cheaply in yen and investing the proceeds in higher-yielding assets elsewhere, pocketing the spread. This newspaper devoted a full explainer to the trade's mechanics earlier this week, and we will not repeat the technical detail here except to restate the core point: a carry trade this large and this durable does not simply reflect market conditions, it actively shapes them, keeping the yen weaker than Japan's own underlying fundamentals would otherwise justify for as long as the rate gap that makes the trade profitable persists. That artificial weakness was not experienced uniformly across Japanese society, and this is where the cartoon's second major visual argument — exporters cheering while an ordinary family winces at rising import costs — earns its place at the center of the image rather than as incidental detail. A weak yen is, mechanically, a transfer: it makes Japanese exports cheaper and more competitive abroad, flattering the earnings of precisely the large manufacturing and technology exporters whose stock performance dominates headlines and whose executives sit on the advisory councils that shape economic policy, while simultaneously making every unit of imported energy, food and raw material more expensive for the households who do not share directly in export profits but who do, unavoidably, need to eat and heat their homes. Two decades of a policy environment that kept the yen structurally weak was, whatever its deflation-fighting justification, also two decades of a structural subsidy flowing from ordinary consumers to exporting corporations — a transfer few politicians of any party found it convenient to describe in those terms while it was happening, but one whose consequences the rice-price crisis and the broader cost-of-living politics of the past three years have made impossible to ignore any longer.

This is the bill arriving, in the cartoon's framing, and this newspaper thinks the framing is substantially correct even where we would add nuance the single-panel format cannot accommodate. The bill has several line items, and it is worth itemizing them with more precision than "the bill arrives" alone provides. There is the direct fiscal cost of intervention itself: tens of billions of dollars in Treasury sales, a record drawdown of foreign exchange reserves, the largest single-month decline on record. There is the cost to exporters now facing precisely the currency headwind their weak-yen years never required them to hedge against with real seriousness, an adjustment several major manufacturers are only now beginning to price into their own guidance. There is the cost to holders of yen-denominated assets who benefited from years of ultra-accommodative policy and asset-price support that a genuine normalization cycle will, by design, partially unwind. And there is, running beneath all of these more visible costs, the deeper structural cost of an economy that spent two decades organizing significant parts of its industrial policy, its corporate strategy, and its household budgeting around an interest-rate environment that was always, definitionally, temporary — a fact easy to forget in year fifteen of a policy regime but impossible to forget in the year its unwinding finally, unmistakably, begins.

The scale on the right side of today's cartoon — "sound money" balanced against "competitive devaluation" — deserves its own extended treatment, because this newspaper believes it identifies the genuine philosophical fork in the road that Japanese monetary policy has approached and largely avoided confronting directly for most of the past two decades. Sound money, in the tradition the term invokes, treats currency stability and purchasing-power preservation as a policy priority worth defending even at the cost of some near-term growth or export competitiveness — the view that a currency's core job is to be a reliable store of value and unit of account, and that a government which lets that reliability erode for the sake of short-term stimulus is borrowing against its own currency's credibility in a way that eventually, and often expensively, comes due. Competitive devaluation, by contrast, treats the exchange rate as a lever to be actively managed in pursuit of export competitiveness and growth, on the theory that a weaker currency is a legitimate, even necessary, tool for an economy trying to escape a deflationary trap or maintain manufacturing competitiveness against lower-cost rivals. Japan's policy establishment has, for two decades, mostly avoided stating plainly which side of this scale it considers correct, preferring instead to describe each individual easing measure as a targeted, temporary response to a specific deflationary threat rather than as evidence of a broader, sustained preference for the competitive-devaluation side of the ledger. This newspaper thinks that avoidance was itself a choice, and a consequential one: it allowed two decades of policy that functioned, in its aggregate effect on the currency, considerably closer to competitive devaluation than to sound money, without the sustained public argument in favor of that choice that a more forthright policy establishment might have offered its own citizens.

We do not say this to relitigate decisions made by officials operating under genuinely difficult constraints, in most cases with access to better information about the deflationary threat than this newspaper's editorial page possesses in hindsight. We say it because the current moment — Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda's cautious but increasingly evident tilt toward the sound-money side of the scale, board member Hajime Takata's public call for the central bank to act "nimble" against inflation, an administration that has "previously favored a dovish approach" now visibly recalibrating toward tightening — represents, whether officials frame it this way publicly or not, something closer to Japan finally choosing a side of that scale with some degree of institutional conviction, after two decades in which the choice was effectively made by default through the accumulated weight of individual, ostensibly temporary measures. That is a genuinely significant shift, and this newspaper believes it deserves to be named as such rather than described only in the incremental, meeting-by-meeting language of "gradual policy normalization" that official communications understandably favor for its calming effect on markets.

Continued on Page 11

EDITORIAL & OPINION

You Cannot Print Prosperity. You Can Only Delay the Bill. — Continued from Page 10

What would taking the sound-money side of that scale seriously actually require, beyond the rate increases already underway? This newspaper would point to at least three commitments the cartoon's framing implies but does not spell out. First, a willingness to tolerate genuinely uncomfortable near-term costs for exporters and asset holders who benefited from the prior regime, rather than retreating toward accommodation the moment growth data or corporate earnings show the strain of adjustment — precisely the test Governor Ueda faces at this month's meeting and will continue facing at every subsequent one until the normalization cycle reaches something like a durable resting point. Second, a fiscal policy stance that does not quietly work against the monetary tightening by continuing to run deficits calibrated to an era of near-free government borrowing, since a central bank raising rates while a finance ministry borrows as though rates remained near zero produces exactly the kind of policy incoherence that markets eventually punish more severely than either institution's own honest miscalculation would have. Third, and perhaps most difficult politically, an honest public accounting of who bore the costs of the weak-yen era and who is now being asked to bear the costs of its unwinding — an accounting this newspaper has attempted in its own coverage this week but that we do not see reflected with comparable clarity in official government communications, which have understandably preferred to frame both the weak-yen years and the current normalization in terms of aggregate economic benefit rather than the more politically fraught language of winners and losers within Japanese society.

The international dimension of today's cartoon — the tug-of-war between the Bank of Japan governor and a trio of American officials including Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, labeled "joint intervention" and "US-Japan coordination" — adds a further layer this newspaper has covered extensively in recent editions and will not fully re-litigate here, except to note how it complicates the sound-money-versus-competitive-devaluation framing in an interesting way. A purely domestic sound-money argument would hold that Japan should raise rates and let the yen find its own level based on Japanese fundamentals alone, independent of what any other government prefers. The actual policy path Japan has taken instead involves substantial coordination with Washington, whose own interest in a stronger yen — easing one persistent irritant in the trade relationship, narrowing an export-competitiveness advantage American manufacturers have long complained about — is not identical to Japan's domestic interest in taming imported inflation, even though the two interests currently point in the same direction. This newspaper considers that alignment of interest genuine rather than coerced, based on our reporting, but we would note that an alignment of interest is not the same as an identity of interest, and the cartoon's rendering of Bessent as bluntly confident — "bet against me if you want" — captures something real about the asymmetry in how visibly each government is willing to stake its credibility on the currency's continued strength. Japan's own officials have, characteristically, been more circumspect in public, a caution this newspaper reads as prudent given how much of the currency's recovery still depends on carry-trade dynamics and market psychology that neither government fully controls, however confidently either side's officials speak in public.

There is a temptation, and this newspaper has felt it while reporting this story across the past week, to treat the current moment as a clean resolution — the bill has arrived, Japan is paying it through higher rates and a stronger currency, and the mountain of accumulated ZIRP-era distortion the cartoon depicts collapsing will, once the dust settles, leave a healthier, more normally functioning economy in its place. We want to resist that temptation, or at least qualify it substantially, because bills of this size and duration are rarely paid in a single, tidy transaction. The rate increases now underway will, if they proceed as markets currently expect, address the most acute symptom — an undervalued currency imposing real costs on ordinary households — without necessarily resolving the deeper structural questions that made two decades of near-zero rates seem like the least-bad available option in the first place: a demographic trajectory this newspaper's editorial page examined at exhausting length in a previous edition, a corporate sector whose competitiveness in several sectors has come to depend on exactly the currency advantage now eroding, and a public debt burden built up across those same two decades that a genuinely higher-rate environment will make meaningfully more expensive to service, whatever relief households feel at the checkout counter in the meantime.

