

Japan: Easy start for Abe's LDP-led government

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Support for Abe Cabinet rises to 66.7%

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The support rating for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet has risen to 66.7 percent, up from 62.0 percent in the previous poll conducted in December after the Liberal Democratic Party returned to power, reflecting public expectations for the premier's initiative to achieve economic recovery, a Kyodo News poll showed Sunday.

In the nationwide telephone survey conducted Saturday and Sunday. The survey reached 1,452 households with eligible voters, with responses received from 1,026.

Asked why they support the Cabinet, 33.7 percent of respondents cited its economic policies, up 4 points from the previous survey.

The latest Cabinet approval rate exceeded the 65.0 percent high Abe secured at the start of his one-year stint as prime minister from September 2006. The disapproval rating this time stood at 22.1 percent.

In the survey, 37.2 percent of the respondents said they intend to vote for the LDP in the proportional representation section of the House of Councillors election in the summer, compared with 12.1 percent for the newly launched Japan Restoration Party, co-headed by Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto and former Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara, 8.8 percent for the Democratic Party of Japan and 6.2 percent for Your Party.

The LDP's approval rating also increased 6.4 points to 40.7 percent, exceeding 40 percent for the first time since January 2007, when Abe was in power.

Other parties' approval ratings stood at 9.6 percent for the Japan Restoration Party, 9.5 percent for the DPJ, 6.4 percent for Your Party, 3.1 percent for the New Komeito party, the LDP's junior coalition partner, 2.5 percent for the Japanese Communist Party and 1.0 percent for the Social Democratic Party, while 24.3 percent said they do not support a specific party.

On Abe's initiative to end deflation, 51.8 percent welcomed the fiscal 2012 supplementary budget, which includes emergency economic measures centering on public works projects, while 62.0

percent said they agreed with the introduction of the 2 percent inflation target, according to the survey.

On the planned increase in the consumption tax rate, 75.6 percent said they expect the government to lower the tax rate on daily necessities such as food when it eventually raises the sales tax rate through a two-stage process to 10 percent in October 2015, while 18.6 percent said they do not see the need for such a reduction.

In the survey, 53.0 percent agreed with Japan's participation in negotiations on the U.S.-led Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade framework, which would require countries to eliminate tariffs without exception, while 35.4 percent were opposed.

Kyodo Press, January 27, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130127p2g00m0dm080000c.html>

Ruling bloc seeks to win majority in upper house election to break divided Diet

About 205 people are preparing to run in the upcoming House of Councillors election this coming summer, and the focus of the poll is whether the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and New Komeito will be able to win at least 64 seats together to dissolve the problem of the divided Diet.

Upper House elections are held every three years with half of the 242 seats being contested in one election. As of Jan. 27, some 205 people were preparing to run in the election for 121 seats up for grabs, according to a survey conducted by the Mainichi Shimbun. The main focus of the election is whether the LDP and its coalition partner New Komeito, which returned to power after the Dec. 16 general election, will be able to secure a majority in the upper house, which is now controlled by opposition parties.

Of the 205 people who are preparing to run in the election, 135 of them are vying for 73 seats up for grabs in constituencies and 70 others vying for 48 proportional representation seats. The LDP and the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) have been working to select their candidates, and therefore the number of people planning to run in the election is likely to increase further.

The LDP currently holds 83 seats in the upper chamber, including one held by upper house vice-president Masaaki Yamazaki. New Komeito holds 19 seats. Thus, the two parties hold a combined total of 102 seats. The LDP and New Komeito have a combined total of 58 seats that will not be up for grabs in the upcoming election. Therefore, the two parties will be able to secure a majority of 122 seats together if they can win 20 new seats on top of retaining the 44 seats that they currently hold.

The opposition bloc, meanwhile, will try to prevent the LDP and New Komeito from winning a majority. Your Party and the Japan Restoration Party have agreed to try to field unified candidates in constituencies for one to three seats up for grabs each. The DPJ is also trying to cooperate with other opposition parties in the election. Therefore, efforts by the opposition bloc to secure cooperation are likely to affect the outcome of the national election.

If the regular Diet session, which opened on Jan. 28, is not extended, official campaigning for the

election will start on July 4, with voting and vote counting to be held on July 21 in accordance with the Public Offices Election Law.

Mainichi Shimbun, January 28, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130128p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Nuke: 56% back review of zero-nuke policy, 47% favor TPP: Mainichi poll

For Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose Cabinet now enjoys an approval rating of over 60 percent, his energy policy including nuclear power, and Japan's possible participation in negotiations over the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade pact, are among vital issues that could make or break his administration.

In a nationwide *Mainichi Shimbun* survey taken on Feb. 2 and 3, 56 percent of respondents expressed their support for Abe's plans to review a policy promulgated by the previous Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government to end nuclear power generation within the 2030s. Thirty-seven percent were against a review of the policy.

