

Japan: wide opposition to the “secrecy law”

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Opponents of secrecy law hold rallies, groups issue protest statements

Opponents of the newly enacted state secrets protection law took to the streets in Tokyo on Dec. 7, vowing to abolish the new law.

The day after the controversial bill to prevent leaks of state secrets was passed into law on Dec. 6, citizens, carrying banners and fliers with such messages as “Abolish the Secrets Protection Law,” shouted in front of the Diet building, “We will not condone this kind of law” in unison. Setsuko Nakauchi, 68, of Warabi, Saitama Prefecture, said, “We will play into the government’s hands if we keep quiet. Today marks the first step toward doing away with the law.”

Buddhist, Christian and other religious leaders and followers from across the country assembled in front of JR Shibuya Station and denounced the law as a measure to shut the public’s eyes, ears and mouths. “Let’s protect democracy,” they said.

Takao Takeda, a 61-year-old monk, said he participated in the rally to express his opposition to the law as a religious member because the law may strip the public of mental freedom. Atsushi Kono, a 49-year-old priest from Numazu, Shizuoka Prefecture, voiced his anger at the law, saying, “We will not back down simply because the law was enacted.”

Meanwhile, various groups issued protest statements and called for abolishing the law. The Japan P.E.N. Club criticized the law as one which would make it easy for policymakers to use their power and easily cover up information and destroy democracy. It faulted lawmakers for ramming the bill

through the Diet, saying they were not qualified as representatives of the public nor have pride in their profession. It emphasized protection of freedom of the press and expression.

The Japanese Medical and Dental Practitioners for the Improvement of Medical Care (Hodanren) expressed fear that its members may be forced to submit patients' medical records and other personal information under the pretext of aptitude evaluations on those who handle special state secrets.

Mainichi Shimbun, December 9, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131209p2a00m0na010000c.html>

(Related link)

The Japan P.E.N. Club statement: http://www.japanpen.or.jp/statement/2013/post_450.html

82% call for revision, abolition of secrecy law: Kyodo poll

TOKYO (Kyodo) — About 82 percent of respondents in the latest Kyodo News survey call for the revision or abolition of the secrecy law, underscoring the public's strong opposition to the legislation, its outcome released Monday showed.

In the nationwide telephone survey conducted Sunday and Monday, 82.3 percent of the respondents said they want the law, enacted Friday, to be revised or abolished, while 70.8 percent said they feel worried about the law.

The support rate for the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe dropped 10.3 percentage points from the previous poll in November to 47.6 percent, falling below 50 percent for the first time since he returned to power in December last year.

The disapproval rating came to 38.4 percent, up from 26.2 percent marked in the previous poll.

The law, forced through the Diet by Abe's ruling coalition toward the end of a 55-day extraordinary session, creates categories of "special secrets" for sensitive information on diplomacy and national security and toughens penalties for those who leak them. The Diet session ended Sunday.

Regarding the way the law was rushed through, 68.5 percent said they do not think it was appropriate, while 25.1 percent said they think it was.

Among those who feel worried about the secrecy law, 40.4 percent said they are concerned that media organizations will not be able to cover events sufficiently, 35.6 percent said ordinary citizens could be subject to punishment, and 35.3 percent said the designation process of the "special secrets" will not be checked sufficiently. Respondents were allowed to give up to two answers.

By political party, approval rate for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party stood at 38.3 percent, down 5.3 percentage points from the previous poll, while that for the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan rose 2.7 points to 9.6 percent.

The opposition Japan Restoration Party garnered 4.5 percent support, followed by Your Party at 4.2 percent, the Japanese Communist Party at 3.5 percent, LDP's ruling coalition partner New Komeito at 2.6 percent, the Social Democratic Party at 1.7 percent, People's Life Party at 0.6 percent and the

New Renaissance Party at 0.5 percent. The survey also found 32.9 percent of the respondents said they supported no party.

The survey was conducted on eligible voters across Japan by dialing random numbers yielded by computers. Of the 1,427 households that answered the phone, 1,020 responded.

Kyodo News, December 9, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131209p2g00m0dm062000c.html>

Gov't to appoint supporters of secrets law to council to check suitability of info

The government intends to appoint mainly those supportive of the controversial special state secrets protection law to an advisory council on the enforcement of the legislation, government sources said.

Critics point to the possibility that discussions among the panel on the appropriateness of classifying information will be conducted in a way favorable to the government.