This newspaper's own position, for whatever it is worth to readers weighing the sound-money-versus-competitive-devaluation question the cartoon poses so directly, is that the choice was never as symmetric as the image's balanced scale visually suggests. Sound money is not merely one legitimate policy preference among several equally defensible options; it is, in the long run, close to a precondition for the kind of stable, predictable economic environment in which households can plan, businesses can invest with confidence, and a currency can do the basic job — storing value, facilitating exchange — that gives it any use at all. Competitive devaluation can buy real, sometimes necessary, breathing room during a genuine deflationary emergency of the kind Japan faced in the late 1990s and again after 2008. It cannot be sustained indefinitely as a substitute for the harder structural reforms — on demographics, on corporate dynamism, on fiscal sustainability — that a currency's exchange rate can disguise the need for, but never actually resolve. Two decades is considerably longer than any genuine emergency justifies, and this newspaper believes the honest accounting Japan is only now beginning to conduct, in the halting, meeting-by-meeting language of gradual policy normalization, was owed to Japanese households considerably earlier than it has arrived.

None of which should be read as this newspaper second-guessing the specific decisions Bank of Japan officials are making in real time, under genuinely difficult conditions, with better information than an editorial page possesses about the precise risks of moving faster or slower than the current gradual path allows. Governor Ueda's caution, whatever its frustrations for readers eager to see the bill fully settled, reflects a defensible judgment that an economy accustomed to two decades of near-zero rates cannot safely absorb their reversal all at once without risking a different, possibly worse, set of disruptions than the gradual path currently being pursued. What we are arguing is narrower and, we think, less contestable: that the bill the cartoon depicts arriving was always going to arrive eventually, that pretending otherwise for as long as Japan's policy establishment collectively did carries its own real costs measured in years of accumulated distortion rather than in any single dramatic crisis, and that the honest public conversation about who paid for the weak-yen decades and who is now paying for their unwinding deserves to continue well past the point when this particular news cycle moves on to whatever currency or trade story claims the front page next.

There is one further group this newspaper believes deserves explicit mention before closing, because the cartoon's household panel — an ordinary family hunched over a sack marked "imported energy and food inflation" — risks being read as a generic symbol rather than a specific, identifiable constituency with specific, identifiable interests in how the next several BOJ meetings unfold. That constituency is disproportionately older, on fixed or slow-growing incomes, and disproportionately concentrated outside the major metropolitan areas where wage growth has been strongest and where the cost-of-living pressures of the weak-yen years were most easily absorbed by rising nominal incomes even before this week's fastest-since-1997 data arrived. A rate-driven normalization that primarily benefits savers and currency-sensitive importers while doing comparatively little for households whose main asset is a modest pension rather than yen-denominated savings earning suddenly more competitive returns risks leaving exactly this constituency behind in the transition, even as the aggregate national statistics — wages up, currency stronger, inflation cooling — tell an increasingly reassuring story at the national level. This newspaper does not have a tidy policy prescription to offer for that distributional gap beyond urging the government to track it explicitly rather than assume a rising national average resolves it, and we intend to keep asking the question in future editions as the normalization cycle proceeds past whatever decision the Bank of Japan reaches this month.

You cannot print prosperity. Japan spent two decades testing the limits of how long that particular lesson could be deferred, and the testing was not costless even in the years when no single headline made the cost legible. This newspaper's job, as the bill finally comes due in the form of higher rates, a stronger currency and an economy relearning how normal monetary policy actually feels, is simply to keep insisting that the lesson was true all along — and to keep asking, as clearly and as often as the story requires, exactly who is being asked to write the check, and whether the household in today's cartoon, hunched over its sack of rising costs, will be made whole by the recovery now underway, or simply asked to absorb one more round of a bill someone else spent two decades running up.

EDITORIAL & OPINION

What It Means That Okinawa Would Rather Talk About Prices Than Bases

A new poll shows cost-of-living concerns outpolling security by nearly three to one. This newspaper asks what that says about the seventy-year bargain underneath Japan's alliance with America

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

For nearly the entire postwar history of Okinawa Prefecture, its governor's races have been conducted, at bottom, as referendums on a single question that never really goes away: how much of the American military presence should the prefecture continue to host, and on what terms. Denny Tamaki built two terms and is fighting for a third substantially on the strength of his opposition to the Futenma-to-Henoko base relocation. His predecessors, going back decades, organized their own campaigns around variations of the same fundamental dispute. So it is genuinely notable, and this newspaper believes genuinely under-examined outside Okinawa itself, that a new Ryukyu Shimpo/JX Press poll conducted in the campaign's final weeks found just 16.6% of respondents naming US bases and security as their top voting concern, against nearly 47% who named the economy, employment and rising prices. That is not a marginal shift in emphasis. It is close to a three-to-one inversion of the priority ordering that has organized Okinawan electoral politics for a generation, and this newspaper thinks it deserves an explanation more serious than the easy one — that Okinawans have simply grown tired of the base issue — because we do not believe that explanation, standing alone, is either accurate or sufficient to what the shift actually reveals.

The easy explanation is not wrong so much as incomplete. Base fatigue is real; Okinawans have been debating essentially the same relocation dispute since the 1990s, through multiple governors, multiple national administrations, and a 2019 prefectural referendum in which more than 70% of voters who participated rejected the Henoko relocation plan, a result that changed remarkably little about the plan's ultimate trajectory given that base policy in Japan is constitutionally and practically a national government prerogative rather than a prefectural one. A voter who has watched three decades of protest, litigation, referendum and negotiation fail to meaningfully alter the outcome could reasonably conclude that continued intense focus on the base question offers diminishing returns relative to more immediately actionable economic concerns — a rational reallocation of political attention rather than a surrender of underlying conviction. This newspaper takes that account seriously. We do not think it is the whole story, for reasons that require examining what has actually changed in Okinawa's economic circumstances over exactly the period this poll captures.

Okinawa Prefecture has, for its entire postwar history, occupied an economically anomalous position within Japan: among the country's lowest average incomes and highest poverty rates, alongside a heavy structural dependence on tourism and on the direct and indirect economic activity generated by the American military presence itself — base-related employment, land-lease payments to base-hosting property owners, and the broader economic ecosystem that decades of concentrated military spending inevitably produces. This dependence has always complicated the base debate in ways that outside observers, focused on the security and sovereignty dimensions, sometimes underweight: opposing the base presence too completely and too successfully would, in a prefecture this economically reliant on the revenue that presence generates, carry genuine economic costs that Okinawa's other governors, Tamaki included, have had to manage carefully even while pursuing base reduction as a stated policy goal. The 47% who now name the economy as their top concern are not, on this newspaper's reading, necessarily voters who have stopped caring about the base question. Many of them are voters for whom the base question and the economic question were never as separable as national commentary sometimes assumes, now finally naming the economic half of that entangled relationship as their primary electoral concern in a moment when broader national cost-of-living pressure — the same pressure this newspaper's editorial page has covered in exhaustive detail through the currency and wage stories dominating other pages this week — has made economic anxiety newly, urgently salient in every corner of Japan, Okinawa very much included.

Consider the timing. This poll was conducted Aug. 28-30, squarely within a summer this newspaper has spent covering as a genuine national cost-of-living inflection point: a yen that collapsed to a 40-year low in July before a record government intervention began clawing it back, food and energy import costs that have weighed on household budgets for three consecutive years running, and only this week, wage growth data finally showing the fastest gains since 1997. Okinawan voters were not registering their economic anxiety in a vacuum specific to the prefecture's own base-dependent economic structure. They were registering it as part of a genuinely nationwide phenomenon that happened to reach its most acute recent phase in exactly the weeks when this particular gubernatorial campaign was entering its final, most closely watched stretch. A poll conducted eighteen months earlier, before the currency crisis and the cost-of-living politics it has intensified reached their current pitch, might well have found a different ordering of priorities — not because Okinawans' underlying views on the base question had changed, but because the relative salience of economic anxiety against every other concern, base policy included, has shifted nationally in ways this newspaper's own front-page coverage this week amply documents.

