

Japan : Political efforts to make it easier to change the Constitution

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Push to change Constitution gains parties' favor

OSAKA — Political efforts to change a key part of the Constitution that would make it much easier to revise other articles continue to strengthen in the ruling and opposition parties.

Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) and Your Party have agreed to cooperate on submitting a proposal to revise Article 96, which currently stipulates that constitutional amendments require two-thirds approval by both the Lower House and the Upper House. The parties favor lowering that to a simple majority in both Diet chambers.

Despite differences on a number of policy issues, Nippon Ishin and Your Party have long pushed for revising Article 96. Last week, Yoriyisa Matsuno, secretary general of Nippon Ishin's Diet group, said they will cooperate by drawing up a joint proposal to lower the Diet requirements.

The agreement between Nippon Ishin and Your Party on Article 96 comes as all parties are looking toward the Upper House election in July, which is being dubbed in some quarters as the "constitutional revision election."

Strong gains by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, or by Nippon Ishin and Your Party, could give those who favor changing Article 96 the necessary votes in the Upper House.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said last month he supports changing the article.

However, LDP coalition partner New Komeito has expressed reservations that it could lead to a quick revision of Article 9's no-war clause.

The LDP-New Komeito coalition has more than a two-thirds majority in the Lower House. The LDP, by itself, does not. But if the LDP teamed up with Nippon Ishin and Your Party to vote for revising Article 96, it would pass by far more than a two-thirds majority.

Such cooperation in the Lower House, combined with a two-thirds majority in the Upper House depending on the outcome of this summer's election, would virtually guarantee Diet passage of an amendment to Article 96. The change would then be put to a national referendum, where a simple majority of votes cast would be needed for it to become law.

Eric Johnston, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, Feb 19, 2013

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