The government decided at a Cabinet meeting on Dec. 10 to promulgate the secrets protection legislation on Dec. 13. Following the decision, the government intends to set up an advisory council in January to seek opinions from experts about guidelines the government will work out for classifying and declassifying government information as special secrets and examining whether civil servants and others are qualified to handle such confidential information.

The panel is expected to consist of experts in information protection, information disclosure, the management of official documents, journalism and legislation. The government is considering appointing University of Tokyo professor Yasuo Hasebe, an expert on the Constitution, Waseda University visiting professor Mikio Haruna, a specialist on intelligence, and diplomat-turned Ritsumeikan University visiting professor Kunihiro Miyake and Tokyo Metropolitan University professor Masahide Maeda, both experts on penal legislation, among other specialists.

Hasebe, Haruna and Maeda pointed to the need for secrets protection legislation when they appeared at the House of Representatives special committee on national security deliberating on the bill to express their opinions as experts.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government is also considering appointing an expert serving on the Cabinet Secretariat's Information Security Policy Council to the new advisory panel.

In contrast, little progress has been made on the government's efforts to select members from judicial circles and journalism because there are many opponents to the legislation in these fields. In fact, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, the Japan Newspapers Publishers & Editors Association and the Japan Commercial Broadcasters Association have expressed opposition to the legislation for fear that the law could infringe on people's right to know.

The secrets protection law stipulates that the legislation must come into force within one year after its promulgation.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga underscored the need to put the legislation into force at an early date. "It's important for the legislation to come into force as early as possible so that the national security panel can function effectively," he told a news conference on Dec. 10.

Prime Minister Abe told a meeting of ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) executives on Dec. 10, "I'm fully aware that public opinion is critical of the law. I'd like to do my best to allay the public's misunderstanding."

However, observers say that the government is making haste in putting the secrets bill legislation into effect to put the Japanese version of the U.S. National Security Council on a steady path as soon as possible.

Mainichi Shimbun, December 11, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131211p2a00m0na018000c.html>

LDP's Ishiba hints at restriction on press, soon retracts remarks

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Shigeru Ishiba, No. 2 man of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, hinted Wednesday that media news gathering activities would be restricted under the country's controversial secrecy law if journalists report on sensitive information, but retracted the comments shortly afterward.

"Based on the conventional wisdom, activities (of the media) would be somewhat restricted if (their reports) severely endanger national security," Ishiba said at the Japan National Press Club.

However, the LDP secretary general told reporters at the party headquarters following the news conference that he wanted to correct his remarks as news reporters would not face punishment.

Masako Mori, state minister in charge of the secrecy law, has told Diet sessions that journalists engaged in normal news gathering activity will not be punished.

Under the secrecy law, leakers of "special secrets" defined as sensitive information on diplomacy, defense, counterterrorism and counterespionage will face up to 10 years in prison, and those who instigate leaks a maximum term of five years.

The law stipulates full consideration should be given to freedom of the press.

At the press conference, Ishiba said even though he is not familiar with how to interpret the text of the secrecy law, he believes the law aims to restrict activities of the press. He also said judicial authority would make a final judgment on the matter.

Before the ruling coalition forced the controversial law through the parliament last Friday, Ishiba had drawn fire for calling demonstrations against the secrecy law "acts of terrorism."

Kyodo News, December 11, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131211p2g00m0dm094000c.html>

LDP's No. 2 again questions media reporting sensitive info

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The No. 2 man of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party on Thursday raised a question again about media reporting sensitive information protected under the country's controversial secrecy law.

While noting reporters will not be punished under the new law, Shigeru Ishiba told a radio program he would have doubts if they "let out information that would have a major impact on the country's security and many people die" as a consequence.

His remarks came a day after he told a press conference that news-gathering activities would be "somewhat restricted" if reports severely endanger national security, a comment which he retracted shortly afterward.

Kyodo News, December 12, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131212p2g00m0dm076000c.html>

Japan promulgates secrecy law, oversight mechanism eyed

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan on Friday promulgated the contentious secrecy law to impose stricter penalties on leakers of state secrets, amid concerns that tighter state control of information will undermine the public's right to know.

The focus shifts to the creation of an independent oversight mechanism as Friday's promulgation of the law via the internet and other channels set off a preparatory period of up to a year before the law comes into effect.

As a first step, the government launched an office staffed by around 10 officials within the Cabinet Secretariat to lay the groundwork for enforcing the law.