This matters for how national policymakers, and this newspaper's own readers outside Okinawa, should interpret Sunday's result whatever it turns out to be. A Koja victory, if it comes, will likely be read in Tokyo — and, this newspaper suspects, in Washington — as evidence that Okinawan resistance to the base relocation has softened to the point of electoral irrelevance, a reading that would substantially understate what the polling actually shows. The polling shows economic anxiety has, for now, outranked base policy as the primary voting issue. It does not show that voters who rank the economy first have abandoned their views on Henoko, any more than a household worried primarily about grocery prices has necessarily abandoned its views on unrelated matters of foreign policy it is simply not being asked to vote on directly this particular Sunday. Genta Koja's own campaign has been notably careful on this point, pairing his support for the relocation plan with a heavy emphasis on economic development messaging rather than attempting to relitigate the relocation question on its own terms — a strategic choice this newspaper reads as the campaign's own recognition that winning an argument about Henoko directly remains considerably harder than winning an argument about jobs and prices, even in a political moment when the relocation question has receded from the top of voters' stated priorities.

There is a version of this shift that should trouble policymakers in Tokyo and Washington precisely because it looks, on its surface, like good news for the current base posture. If Okinawan economic anxiety can reliably crowd out base-policy salience whenever national cost-of-living pressure spikes, that creates an uncomfortable incentive structure: a national government facing sustained Okinawan resistance to its base policy would, on this reading, benefit politically from exactly the kind of broad economic distress currently gripping Japanese households, since that distress appears to reliably depress the salience of the base question relative to more immediate economic concerns. This newspaper does not believe the Takaichi government has engineered, or would ever deliberately engineer, economic hardship for this cynical purpose — the currency crisis and cost-of-living pressure driving this month's polling shift are real, unwelcome, and something the government has spent considerable political capital attempting to address rather than exploit. But the structural incentive the pattern reveals is worth naming plainly regardless of anyone's intent: a base-hosting arrangement whose local political sustainability depends partly on the base-hosting population being sufficiently economically comfortable to prioritize the base question over more pressing material concerns is a more fragile arrangement, in the long run, than one whose legitimacy rests on a settled, broadly shared view of the base presence's merits independent of the prevailing economic weather. If Sunday's outcome turns substantially on economic anxiety rather than a genuine resolution of the base debate, that outcome tells us less about whether Okinawa has made peace with hosting the preponderance of American forces in Japan than about which of two persistent grievances — economic marginalization or military overconcentration — happened to feel more urgent in the specific weeks this particular campaign's final poll was conducted.

This newspaper has covered, in recent editions, how Genta Koja's platform pairs support for the relocation plan with the planned return of American-held land south of Kadena Air Base under the 2013 consolidation framework — a package explicitly designed to offer Okinawan voters concrete economic and territorial benefits in exchange for accepting the relocation's completion, rather than asking voters to accept the relocation on security grounds alone. That pairing is itself a tacit acknowledgment, from a campaign backed by the national ruling coalition, that the old model of asking Okinawa to bear a disproportionate share of Japan's American military presence primarily in the name of national security and alliance solidarity has run out of persuasive power on its own terms, and that continued Okinawan cooperation increasingly requires being purchased through the kind of direct economic and territorial concessions Koja's platform offers. Whether that model — explicit economic exchange in place of appeals to shared national security interest — proves more durable than the one it is replacing is a question this newspaper cannot answer today, but we think it is the more honest way to describe what is actually happening in this campaign's closing argument than the simpler "Okinawa has moved on from bases" narrative that a surface reading of the polling might otherwise support.

There is also a reading of this shift that Denny Tamaki's own campaign has implicitly offered, and that this newspaper considers worth taking seriously on its own terms: that a base-opposition governor who has also demonstrated competent crisis management — Tamaki's administration has navigated both the Kumamoto-adjacent disaster-preparedness questions and this month's national currency turbulence without major visible missteps, a record his campaign has leaned into as evidence of steady governance — can credibly ask voters to trust him on the economic questions now dominating their attention precisely because his base-policy convictions have not required him to neglect the more mundane work of prefectural administration. Tamaki's shift toward emphasizing medical care and social welfare policy in his campaign's final weeks, which this newspaper's coverage has tracked as a tactical recalibration in response to the polling, can equally be read as Tamaki attempting to prove that a governor who prioritizes base opposition can simultaneously deliver on the economic concerns voters are telling pollsters matter most — an argument that, if it succeeds on Sunday, would offer a considerably more comfortable resolution for those who would prefer Okinawa's base resistance to remain politically durable even as economic anxiety temporarily commands more of the electorate's attention.

This newspaper does not know which of these readings Sunday's actual result will vindicate, and we are wary of the confident predictions already circulating in both Tokyo and Washington about what a Tamaki or Koja victory will supposedly prove about Okinawan sentiment on the base question specifically. What we do think can be said with confidence, regardless of Sunday's outcome, is that the seventy-year bargain underlying Japan's base-hosting arrangement with Okinawa — disproportionate military concentration in exchange for a mix of national security rationale, direct economic activity, and increasingly explicit territorial and development concessions — has entered a period of genuine renegotiation, however quietly that renegotiation is proceeding beneath the surface of a campaign nominally centered on grocery prices and healthcare policy. A bargain whose local political sustainability increasingly depends on active economic management rather than on a settled, independently durable consensus about the base presence's merits is a bargain that will require continuous tending from Tokyo regardless of who wins on Sunday — tending this newspaper intends to keep watching closely, in whatever form it takes once this particular election's results are counted and the next phase of the underlying negotiation, whatever shape it takes, inevitably begins.

It is worth placing this Okinawan dynamic alongside a comparison this newspaper has drawn elsewhere in recent coverage: the rapidly deteriorating US-Canada trade relationship, a dispute between two of the most deeply integrated economies on earth that unraveled with a speed few observers anticipated even a year ago. The parallel is not exact — Okinawa's relationship to Tokyo and Washington is a matter of basing rights and territorial burden-sharing rather than tariff schedules — but the underlying structural lesson rhymes in a way this newspaper thinks is instructive. Both cases involve a long-standing arrangement whose durability depended substantially on an accumulated stock of institutional trust and mutual benefit that both sides had, over decades, come to treat as effectively permanent rather than as something requiring continuous, active renewal. Both cases are now revealing, under stress, how much of that apparent permanence actually depended on background conditions — economic comfort, in Okinawa's case; a shared assumption of good-faith negotiation, in Canada's — that turned out to be more contingent than either side's rhetoric acknowledged while those conditions still held. Japan's national government would do well to draw the lesson explicitly: an arrangement as consequential as the Okinawa basing structure cannot be safely assumed to run on institutional momentum alone, regardless of which candidate wins Sunday's election or by what margin.

The economic concessions embedded in Koja's platform — the Kadena land return, the broader development package his campaign has emphasized — represent one model for how that continuous renewal might be attempted going forward: an explicit, transactional acknowledgment that Okinawan cooperation has a price, and that paying it in concrete economic terms is both more honest and, this newspaper suspects, more durable than continuing to lean primarily on appeals to shared national security interest that a growing share of Okinawan voters, on the evidence of successive elections and referenda, have simply stopped finding persuasive on their own terms. Tokyo's national government has, in fact, moved gradually in this direction across multiple administrations, with successive economic development packages targeted specifically at Okinawa Prefecture in ways that acknowledge, if rarely in so many words, the transactional character the relationship has increasingly assumed. Whether the current package on offer is generous enough, structured well enough, and credible enough in its implementation timeline to meaningfully shift the underlying political economy is a separate question this newspaper cannot resolve today, but the direction of travel — toward more explicit economic exchange and away from appeals to abstract security solidarity — seems, on the evidence of this campaign specifically, difficult to reverse regardless of Sunday's specific outcome.

Readers outside Okinawa, including many in mainland Japan who have historically treated the base question as a distant, largely settled matter of national security policy rather than a live and continuously renegotiated political bargain, should take one further lesson from this campaign's closing weeks: the economic anxiety currently reshaping Okinawan electoral priorities is not a uniquely Okinawan phenomenon layered atop a uniquely Okinawan base dispute. It is the same national cost-of-living pressure this newspaper has covered in exhaustive detail across our currency, wage and trade reporting this week, simply expressing itself through the particular electoral lens Okinawa happens to be offering voters this specific Sunday. A prefecture whose politics have long served as something of an early, more intense preview of tensions that eventually surface more broadly across Japan may, in this instance, be offering the rest of the country an early look at how thoroughly economic anxiety can reorder political priorities once it reaches sufficient intensity — a lesson mainland readers watching Sunday's results would do well to absorb for reasons that extend considerably beyond Okinawa's own borders.