Abe declared during a plenary session of the House of Representatives on Jan. 30 that his government will review the zero-nuclear policy from a clean slate. The latest poll found that 73 percent of supporters of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), of which Abe is president, were in favor of the proposed review, as were 56 percent of supporters of its coalition ally, New Komeito. Overall, 67 percent of Abe Cabinet supporters back the review.

When asked about the TPP negotiations, 47 percent replied that Japan should participate, compared with 19 percent who were against participation. Public support for Tokyo's entry into the TPP negotiations has steadily risen as evidenced by a survey in November 2011 which showed 34 percent in favor and another poll in November 2012 which showed 41 percent support. By gender, 57 percent of men and 39 percent of women support the TPP initiative, the latest poll reveals.

According to the poll, 64 percent of DPJ supporters and 60 percent of supporters of the Japan Restoration Party (JRP) are positive about Japan's participation, compared with 46 percent of LDP supporters and 44 percent of New Komeito supporters. But 32 percent of all respondents say they don't know about the issue, mirroring a lack of national debate on the possible effects of TPP participation on the domestic industry as a result of market-opening measures.

Mainichi Shimbun, February 04, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130204p2a00m0na016000c.html>

U.S. links Abe-Obama meet to progress on major issues: Futenma move, TPP

entry, beef imports top list

The United States has pressed Japan to achieve results concerning key bilateral issues before Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visits Washington, effectively setting hurdles for Tokyo, which wants enhanced ties with its main ally, diplomatic sources said.

The request, made earlier this month at a meeting of senior officials of the two countries, pertains to issues ranging from the contentious plan to relocate a U.S. military base in Okinawa to Japan's possible participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership free-trade talks to Tokyo's restrictions on imported U.S. beef.

Abe, who took office in December following the Liberal Democratic Party's general election victory, originally hoped to meet President Barack Obama this month, apparently with the aim of showcasing stable bilateral relations at a time of soured ties with its neighbors, particularly China, over territorial disputes.

But he was forced to give up the idea, with the government citing Obama's tight schedule, as he will be inaugurated for a second term Sunday. But the sources said the development partly reflects the difficulties Tokyo faces in meeting the U.S. request immediately.

Abe, who instead chose Southeast Asia for his first foreign trip, is now expected to visit Washington in February at the earliest.

The U.S. has called for results in Japan's efforts based on a bilateral agreement to relocate U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma within Okinawa for safety reasons, a plan fiercely opposed by local residents.

Abe's LDP-led government is considering asking permission next month from Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima to begin land-fill work at the planned relocation site in Henoko, in the city of Nago.

According to the sources, Washington has also strongly hoped that Abe will make clear at his meeting with Obama of Japan's intention to join the U.S.-led TPP talks. Abe has said Japan will not participate in the talks if Tokyo will be required to eliminate tariffs without exception, a position that reflects strong opposition by domestic farmers and LDP lawmakers dependent on rural voters.

Japan has also fallen short in determining whether to moderate its restrictions on U.S. beef imports due to fears about mad cow disease.

On the fourth and final issue, amid strong calls from the U.S. and other developed countries, Tokyo has signaled it will implement legal changes to join an international treaty on settling cross-border child custody disputes.

Japan will accelerate procedures to take part in the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, which sets rules for the prompt return of children under 16, taken or retained by one parent following the failure of international marriages, to the country of their habitual residence.

Kyodo Press, Jan 19, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/01/19/national/u-s-links-abe-obama-meet-to-progress-on-major-issues/#.UQSuNfKto6g>

NYT raps Abe's wartime revisionism

NEW YORK - A *New York Times* editorial has slammed Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for planning to revise Japan's formal apology for its World War II aggression, as well as its acknowledgment that the Imperial army forced hundreds of thousands of Asian women and girls into prostitution.

Thursday's article, titled "Another Attempt to Deny Japan's History," referred to Abe's recent interview with the daily *Sankei Shimbun*, in which he voiced his willingness to issue a "forward-looking statement" that would replace the 1995 apology by then-Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's for the country's wartime expansionism.

Also mentioned was Abe's remark in the same interview that his previous Liberal Democratic Party administration, from 2006 to 2007, had found no evidence that "comfort women" had been forced to work as sex slaves in military brothels during the war.

Abe "seems inclined to start his tenure with a serious mistake that would inflame tensions with South Korea and make cooperation harder," *The New York Times* said, pointing out that "it is not clear" how the rightwing leader might modify the apologies, but he "has previously made no secret of his desire to rewrite his country's wartime history."

"Any attempt to deny the crimes and dilute the apologies will outrage South Korea, as well as China and the Philippines, which suffered under Japan's brutal wartime rule," the newspaper warned. "(Abe's) shameful impulses could threaten critical cooperation in the region on issues like North Korea's nuclear weapons programs."

Jiji Press, January 5, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20130105b3.html>