To ease mounting concern that the public's right to know and freedom of the press will be compromised, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pledged to create a system that can impose checks on the legitimacy of withholding sensitive information as "special secrets."

"We will explain in detail about the purpose and intention of the law and how it will be enforced to dispel public worries and concerns," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a press conference.

Under the secrecy law that the ruling bloc enacted last Friday, leakers of special secrets — information on diplomacy, defense, counterterrorism and counterespionage — such as civil servants will face up to 10 years in prison. Those who instigate leaks will get a maximum term of five years.

The government is to launch an oversight committee where government officials at the vice-ministerial level will oversee the designation and declassification of secrets, possibly by the end of

this year.

It will also establish in January an advisory council of experts to decide on rules detailing how information will be designated as secret, controlled and declassified.

Still, opposition lawmakers and critics have questioned whether the oversight mechanism the government intends to establish will be truly independent, expressing concerns about the absence of legislative checks.

Kyodo News, December 13, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131213p2g00m0dm079000c.html>

Opposition to new secrecy law remains strong

Even after the state secrets protection law was promulgated on Dec. 13, protests against and concern about the new law remained strong and bitter.

A group of 23 criminal law scholars issued a statement of protest, saying the definition of secrecy is vague and the new law runs counter to the principle of no punishment without law, and violates the Japanese Constitution. The group called for abolishing the law with group leader Toshikuni Murai, professor emeritus at Hitotsubashi University, saying the public's freedoms would be restricted one after another.

Yukiko Miki, head of the nonprofit organization Access-Info Clearinghouse Japan, denounced the law as, via expanding the scope of secrets and a monopoly of declassification powers by administration leaders, unnecessarily clearing the government of basic responsibility to explain itself to the public.

Amnesty International Japan also issued a statement of protest criticizing supporters of the law for ramming it through the Diet and ignoring protesters. It demanded that the law be reviewed.

Toshiaki Hibino, leader of the Shimbun Roren, a coalition of labor unions at newspapers and other news organizations, expressed the fear that although the law will give sufficient consideration to the freedom of reporting and news gathering, authorities have discretion over whether they will give such consideration or not.

Mitsuru Otani, head of the Japan Federation of Publishing Workers' Unions, issued a statement protesting the new law as being incompatible with democracy.

Mainichi Shimbun, December 13, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131213p2a00m0na007000c.html>

LDP bigwig apologizes for 'terrorism' comment over protests against secrets bill

Shigeru Ishiba, secretary-general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has offered an

apology for labeling noisy protests against the state secrets protection bill as a de facto act of terrorism.

In a fresh blog posted Dec. 2, Ishiba dropped the terrorism reference and said the demonstrations by those who have been crying at the top of their lungs are different from the rightful method of democracy. His apology came amid mounting public criticism of his earlier blog posted Nov. 29 in which he condemned the demonstrators around the Diet building for engaging in an act of terrorism by causing excessive noise.

In his latest blog, Ishiba was still critical of the demonstrators who have expressed their opinions with loud sounds, which he says disturb the public's tranquility. But he also apologized for failing to behave properly as a person in charge of the LDP.

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and other opposition parties are preparing to grill him in Diet deliberations.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a meeting of the House of Councillors' national security special committee that Ishiba has already retracted a portion of his earlier blog and explained his real intentions. He added that demonstrations are guaranteed by freedom of speech so long as they are conducted within the confines of the law.

But criticism is already widely spreading across Japan against Ishiba's remarks.

Yuichi Kaido, deputy head of a task force against the controversial bill at the Japan Federation of Bar Associations (JFBA), said Dec. 1 during a rally in front of Shinjuku railway station's west exit, "Are we terrorists? We are sovereign members (of Japanese society)."

In the rally organized by the JFBA, Kaido said people now know that Ishiba, the LDP's No. 2 man after LDP President and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, sees protesters against the secrets protection bill and nuclear power plants as terrorists. "Our civic movements will be clamped down," he warned.

One of the participants in a gathering at Kyoto University in the ancient capital's Sakyo Ward, was former Mainichi Shimbun reporter Takichi Nishiyama, who was convicted of abetting in obtaining secret Japan-U.S. documents about the 1972 reversion of Okinawa from the United States to Japan in violation of the National Public Service Law.

Nishiyama, 82, said Ishiba's remarks violate the postwar Japanese Constitution that guarantees freedom of assembly and association. The state secrets protection bill reflects the government's attempts to control people's declarations of intention, he said, adding that the LDP is finally showing its true colors.