Continued on Page 13

EDITORIAL & OPINION

What It Means That Okinawa Would Rather Talk About Prices Than Bases — Continued from Page 12

One final observation, offered with appropriate humility about how much can genuinely be inferred from a single pre-election poll: this newspaper has spent this essay treating the 47-to-16.6 split as evidence of a meaningful, if complicated, shift in Okinawan political priorities. We should note the alternative possibility our own reporting cannot fully rule out — that this particular poll, conducted by a specific outlet using a specific methodology at a specific moment in an unusually currency-turbulent national news cycle, captures something more transient than a durable realignment of Okinawan political identity. Polls conducted closer to the vote, or after it, may tell a different story, and this newspaper will report that story with the same attention we have given this one if it emerges. What will not change, whatever the polling ultimately shows, is the underlying structural tension this essay has tried to name plainly: a prefecture asked to host a disproportionate share of an alliance's military burden, whose continued willingness to do so has always depended on a bargain more complicated, and more continuously renegotiated, than either "national security requires it" or "Okinawa has made its peace with it" fully captures. Sunday's voters will decide who leads that renegotiation for the next four years. This newspaper's job is to keep describing, as honestly as the reporting allows, what is actually being negotiated underneath the headline result.

A postscript worth adding for readers who will read this essay after Sunday's result is known: whichever candidate wins, this newspaper intends to revisit this analysis explicitly rather than let the result stand as self-explanatory. A narrow result either way will likely sustain the reading offered here, that the underlying bargain remains genuinely contested and continuously renegotiated. A decisive result in either direction would deserve its own honest reckoning with whether this essay's central claim — that economic anxiety, not a settled resolution of the base question, is driving Sunday's outcome — held up against the fuller evidence a completed election, rather than a single pre-vote poll, will provide. That is, in the end, the standard this newspaper tries to hold itself to across every story we cover with the depth this format allows: not simply reporting what a poll or a headline number suggests in the moment, but returning to test whether the fuller pattern of events ultimately bears out the interpretation offered when the evidence was still incomplete. Readers are owed that follow-through as much as they are owed the initial analysis, and this newspaper does not consider a story finished simply because the news cycle has moved on to whatever claims the front page next.

EDITORIAL & OPINION

The New Alliance Economics: What This Summer Actually Taught Us

Joint currency intervention, a \$550 billion investment framework, and a cautionary tale from Canada. This newspaper asks what they add up to

By Jonathan Mercer | Senior Editor, International Desk

Three stories have dominated this newspaper's coverage of the US-Japan relationship this summer, and we have, until now, mostly covered them separately: the joint currency intervention that helped pull the yen back from a 40-year low, the continued rollout of the \$550 billion bilateral investment framework, and the deepening defense-industrial cooperation on shipbuilding and munitions that has advanced alongside a genuinely crowded regional security agenda. Treated individually, each is a discrete policy story with its own timeline, its own officials, its own set of winners and losers. Treated together, and set against the cautionary counter-example this newspaper has drawn repeatedly from the deteriorating US-Canada trade relationship, they add up to something this newspaper believes deserves to be named explicitly: a genuinely new model of how the United States manages its closest alliances, one that looks less like the postwar template of security guarantees exchanged for basing rights and diplomatic deference, and more like a continuously negotiated economic partnership in which currency policy, investment commitments and defense cooperation are treated as interlocking components of a single, actively managed relationship rather than as separate tracks that happen to run in parallel.

Start with what makes this summer's currency coordination genuinely unusual rather than merely newsworthy. Joint intervention between Washington and Tokyo has happened before — the last comparable coordinated operation dates to 1998 — but the context surrounding that precedent was fundamentally different from today's. The 1998 intervention came amid the Asian financial crisis, a moment of genuine regional financial contagion in which a collapsing yen threatened to destabilize economies well beyond Japan's own borders, giving Washington a direct, self-interested stake in supporting the currency that had little to do with the bilateral US-Japan relationship specifically. This summer's intervention arrived under different circumstances entirely: no regional contagion, no acute financial crisis beyond Japan's own borders, simply a currency that had drifted to a genuinely uncomfortable level for Japanese households and that Washington, for reasons of its own trade politics, had clear incentive to help correct. That Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent proved willing to commit US resources and credibility to a currency intervention justified substantially by Japan's domestic political needs, rather than by any comparable American or global financial-stability imperative, marks a meaningful shift in how directly Washington is now willing to intervene in support of a key ally's specific domestic economic circumstances — a form of alliance management considerably more hands-on than the security-guarantee-for-basing-rights template that has organized the relationship for most of the postwar period.

The \$550 billion investment framework, this newspaper's second thread, extends the same logic into industrial policy. Rather than the more traditional pattern of bilateral trade negotiation — tariff schedules, market-access quotas, the kind of transactional haggling that has defined the deteriorating US-Canada relationship this newspaper has covered at length — the framework organizes Japanese capital directly around American strategic priorities: semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, critical minerals, shipbuilding, energy, artificial intelligence. It is, in effect, an attempt to align Japanese industrial investment with American industrial policy so closely that the two countries' economic strategies become difficult to fully disentangle from one another, a degree of coordination considerably deeper than a conventional trade agreement typically attempts. Japanese officials interviewed for this newspaper's ongoing coverage have been explicit that they consider this structural feature the framework's core distinction from more conventional trade arrangements, including, implicitly, the kind of arrangement Canada has found itself relitigating this year under considerably more adversarial terms.

The shipbuilding and defense-industrial cooperation this newspaper has tracked in recent weeks completes the pattern. Japanese shipbuilders' growing role in addressing the US Navy's own well-documented capacity constraints, and the expanding munitions-production cooperation both governments have pursued amid the Gulf conflict's sustained demand pressure, extend the same logic of deep, continuously managed integration from currency and civilian investment into the defense-industrial base itself — traditionally among the most jealously guarded, nationally sensitive corners of any advanced economy's industrial policy. That Japan and the United States are now integrating defense production planning to this degree represents, on its own, a significant evolution in how the alliance's military dimension is managed, quite apart from the traditional security-guarantee architecture that has anchored the relationship since 1960.

What ties these three threads together, in this newspaper's assessment, is not simply that all three happen to be occurring simultaneously, but that they share a common underlying logic: an alliance relationship being actively, continuously renegotiated and re-justified on economic and industrial terms, rather than resting on the kind of accumulated postwar institutional inertia that allowed earlier generations of officials on both sides to treat the relationship's basic terms as largely settled. This is, we think, the genuinely new model worth naming. The traditional alliance template assumed that a foundational security bargain, once established, would continue generating cooperation across other domains more or less automatically, sustained by shared strategic interest and accumulated institutional trust rather than by continuous, explicit renegotiation of each component. The emerging model this summer has clarified looks different: currency coordination, investment flows and defense-industrial integration each appear to require their own ongoing justification, their own periodic renewal of mutual benefit, rather than following automatically from the underlying security relationship's continued existence.

The Canada comparison this newspaper has drawn repeatedly this week is instructive here precisely because it shows what happens when that continuous renegotiation breaks down rather than succeeds. Canada's relationship with the United States rested, for decades, on exactly the kind of accumulated institutional trust the traditional alliance template assumes — a free-trade agreement, deeply integrated automotive and energy supply chains, a shared security architecture through NORAD and NATO — that both governments largely treated as a stable, self-sustaining background condition rather than as something requiring active, continuous management. When specific grievances accumulated — dairy market access, softwood lumber pricing, digital-services taxation — the absence of a continuously renegotiated, explicitly justified relationship left both governments without an obvious mechanism for resolving them short of the maximalist tariff escalation that has now defined more than eighteen months of the relationship. Japan's framework, this newspaper's reporting suggests, was built with something like this failure mode in mind, however implicitly: by making the economic and industrial dimensions of the relationship explicit, continuously negotiated and mutually justified rather than assumed, Tokyo and Washington have, so far, avoided the kind of accumulated, unaddressed grievance that eventually overwhelmed the US-Canada relationship's older, more implicit model.

