

South Korea-Japan : Tensions around the Takeshima/Dokdo Islets issue

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Senior Japanese gov't official attends « Takeshima Day » ceremony

MATSUE, Japan (Kyodo) — A senior government official attended a ceremony on Friday commemorating the day the islands at the center of a dispute with South Korea were incorporated as Japanese territory, sparking a protest from the South Korean government.

The presence of Aiko Shimajiri, a parliamentary secretary with the Cabinet Office, at the « Takeshima Day » ceremony in the Shimane Prefecture city of Matsue marks the first time anyone from one of the top three posts in a government ministry has attended the event.

« It goes without saying that Takeshima is Japanese territory, » Shimajiri said during the ceremony, adding that the island row is a « very important issue involving sovereignty. »

The islets group, collectively known as Takeshima in Japan and Dokdo in South Korea, consists of two small islands and numerous reefs. Japan claims it as part of Shimane Prefecture, while South Korea says it is part of its North Gyeongsang Province.

Shimane Gov. Zembee Mizoguchi, who also attended the event, expressed regret that South Korea is trying to make its control over the islands an « established fact. »

With the islands controlled by South Korea, the move is expected to affect relations between Tokyo and Seoul at a time when the two countries are fostering ties between their new leaderships.

Park Jun Yong, director general of Northeast Asian affairs in South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, summoned Takashi Kurai, deputy chief of mission at Japan's Embassy in Seoul, to the ministry and lodged an official protest against the event.

In Tokyo, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said in a press conference Japan has told the South Korean side its protest « cannot be accepted at all. »

At the same time, Suga said Japan hopes to « develop Japan-South Korea ties from a broad perspective as South Korea is an important neighbor who shares basic values and interests. »

Suga added that the South Korean protests would have no influence on the government's plan to have Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso attend the new president's inauguration ceremony.

In front of the Japanese Embassy in central Seoul on Friday, South Korean civic organizations held rallies protesting Japan's event to promote its claim to the islets situated about halfway between the two countries in the Sea of Japan.

The South Korean foreign ministry had earlier warned it would take countermeasures if a senior Japanese government official attended the Takeshima event.

Several South Korean civic group members also staged a protest near the venue of the ceremony in Matsue.

The ceremony, which began in 2006, marks the incorporation on Feb. 22, 1905, of the rocky islands as Japanese territory.

South Korea, which occupied the islands in 1952, has stationed border guards there since 1954, constructing a lighthouse and a heliport.

Bilateral ties worsened after outgoing South Korean President Lee Myung Bak made an unprecedented visit to the islets in August last year.

Kyodo News, February 22, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130222p2g00m0dm074000c.html>

South Korea-Japan : South Korean merchants plan Japan boycott

SEOUL — South Korea's self-employed merchants said Monday they plan to boycott Japanese products to protest Tokyo's latest sovereignty claim to a pair of islets controlled by South Korea, according to Yonhap News Agency.

« The boycott is to show the resolve of merchants to protect Dokdo, » Oh Ho Seok, head of the Save Local Stores Alliance, was quoted as saying. Dokdo is the Korean name for the islets, which are known as Takeshima in Japan.

Organizations such as the Federation of Professional Economic-Person Societies, Voter Citizenship Behavior and Save Local Stores Alliance, which have a combined 6 million members, said they will opt not to buy or sell Japanese products starting Friday.

The move by the merchants is the first nationwide effort to boycott products and is timed to start on March 1, a national holiday in South Korea to commemorate a popular uprising to resist Japanese colonial rule in 1919. In the past, smaller organizations have taken such steps with limited impact.

The products that will be affected the most are Mild Seven cigarettes and Asahi beer, although campaigns not to buy Nikon cameras and Uniqlo clothes along with products made by Sony, Toyota and Honda will be pursued as well, Yonhap said.

The boycott is to be a protest over Shimane Prefecture's holding of an event last Friday to promote Japan's claim to the islets, despite Seoul's calls for restraint.

The boycott, meanwhile, is expected to have an impact because the merchants and the stores they

own such as small supermarkets and restaurants handle roughly 80 percent of all Japanese products in the country.

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<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/26/national/south-korean-merchants-plan-japan-boycott/#.USwYxDfA55s>