Mainichi Shimbun, December 2, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131202p2a00m0na026000c.html>

U.N. rights chief urges Japan to hear public concerns on secrecy law

GENEVA (Kyodo) — The top U.N. human rights official urged Japan on Monday to pay attention to public concerns raised at home and abroad over a bill to toughen penalties for leakers of state

secrets.

“I would encourage the government and the legislature to hear national and international concerns,” U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay told journalists in Geneva, pointing out that two U.N. rights experts on freedom of expression and the right to health recently expressed serious concern about compliance of the law with human rights standards.

“Some of the concerns are that there is not sufficient clarity as to what constitutes a secret,” Pillay said, adding that it “allows the government to designate any inconvenient information as secret.”

Calling on lawmakers for caution, Pillay urged them not to “rush through the law without first putting in proper safeguards for the rights to access to information and freedom of expression as guaranteed in Japan’s Constitution and international human rights law.”

The bill for the proposed law — which cleared the House of Representatives last week and is likely to be approved by the House of Councillors during the current Diet session through Dec. 6 — would designate some sensitive information within the government as “special secrets” and impose penalties of up to 10 years in jail for those who leak it.

Kyodo News, December 3, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131203p2g00m0dm032000c.html>

Thousands form human chain around Diet building to protest state secrets bill

Thousands of people joined hands in a human chain around the Diet building on Dec. 4 to demonstrate against the state secrets bill now before the House of Councillors.

According to protest organizers, more than 6,000 people took part in the demonstration, many holding placards reading “Stop the secrets protection bill!” and shouting, “We the people are sovereign!” and “We are not terrorists!”

“This bill is designed to put a gag on the people of Japan. Steamrolling this legislation through is a form of government tyranny,” one 50-year-old protester from Hadano, Kanagawa Prefecture, commented. “Even though I’m standing right in front of the Diet, it feels very far away,” he added.

Meanwhile, a 63-year-old former teacher from Hachioji, Tokyo, told the Mainichi, “I’ve got four grandkids. Thinking of their futures, I have to say that this bill must be rejected.”

The protest was organized by the citizens’ group, “Himitsu hogoho haian e! Jikko iinkai” (Executive committee for the rejection of the secrets protection bill).

Mainichi Shimbun, December 5, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131205p2a00m0na002000c.html>

Local residents shut out of public hearing on state secrets bill

SAITAMA — Experts offered their opinions during a hastily scheduled public hearing on the contentious state secrets protection bill on Dec. 4, while residents who had been shut out from the session protested against the bill outside.

“My appearance as a speaker at the session was decided at 10 p.m. last night,” said Toru Yamazaki, former vice president of the Saitama bar association, raising questions about claims by ruling coalition parties that they made efforts to listen to public opinions about the bill as their decision to hold the public hearing session came out of nowhere.

Yamazaki also expressed his concerns over ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Secretary-General Shigeru Ishiba’s comments on Nov. 29 in which he criticized civic groups’ rallies against the secrets bill, saying they were “in essence de facto acts of terrorism.”

Ishiba’s comment, Yamazaki pointed out, suggests that “any act of protest, from rallies, parades, civic assemblies to distributing fliers, may fall under the category of ‘terrorism’ under the proposed bill.”

“We can’t have a society where civil movements are labeled as terrorism and become a target of the government’s surveillance,” he added.

Meanwhile, Saitama resident Yukiko Yoshida, 73, could not enter the hall where the public hearing was held. She learned that the House of Councillor’s special committee was holding the meeting on the morning of Dec. 4 while she was watching a Diet session on TV. She had to call the prefectural government office and the upper house secretariat to find out lawmakers’ contact information. She then was finally able to find out where the public hearing was going to take place.

When she tried to enter the building, however, security officials told her that only people with a letter of introduction from a party could attend. Attendees had to have admission tickets, which had been distributed to each party. Only about 30 people attended the hearing while many seats remained empty.

“They kept everything secret. Members of the public were not informed that the hearing session would be held and only people who had connections with parties could enter the building,” Yoshida said furiously.

Hideki Hashimoto, a professor of the University of Tokyo’s graduate school, who also tried to attend the public hearing said the meeting was carried out in a more exclusive way than he had expected. “I thought today was the last chance I had to see how the bill was debated,” Hashimoto commented.