This newspaper does not want to overstate the contrast. Japan's framework is young — barely more than a year old in its current form — and has not yet faced the kind of sustained political pressure, from either a change in American administration priorities or a genuine Japanese domestic backlash against the scale of American-directed investment, that would test whether its more explicit, continuously negotiated structure actually proves more durable than Canada's older, more implicit one, or simply has not yet encountered the circumstances that would reveal comparable fragility. Skeptics within Japan's own policy establishment, this newspaper has reported in earlier coverage, have raised exactly this concern: that a framework requiring this much continuous, active management is also a framework that requires continuous political investment to sustain, investment that could prove harder to maintain during a future Japanese administration less personally invested in the relationship than the current one, or during a future American administration whose priorities shift in ways the framework's current structure did not anticipate.

There is also a harder question this newspaper thinks deserves more direct treatment than either government's public communications typically offer: what does this new model of continuously negotiated, economically integrated alliance management actually cost Japan in terms of policy autonomy, relative to the more implicit, less continuously renegotiated relationship it is replacing? A framework this explicitly organized around American strategic priorities — the specific sectors targeted for investment, the specific terms of currency coordination, the specific structure of defense-industrial integration — is, definitionally, a framework in which Japanese industrial and monetary policy bends more visibly toward American preferences than a more implicit, arms-length alliance relationship would require. Japanese officials interviewed for this newspaper's coverage have generally framed this alignment as reflecting genuine, freely chosen mutual interest rather than externally imposed constraint, and our reporting has found little evidence of the kind of visible domestic political resistance that would suggest otherwise. But genuine mutual interest and externally shaped constraint are not always as easy to distinguish from one another as either government's public framing suggests, particularly when the party with greater relative economic and military weight in the relationship is the one whose strategic priorities the framework is explicitly organized around meeting.

This newspaper's own view, offered with the appropriate humility of an outlet covering a relationship still actively unfolding rather than one whose long-term verdict can yet be confidently rendered, is that the new model this summer has clarified represents a genuinely more resilient template than the one it is replacing, precisely because it trades the false comfort of assumed permanence for the harder, more continuous work of explicit, mutual justification — the same distinction this newspaper drew in assessing what the Canada dispute reveals about institutional trust more broadly. An alliance relationship that requires continuous tending is, by that same token, a relationship whose participants cannot as easily drift into the kind of unaddressed, accumulated grievance that eventually overwhelmed the US-Canada relationship's more implicit structure. But continuous tending is also, definitionally, more demanding — of diplomatic bandwidth, of domestic political capital, of the sustained attention from senior officials on both sides that a more implicit, institutionally inertial relationship never required to the same degree.

It is worth examining, too, who within each government has actually driven this shift toward continuous, explicit management, because the answer complicates any assumption that the new model reflects a deliberate, top-down strategic choice made simultaneously by both capitals. On the Japanese side, this newspaper's reporting points to a policy establishment responding substantially to circumstance rather than executing a long-premeditated design: a currency crisis that demanded intervention, a trade negotiation that produced the investment framework as its price of admission, a regional security environment that made defense-industrial cooperation increasingly necessary regardless of any broader theory about alliance management. On the American side, Treasury Secretary Bessent's own public enthusiasm for the currency coordination specifically appears to reflect his own reading of what serves American trade interests in this particular moment, rather than a settled interagency consensus about how alliance relationships should be structured going forward. This newspaper raises this not to diminish the significance of what has emerged, but to note that a model built substantially through improvisation in response to specific pressures is, almost by definition, less institutionally secure than one built through deliberate design — a distinction that matters considerably for how confidently either government's officials, or outside observers like this newspaper, should predict the model's durability once the specific pressures that produced it eventually recede.

This newspaper would also note a structural asymmetry in the new model that deserves more direct acknowledgment than either government has offered publicly: the continuous management this essay has described runs, in practice, considerably more through Tokyo's active accommodation of Washington's priorities than through the reverse. Japan adjusts its currency intervention posture partly in response to American trade-political needs. Japan directs investment capital toward sectors Washington has identified as strategic priorities. Japan expands shipbuilding capacity to address a US Navy capacity shortfall that is, definitionally, an American problem Japanese industrial policy is being asked to help solve. This is not a criticism of Japanese officials' negotiating competence — this newspaper's reporting suggests they have secured real, substantial benefits from the relationship, including the currency support at the center of this week's coverage — but it is a description worth stating plainly rather than obscuring behind the more symmetrical-sounding language of "coordination" and "partnership" that official communications on both sides tend to favor. A genuinely symmetrical new alliance model would show comparable examples of American policy bending toward Japanese strategic priorities in ways this newspaper's reporting has, to date, found comparatively difficult to identify with the same specificity.

None of which should be read as this newspaper arguing that Japan has been poorly served by the arrangement, on the evidence available so far. The currency intervention has delivered genuine relief to Japanese households after years of weak-yen cost-of-living pressure. The investment framework has directed substantial capital toward Japanese firms' own strategic priorities in semiconductors and advanced manufacturing, not merely toward American ones. The defense-industrial cooperation addresses genuine Japanese security interests in a region where North Korea's continued weapons development and the broader regional security environment give Tokyo every reason to want closer American defense-industrial integration regardless of whose capacity constraints originally motivated the specific shipbuilding cooperation now underway. The asymmetry this newspaper has identified is real, but a relationship can be asymmetric in its structure while still delivering genuine, substantial benefit to the less dominant party — precisely the kind of nuanced assessment this newspaper believes a mature alliance relationship actually requires, rather than the simpler binary of exploitation versus partnership that cruder commentary on alliance economics sometimes offers.

Looking ahead, this newspaper sees three tests that will determine whether the new model proves durable beyond the specific circumstances of this particular summer. The first is generational: whether Japanese public support for this level of economic and industrial alignment with American priorities survives a change of government to a less personally invested administration than the current one, or whether it depends substantially on the specific political relationships current officials on both sides have built. The second is cyclical: whether the model survives a genuine divergence of interest between Washington and Tokyo, of the kind that has not yet meaningfully arisen during a summer in which currency, investment and defense priorities have happened to align closely, but that seems inevitable to emerge eventually given how rarely two governments' interests remain perfectly aligned indefinitely. The third, and perhaps most consequential, is comparative: whether other American allies, watching how thoroughly Japan has integrated its economic and industrial policy with Washington's priorities, conclude that the arrangement offers a template worth emulating, or instead watch Canada's considerably more adversarial experience and conclude that deep economic integration with the current American administration carries risks that outweigh whatever benefits Japan has secured. This newspaper does not know how any of these three tests will ultimately resolve. We do know they represent the actual stakes of the model this summer has revealed, considerably more consequential than any single currency intervention or investment tranche considered in isolation.

Whether Japan and the United States can sustain that level of continuous engagement across changes of government on both sides, through whatever future currency, trade or security crises arise beyond the ones this newspaper has spent the summer covering, is the genuine open question this new model of alliance economics now poses — and one this newspaper intends to keep answering, one summer's worth of currency intervention, investment framework consultation and defense cooperation at a time, for as long as the relationship continues evolving along the lines this year has revealed.

Continued on Page 15

EDITORIAL & OPINION

The New Alliance Economics: What This Summer Actually Taught Us — Continued from Page 14

For now, the evidence this newspaper has gathered across a summer of covering currency intervention, investment framework consultations and defense-industrial cooperation points toward a cautiously positive assessment: the new model is working, in the narrow sense that it has produced a stronger yen, continued investment flows, and deepening defense cooperation without the kind of breakdown now playing out between Washington and Ottawa. Whether it continues working depends on factors well beyond this newspaper's ability to forecast with confidence — the outcome of the Bank of Japan's own rate decisions, the durability of the current American administration's trade priorities, the political sustainability in Japan of a relationship requiring this much continuous, visible alignment with American strategic interests. What this newspaper can say with more confidence is that the old template, the one Canada's experience this year has shown to be considerably more fragile than decades of accumulated institutional trust made it appear, is not the template Japan and the United States are currently operating under. Whether that is cause for relief or for a different kind of concern about where the relationship's genuine leverage now sits is a question this newspaper suspects will only be answered by watching, closely and continuously, exactly as we have tried to do across the stories that led to this essay.