Mainichi Shimbun, December 5, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131205p2a00m0na018000c.html>

Protesters step up opposition to state secrets bill

Growing numbers of organizations and groups have expressed opposition to and serious concerns about the proposed state secrets law.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay recently joined them in voicing her worry about the measure, saying the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe may classify inconvenient information as state secrets. Her remarks have caused a stir in Japanese parliamentary deliberations.

In Japan, civic groups and organizations of scholars and researchers are stepping up their criticism of the bill.

Since the legislation was rammed through the House of Representatives on Nov. 26, movie directors, musicians and other artists have been protesting the bill. After the House of Councillors Special Committee on National Security approved it, singer and composer Ryudo Uzaki issued a statement with the message, "Don't control me."

Opponents of the proposed law started assembling around the Diet building on the morning of Dec. 6, raising a chorus of complaints, such as "We don't need this kind of politics!"

They carried placards and flags emblazoned with slogans such as "Anger" and "The bill will definitely be shelved."

Mainichi Shimbun, December 6, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131206p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Ruling parties railroad controversial state secrets bill into law

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner used their majority in the House of Councillors to ram a controversial secrecy bill through the upper house during a plenary session late on Dec. 6, passing the bill into law.

The bill received 130 votes for and 82 against. The opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Japanese Communist Party (JCP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the People's Life Party all voted against the legislation, while Your Party and the Japan Restoration Party (JRP), which had earlier agreed with the ruling coalition on amendments, abstained from voting.

On the same day, the DPJ submitted a no-confidence motion against the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, as well as a censure motion against Masako Mori, state minister in charge of the secrecy law, in lower and upper houses, respectively. However, the ruling parties voted the motions down.

The ruling parties' decision to railroad the bill through the upper house came as citizen groups rallied outside the Diet building late into the night in protest against the law, which critics say raises the possibility of the government strengthening its grip on information and impeding the public's right to know.

Earlier on Dec. 6, the DPJ submitted a censure motion against Masaharu Nakagawa, chairman of the upper house special committee on national security, which is the body that cleared the way for the upper house to vote on the state secrets bill. When Nakagawa filed a chairman's report following the ruling parties' dismissal of the motion, lawmakers from the DPJ, Your Party and the JRP walked out

of the chamber in protest. The DPJ legislators subsequently returned to the chamber and voted against the bill.

The JRP, which had agreed with the ruling coalition on amendments to the bill but walked out on the vote in the House of Representatives, also relinquished its right to vote in the upper chamber. Your Party, which had voted for the secrets bill in the lower house, also abstained from voting in the upper house. However, three Your Party lawmakers — Yuichi Mayama, Ryuhei Kawada and Sukeshiro Terata — rebelled against the party's line and stayed behind to vote against the bill. Satoshi Ninoyu of the Liberal Democratic Party also voted against the bill, but told reporters that he made a voting error.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters after the vote, "The security environment surrounding our country is tough, and it's very good that an important bill ensuring the safety and security of the public has been passed." Mori added, "I want to respond so that the people's right to know will be protected, and secrets won't be designated arbitrarily."

Noting public concerns about the bill, LDP Secretary-General Shigeru Ishiba said, "We have to put more effort into gaining further understanding (from the public) during the period before the law comes into effect."

Banri Kaieda, ruler of the opposition DPJ, said, "We need to continue in our checking function as the LDP goes on the rampage."

Wary of the possibility of the opposition parties using delay tactics, the ruling coalition voted during a lower house plenary session on Dec. 6 to extend the Diet session for two days until Dec. 8. Kaieda criticized Abe on the evening of Dec. 6, saying, "His authoritarian stance of ignoring the Diet is just the same as during his first administration."

The no-confidence motion against Abe's Cabinet was supported by the DPJ, Your Party, JCP, People's Life Party and SDP, but was voted down by the ruling coalition and the JRP.

The government is poised to set up an office within the Cabinet Secretariat to prepare for the law, which it aims to bring into effect by December next year.

An advisory council of experts will be set up to decide on a set of guidelines for designating information as special secrets, and on evaluating public servants to determine whether they can be entrusted with such secrets.

The government says it will set up an information security oversight office under the Cabinet Office and an oversight committee within the Cabinet Secretariat to prepare for the introduction of the law.

Mainichi Shimbun, December 7, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131207p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Protestors continue rallying against secrets protection bill after it passes into

law

A brief silence fell over a packed sidewalk of protesters near the Diet building following the announcement around 11:20 p.m. on Dec. 6 that the special secrets protection bill had been passed into law.

Some in the crowd appeared to lose their vigor, defeated. But soon calls of "Shame on you!" and "This is unconstitutional!" rang out, and the crowd was again chanting its slogans.

Nearby Kita Ward resident Michie Ichihara, 67, said angrily, "It's frustrating that a law that seems to have us backpedaling to the same sort of situation we had before the war could be passed. It's frightening thinking we could be entering a stifling age that limits people's right to know."

Takehiro Masuyama, 45, a resident of Setagaya Ward, commented, "It is a betrayal of voters and a destruction of democracy. Now that the law has been enacted, I want to think of how we can abolish it."

According to numbers released by protest organizers, around 15,000 people gathered for an anti-bill demonstration that began at around 6:30 p.m. at the Hibiya Open-Air Concert Hall in Chiyoda Ward. People who couldn't fit into the venue spilled over into Hibiya Park.

"I couldn't just stand by, so I hurried here," said Fumio Ito, 61, of Arakawa Ward. "(The bill) wasn't part of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) manifesto, it was just brought out suddenly. It goes against the trend of more public access to information."

Nao Saruta, 30, of Nerima Ward, said, "We won't even know what have been marked as specially designated secrets. It's scary because it seems like before we know it, we could end up a country able to go to war."

Lawyer Yuichi Kaido spoke with a microphone on stage, saying, "Even if the bill passes into law, let us not give up, but begin efforts to abolish it."

Kenji Yamagishi, president of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations labeled discussion on the bill in the Diet as "hasty and rough."

"They're getting the order of things mixed up to make a third-party organ (to check the designation of secrets) after the bill is already made into law," he said.

Internet broadcaster OurPlanet-TV head Hajime Shiraishi told the crowd, "We're facing very tough circumstances, but we don't feel that we've lost. Let us recapture true democracy with our own hands!" His comments drew loud applause.

After the gathering, participants divided into two groups that marched in protest towards the Diet building.

Meanwhile, anger and disappointment could also be heard from people who had attended a public hearing on the special secrets protection bill in Saitama on Dec. 4.

Former vice president of the Saitama Bar Association Toru Yamazaki, who spoke at the public hearing with the backing of the Japanese Communist Party, said, "If they (the bill's proponents) had listened to the people's voice of opposition that has spread so widely, it should have been obvious to keep continued deliberation of the bill as an option."

“During presentation of opinions at the hearing, the LDP side selected two people with Self-Defense Force backgrounds. It wasn’t at all a place where one could hear the voices of the public. I want the government to step down.”

Akihiko Mochida, 53, chairman of peace group “Saitama Heiwa Undo Center” said angrily, “I don’t believe that the opinions given at the hearing were made use of in the bill’s deliberations.”

Mitsuru Ogawa, 61, a former high-school teacher from Midori Ward, Saitama, raised his voice in protest near the site of the public hearing. “The public hearing was nothing more than a self-justification. Prime Minister (Shinzo) Abe is making Japan into his own private property,” he said angrily.

Mainichi Shimbun, December 7, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131207p2a00m0na019000c.html>

Nobel laureates, scholars protest secrecy law

TOKYO (Kyodo) — A group of 31 scholars in Japan including Nobel laureates issued a statement of protest on Saturday against a controversial law toughening penalties for leakers of state secrets that was enacted the day before.

In the statement, Nobel Prize winners Toshihide Maskawa and Hideki Shirakawa and their fellow scholars say the law “threatens the fundamental human rights and pacifist principles established in the Constitution” and poses “the largest ever danger to democracy in postwar Japan.”

The statement, endorsed by an additional 3,150 academics, also condemns the ruling bloc’s railroading of the bill through both houses of the Diet as “reminiscent of the prewar government that wrested away freedom of thought and freedom of the press in its push toward war.”

A swarm of protesters that formed outside the Diet building on Friday continued their protests Saturday, holding signs and chanting slogans against the new law. More than 500 people who gathered in Tokyo’s Yoyogi Park also marched through the streets shouting protests.

Kyodo News, December 7, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131207p2g00m0dm076000c.html>

Ruling, opposition eye Diet oversight panel for Japan’s secrecy law

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan’s ruling and opposition parties are exploring the possibility of setting up a panel in the parliament to act as an oversight mechanism to monitor designation and declassification of state secrets under a controversial new law, lawmakers said Saturday.