A final word on method, since this newspaper has now published three separate long-form essays this week alone examining different facets of the same underlying summer of currency, trade and alliance news. We do not consider this repetition. Each essay has approached a genuinely distinct question — what the currency intervention reveals about two decades of monetary policy, what a single election reveals about the durability of a seventy-year basing bargain, and what this summer's accumulated pattern of currency, investment and defense cooperation reveals about the alliance's changing structure — using the same underlying events as source material precisely because those events turn out to bear on more than one important question simultaneously. This newspaper considers that density of implication, rather than any single dramatic headline, the actual story of this particular summer, and we have tried to give each of its component questions the sustained treatment a conventional daily news article, however well reported, is simply not built to provide. It is, this newspaper believes, the kind of attention a story of this genuine consequence to Japan's households, its alliance posture and its economic future actually deserves, even when — especially when — delivering it requires more of both writer and reader than the ordinary rhythm of daily news coverage typically asks of either.

Readers who have followed this newspaper's coverage across the full arc of this story -- from the first reports of the yen's July collapse through this week's wage data and the cartoon that opened this essay's companion piece -- will recognize that no single installment fully captured the picture. That is, we would argue, simply how a genuinely complex economic and diplomatic story unfolds in real time: not as a single, fully-formed revelation, but as an accumulating record that only makes complete sense once enough of its pieces are finally laid out side by side, as we have tried to do today.



OUR STAFF — THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE JAPAN MORNING POST

Founded in service of accurate, fair and complete coverage of Japan and its place in the world.

OWNER:

Paul Carter | PUBLISHER: WPM Productions

MANAGING EDITOR:

Dixon Yan

SENIOR EDITOR, INTERNATIONAL DESK:

Jonathan Mercer

POLITICS & POLICY:

Michael Hayes, Deputy Editor | William, Senior Political Analyst

JAPAN BUREAU:

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

ECONOMICS & FINANCE:

Yuki Saito | DATA & VISUALIZATION: Kenta Sakamoto

JAPAN-U.S. COVERAGE:

Rachel Kim, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

INVESTIGATIONS & LONGFORM:

Daisuke Ito

TECHNOLOGY & SCIENCE:

Ethan Cole, Editor | Maya Suzuki, Science & Innovation

CULTURE & SOCIETY:

Naomi Kato, Editor

SPORTS:

Oliver Brooks, Desk Editor | Haruto Yamamoto, Reporter

FOOD & RESTAURANTS:

Grace Park | REAL ESTATE & URBAN DEVELOPMENT: Kenji Fukuda

EDITORIAL PAGE:

Samantha Ortiz, Editor

PHOTO EDITOR:

Hiroshi Nakamura, Tokyo | GRAPHICS DIRECTOR: Claire Reynolds

STAFF CARTOONIST:

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

COPY DESK:

Benjamin Lee, Chief | Olivia Martinez, Features

MULTIMEDIA & VIDEO:

Akira Watanabe | RESEARCH & ARCHIVE: Hana Ito

PAGE DESIGN & PRODUCTION:

Daniel Foster

ADVERTISING & PARTNERSHIPS:

Linda Carter (U.S.) | Takeshi Mori (Japan)

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT:

Sophia Grant | READER RELATIONS & SUBSCRIPTIONS: Mika Tan

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

EDITORIAL STANDARDS & PRACTICE

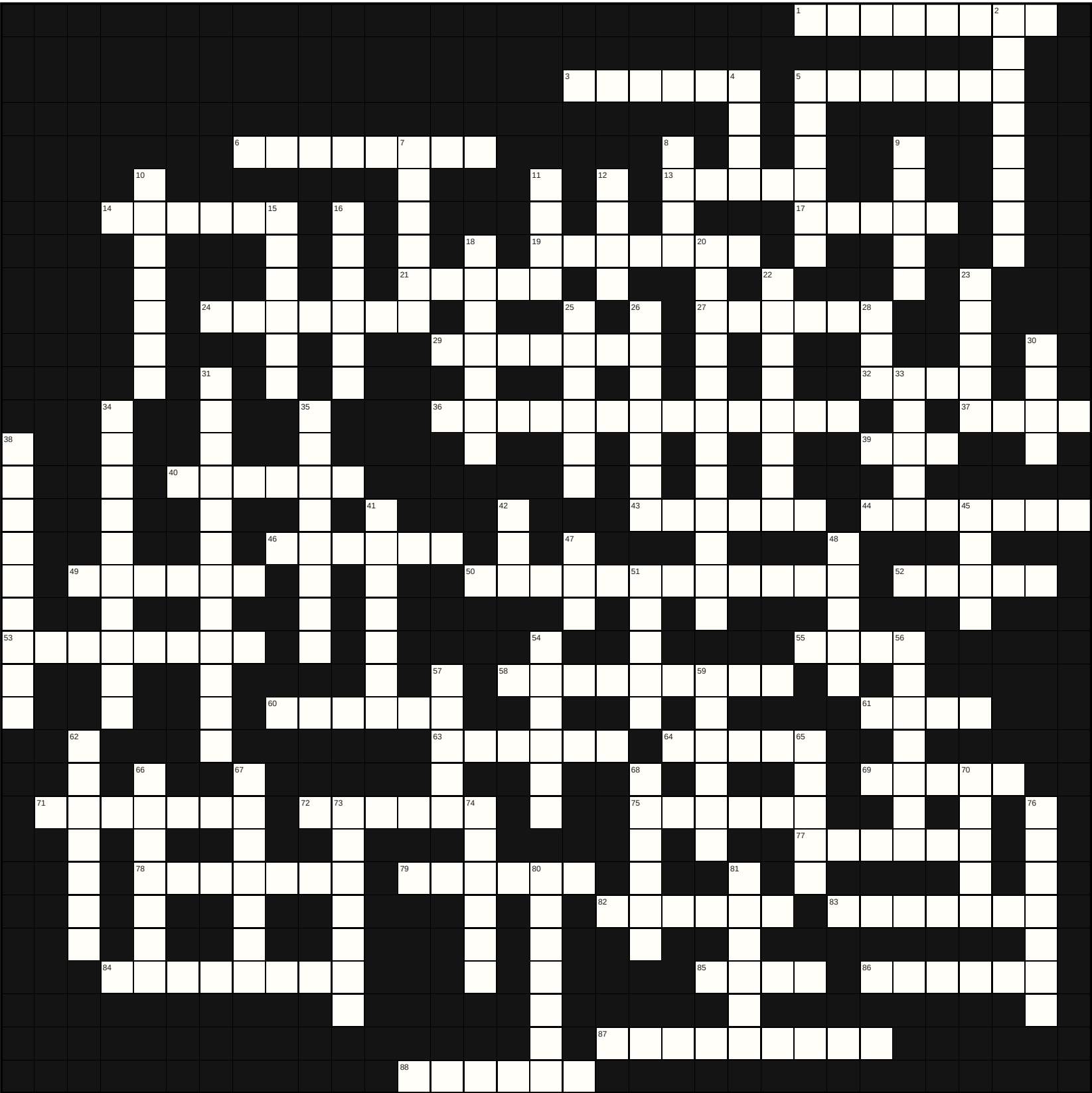
The Japan Morning Post is edited and produced independently of WPM Productions' ownership. News reporting and editorial opinion are kept separate: articles appearing under the Editorial & Opinion banner reflect the newspaper's institutional view or that of a named columnist; all other reporting is written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

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

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

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Today's Professional Puzzle — Constructed by James O'Neill — 89 Words



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

ACROSS

1. Finance minister managing the currency story (8)
3. Import tax central to the Canada-US dispute (6)
5. North Korean site with an expanded enrichment annex (7)
6. The U.N. General ____, opening this month (8)
13. Japanese term for a vacant, abandoned house (5)
14. Voting slip (6)
17. Gate marking a Shinto shrine (5)
19. Autumn rice ____, proceeding on schedule (7)
21. City phasing out magnetic train tickets (5)
24. Coolest big city on today's weather map (7)
27. Landform surrounded by water, like Japan itself (6)
29. Japanese term for short-term lodging (7)
32. Survey showing economy ahead of bases in Okinawa (4)
36. Chip industry's core material, in short (13)
37. Martial arts training hall (4)
39. Osaka theme park opening a record Halloween event (3)
40. Classical Japanese drama form (6)
43. Air base near land Kōja would return to Japan (6)
44. One of two yokozuna atop September's banzuke (7)
46. Woven straw floor mat (6)
49. Narrow passage like Hormuz (6)
50. Government action to defend a currency (12)
52. Noodle soup dish (5)
53. Prefecture in its seventh week of earthquake recovery (8)
55. BOJ governor weighing a rate hike (4)
58. \$550 billion US-Japan investment pact (9)
60. Southern island where Kumamoto and Fukuoka sit (6)
61. Institution like the BOJ (4)
63. BOJ board member who said hike "nimby" (6)
64. Share of company ownership (5)
69. Grand sumo tournament, opening Sunday (5)
71. Japan's ceremonial head of state (7)
72. Sacred Shinto site (6)
75. Coastal area where Futenma would relocate (6)
77. Okinawa's incumbent governor seeking a third term (6)
78. Suica's outgoing mascot (7)
79. Goods brought from abroad, cheaper with the yen's rise (6)
82. High-level meeting of leaders (6)
83. Defense minister retaining his post (7)
84. Japan's prime minister, Sanae ____ (8)
85. Government debt instrument, sold to fund defense (4)
86. Miniature potted tree (6)
87. October holiday USJ celebrates with zombies (9)
88. Where stocks are traded (6)

DOWN

2. Cabinet-level official (8)
4. Japan's highest peak (4)
5. Striking martial art (6)
7. Fast-growing woody grass (6)
8. What rose fastest since 1997 this week (4)
9. IC card whose penguin mascot is retiring (5)
10. Sliced raw fish dish (7)
11. Okinawa's capital, warmest city on today's map (4)
12. Zero interest rate policy, for short (4)
15. Buddhist place of worship (6)
16. Tiered ceremonial tower (6)
18. Body of ministers Takaichi will soon reshuffle (7)
20. Industry where Japan aids US Navy capacity (12)
22. Democratic vote, as in Okinawa, this Sunday (8)
23. Return on a bond, near a 3-decade high (5)
25. Powdered green tea (6)
26. US Commerce Secretary meeting Akazawa (9)
28. Opposition party Tamaki now leads (3)
30. Genta ____, Okinawa's LDP-backed challenger (4)
31. Bringing capital home, as carry traders now are (12)
33. Japanese hot spring (5)
34. Borrow-cheap-in-yen strategy now unwinding (10)
35. Island hosting RapiDus's fab (8)
38. Ryogoku venue hosting the Aki Basho (9)
41. Chip venture nearing a 3 trillion yen pledge (7)
42. Meditative Buddhist school (3)
45. Ancient Japanese wrestling (4)
47. Currency recovering from a 40-year low (3)
48. Benchmark like the Nikkei 225 (5)
51. One who casts a ballot (5)
54. Formal agreement between nations (6)
56. Trade minister meeting Lutnick and Greer (7)
57. Traditional floor bedding (5)
59. Dodgers star continuing as a hitter only (6)
62. Feudal Japanese warrior (7)
65. City following Shinjuku in curbing rentals (5)
66. Battered, deep-fried dish (7)
67. Art of paper folding (7)
68. Historic military ruler of Japan (6)
70. Seventeen-syllable poem (5)
73. Central League's leading ballclub (7)
74. Goods sent abroad, squeezed by a stronger yen (6)
76. Ocean bordering Japan's east coast (7)
80. Foreign currency stockpile a government draws on (7)
81. Traditional Japanese robe (6)

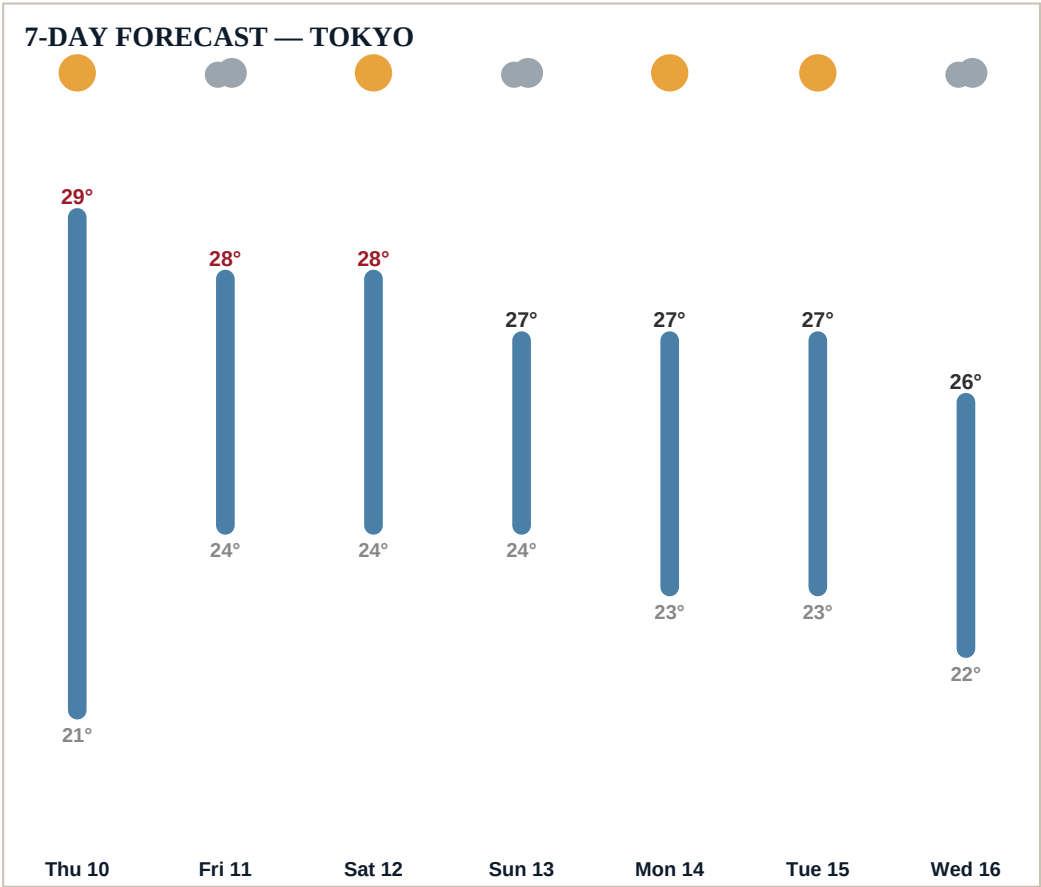
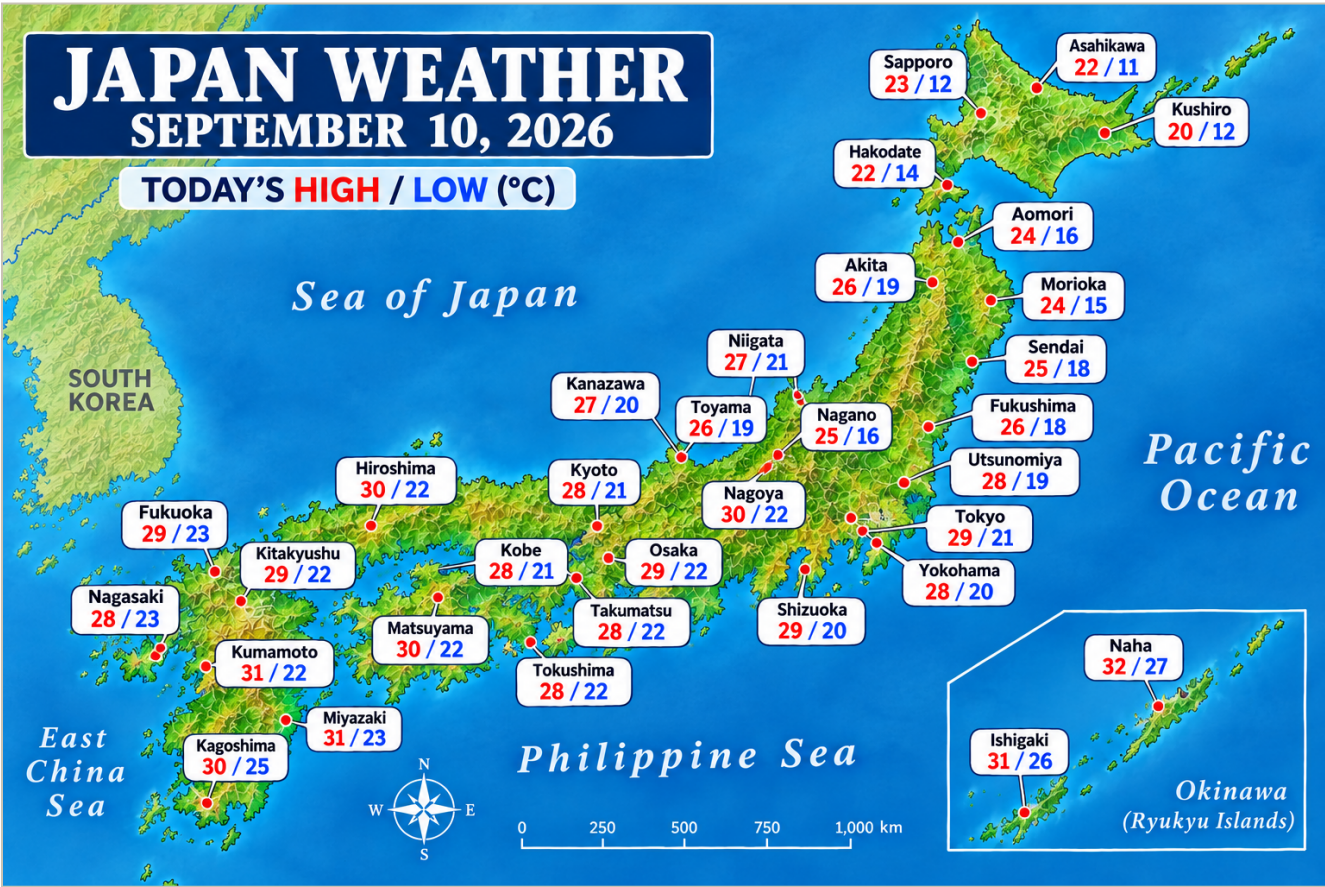
Yesterday's Puzzle, Solved — Wednesday, September 9, 2026 — 92 Words