Both camps are considering establishing a permanent standing committee in the Diet, which will discuss secrets provided by the government for counterchecking, after the nation’s secrecy law to

prevent state secret leaks was enacted Friday, the lawmakers said.

The Diet Law is expected to be revised to set up such a committee in the parliament, they said.

Attention is focused on whether the Diet can effectively keep an eye on preventing the government from making an arbitrary designation of state secrets.

Under the secrecy law, "special secrets" are defined as sensitive information on diplomacy, defense, counterterrorism and counterespionage, and Cabinet ministers and government agency chiefs can decide what will constitute special secrets.

The envisioned Diet oversight panel is patterned after the U.S. committees on intelligence, both under the Senate and House of Representatives, the lawmakers said.

The political parties are expected to send a delegation consisting of their members of the steering committees of both chambers to the United States possibly next month, they said.

The law envisages that the monitoring of the secrets will be done by a third-party oversight mechanism and the parliament.

The government has already unveiled that it will set up a third-party oversight organization in the Cabinet Office as well as an oversight committee in the Cabinet Secretariat where the legitimacy of special secrets will be checked.

The oversight panel in the parliament will hold closed-door meetings and the government will make the special secrets available for discussion, unless the revelation of such secrets is deemed to pose a major security risk, the lawmakers said.

Leakers of special secrets, such as civil servants, will face up to 10 years in prison, and those who instigate leaks a maximum term of five years.

How to deal with cases in which lawmakers spill secrets to their secretaries or staff will be subject to future Diet deliberations, the lawmakers said.

The government's original version of the bill contained a clause that says the government may provide special secrets to the Diet through a closed-door meeting.

Critics have been arguing that the law could undermine the public's right to know and freedom of the press and are protesting that the law was rushed to be passed in the parliament without sufficient debate.

Kyodo News, December 8, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131208p2g00m0dm050000c.html>

Fukushima residents plead against state secrets bill

FUKUSHIMA — Fukushima Prefecture residents expressed their concern about a controversial state secrets protection bill at a public hearing, amid fear that information on the crippled nuclear plant

might be concealed if the bill was passed.

The House of Representatives' special committee for national security held a public hearing in Fukushima on Nov. 25 where representatives of Fukushima residents offered their opinions on the special secrets protection bill.

Yumiko Nihei, a professor from Fukushima-based Sakura no Seibo Junior College, received a request to speak at the hearing on Nov. 21, just four days before the session. While she thought that the government would use this opportunity to claim its willingness to listen to locals' opinions before passing the bill in the lower house, she felt that she should clarify her position on the matter after seeing the plant disaster.

"I'm still not sure if I should teach young women in this city," said Nihei in the hearing session, as information about the plant hasn't been properly provided after the disaster. "I'm opposed to a bill that denies people's access to information," she added.

Another speaker at the session, Tamotsu Baba, mayor of the town of Namie, said "If information concerning the nuclear plant was categorized as special secrets against terrorism, the government could hide it under the bill."

After the hearing session, however, Baba expressed his frustration, saying "Fukushima residents' voices didn't seem to reach the committee members."

Mainichi Shimbun, November 26, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131126p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Domestic, international critics lambast state secrets bill as passage nears

As the state secrets bill rushes toward passage in the House of Representatives, calls for extending and deepening discussion on the bill are being joined by voices both in and outside Japan and from a broad range of backgrounds staunchly opposed to the bill.

Chiba University professor Yoshiko Kurita and 82 other Middle East experts from across Japan have released an emergency declaration condemning the special secrets bill.

"There is a serious danger that the government will crack down on researchers working to get information on the Japanese military and other activities in the Middle East" under the bill, the declaration reads, adding, "Surveillance of people from the Middle East and Muslims will be strengthened."

Meanwhile, 18 religious organizations including Buddhist and Christian groups made their own anti-secrets bill appeal on Nov. 14, stating, "To snatch away the Japanese people's right to know will be a repeat of the pre-World War II censorship system. Japan will become a 'warlike nation' once more." According to the office handling the joint-declaration, the document had the backing of 3,003 people as of Nov. 25. The groups had scheduled an anti-secrets bill gathering for the afternoon of Nov. 26 inside the Diet building.