[illegible]

WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

29°C

Tokyo — Sunny and humid, a full continuation of late-summer conditions



TOKYO METROPOLITAN AREA — Thursday, September 10, 2026

Morning: Sunny and warm, 24°C, continuing the settled pattern that has held across the Kanto region since the middle of this week. Light winds from the southwest. Sunrise 5:18 a.m.

Afternoon: Sunny and humid, high near 29°C, a full continuation of late-summer conditions. UV levels running high given clear skies; sun protection recommended for extended time outdoors.

Evening: Clear and mild, cooling toward 24°C by 9 p.m. Sunset 5:58 p.m. Comfortable conditions for evening commutes and outdoor dining.

Overnight: Clear, low near 21°C. A third consecutive dry, settled night across central Japan.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Clear, warm conditions extend across almost the entire country today, from Hokkaido's comparatively mild 23°C high in Sapporo to a steamy 32°C in Naha, Okinawa. The settled pattern that arrived earlier this week shows no sign of breaking, with the Meteorological Agency's national outlook calling for continued dry, stable weather through the coming week — good news heading into Sunday's twin events, the Aki Basho sumo tournament's opening in Tokyo and Okinawa's gubernatorial election, both of which should proceed under comfortable, dry skies.

UV INDEX & AIR QUALITY

UV Index: 8 (Very High) nationally, typical for a clear early-September day. Air Quality Index: Good in most regions. Pollen: Negligible, though the early autumn ragweed season typically begins in the coming weeks.

TODAY'S HIGH / LOW BY REGION (°C)

Hokkaido — Sapporo 23/12, Asahikawa 22/11, Kushiro 20/12, Hakodate 22/14: the coolest readings in the country today, with Hokkaido continuing to enjoy the clearest, most autumn-like conditions nationally.

Tohoku — Aomori 24/16, Morioka 24/15, Akita 26/19, Sendai 25/18, Fukushima 26/18: comfortably warm with overnight lows now beginning to hint at the season's eventual turn.

Chubu & Hokuriku — Niigata 27/21, Toyama 26/19, Kanazawa 27/20, Nagano 25/16, Nagoya 30/22: Nagoya running warmest in the region as the Tokai area's late-summer pattern holds firm.

Kanto — Utsunomiya 28/19, Tokyo 29/21, Yokohama 28/20, Shizuoka 29/20: consistent, comfortable late-summer warmth across the capital region.

Kansai — Kyoto 28/21, Kobe 28/21, Osaka 29/22: steady, humid warmth typical of early September in the Kansai basin.

Shikoku — Takamatsu 28/22, Tokushima 28/22, Matsuyama 30/22: Matsuyama the day's warmest reading on the island.

Chugoku & Kyushu — Hiroshima 30/22, Kitakyushu 29/22, Fukuoka 29/23, Nagasaki 28/23, Kumamoto 31/22, Miyazaki 31/23, Kagoshima 30/25: Kumamoto and Miyazaki both reaching into the low 30s, consistent with southern Kyushu's typically later transition out of summer heat.

Okinawa — Naha 32/27, Ishigaki 31/26: the warmest readings nationally, as expected for the Ryukyu Islands in mid-September, with overnight lows remaining firmly tropical.

SEVEN-DAY EXTENDED FORECAST FOR TOKYO

Friday, Sept. 11: High 28°C, low 24°C. Partly cloudy with a slight chance of an isolated afternoon shower; otherwise dry.

Saturday, Sept. 12: High 28°C, low 24°C. Warm and humid with hazy sunshine, comfortable for weekend plans.

Sunday, Sept. 13: High 27°C, low 24°C. Partly cloudy. Sumo fans arriving at Ryogoku Kokugikan for the Aki Basho's opening day, and Okinawa voters heading to the polls, should find comfortable, dry conditions in their respective regions.

Monday, Sept. 14: High 27°C, low 23°C. Mostly sunny with early signs of gradually easing humidity.

Tuesday, Sept. 15: High 27°C, low 23°C. Mostly sunny and warm, continuing the settled pattern.

Wednesday, Sept. 16: High 26°C, low 22°C. Partly cloudy, with the first hints of the seasonal transition toward autumn expected by the following week.

Thursday, Sept. 17: High 26°C, low 22°C. Mostly sunny. The Bank of Japan's two-day policy meeting begins today in Tokyo.

EXTENDED OUTLOOK (September 11-17)

The settled, warm pattern now in place nationally is expected to persist through the coming week, continuing through both the Aki Basho's Sept. 13 opening and Okinawa's gubernatorial election the same day, before the first tentative signs of an autumn transition arrive around Sept. 16-17 in the form of modestly cooler overnight lows. Forecasters continue to monitor the western Pacific for further tropical development given this year's above-average typhoon season, though no system currently poses a near-term threat to Japan.

ALMANAC

Today's sunrise: 5:18 a.m. Today's sunset: 5:58 p.m. Day length: 12 hours, 40 minutes, continuing to shorten by roughly two minutes daily as the autumnal equinox approaches later this month. Moon phase: Waning gibbous. Tokyo Bay tide times: high tide 8:15 a.m. and 8:48 p.m.; low tide 2:20 p.m. Barometric pressure: 1016 hPa and steady, consistent with the settled conditions nationally.

CLASSIFIEDS & NOTICES

CLASSIFIEDS, LEGAL NOTICES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

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

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

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

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

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

OTEMACHI CURRENCY RISK ADVISORY: Hedging strategy consultations for exporters navigating this month's yen movement. hedging@otemachifx.jp

LEGAL & PUBLIC NOTICES

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

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

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

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

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

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

ADDITIONAL PROPERTY LISTINGS

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

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

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

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

PUBLIC NOTICES

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

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: The Japan Morning Post regrets that earlier editions rendered the name of Okinawa gubernatorial candidate Genta Koja incorrectly. The correct name is Genta Koja, and this edition's coverage reflects the correction. Please direct further inquiries to corrections@japanmorningpost.com.