Even the Japan Broadcasting Labour Union (Nipporo), the union of national broadcaster NHK,

posted a declaration on its website on Nov. 21 stating it had “deep reservations” about the special secrets bill. The declaration goes on to say, “We are extremely uneasy with the passage of a law that leaves so much discretion on information management to the government and its agencies. There remains room in this law to view regular journalistic activity as ‘solicitation’ of secret information and thus the application of more severe penalties against journalists.”

Criticism of the legislation is also flowing in from abroad. Frank La Rue, a United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNHCR) special rapporteur of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, said on Nov. 22 that he’s worried the secrets law would threaten both whistleblowers inside the government and journalists, and demanded that the Japanese guarantee greater transparency.

The writers’ association PEN International, which has affiliate groups in 102 countries, released a statement by its president and Canadian writer John Ralston Saul declaring that the secrets bill “is not about the needs of the state or real secrets or the protection of the public good. It seems to be about politicians and employees of the state hiding behind an inflated idea of secrecy and an obsession with security verging on the hysterical, all in order to gather more power for themselves by undermining the rights of citizens to information and to free speech.”

The statement was PEN’s first aimed at Japan since the end of World War II.

Statement by PEN International President John Ralston Saul:

<http://www.pen-international.org/newsitems/statement-on-the-japanese-governments-designated-secrets-bill-by-john-ralston-saul-pen-international-president/>

Mainichi Shimbun, November 26, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131126p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Japan’s lower house passes controversial secrecy law bill

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan’s ruling bloc passed a controversial bill in the lower house Tuesday to toughen penalties for leakers of state secrets, in what the government views as a crucial step toward Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s goal of enhancing the country’s ability to face security challenges in Asia.

Passage of the bill in the House of Representatives put the ruling bloc on course to enact the law before the current Diet session ends Dec. 6. But it could still face an uphill battle in the House of Councillors as some opposition lawmakers are calling for more deliberations.

“We’re aware that worries and concerns remain among the public,” Abe told reporters after the vote. Saying the bill is designed “to protect the safety of the people,” he added, “We’ll strive to dispel (such worries and concerns) through deliberations in the upper house.”

Seen as a prerequisite for Japan to share sensitive information with foreign countries, the envisaged law will impose a prison sentence of up to 10 years on leakers of “special secrets,” or information concerning diplomacy, defense, counterterrorism or espionage.

Opposition lawmakers and experts have voiced concern that tighter state control of information will infringe on the public's right to know and freedom of the press.

The biggest opposition Democratic Party of Japan criticized the ruling bloc, saying it pushed the bill through without thorough deliberations.

"It (the bill) will spell serious trouble for Japan's democracy," DPJ Secretary General Akihiro Ohata told reporters.

The Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner the New Komeito party forced the bill to a vote in a special committee in the lower house earlier in the day and subsequently had it approved by the lower house, with some opposition lawmakers refusing to vote or walking away in protest.

Together with the planned establishment of a U.S.-style National Security Council, the secrecy law is being touted as one of the pillars of Abe's efforts to bolster the country's defenses against mounting security threats from an assertive China at sea and North Korea's missile and nuclear development.

"Special secrets" will remain classified for up to 60 years after the ruling bloc made minor changes to the government's original plan to set the maximum length at 30 years, extendable upon Cabinet approval.

After haggling over details with the opposition Japan Restoration Party and Your Party, the ruling bloc agreed the prime minister will be given the authority to check the legitimacy of labeling certain information as special secrets, and the government will have to "consider" an option to set up an independent monitoring body.

There are, however, exceptions to the rule, and the list of seven items kept from the public even after 60 years includes details about weapons, the number and capacity of aircraft, defense codes, and Japan's negotiations with foreign governments.

Critics of the bill, which has reminded some of Japan's past wartime secrecy, have argued there are no clear rules on what constitutes a special secret under the envisaged law, and the government can use the current rough definition to keep information from the public at its own discretion.

In the lower house, information about nuclear power plants came into focus but Masako Mori, state minister in charge of the bill, said a security plan at a nuclear power plant could be labeled as a special secret, but not details about the spread of radioactive substances.

Still, participants from Fukushima Prefecture expressed opposition to the bill at Monday's lower house public hearing, citing fears that information about the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plants will be withheld if the new law comes into force.

Kyodo News, November 26, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131126p2a00m0na024000c.html>

Japan to launch NSC on Dec. 4 as Diet enacts law

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan plans to launch a U.S.-style National Security Council on Dec. 4, a government source said Wednesday, as parliament enacted a law to create the body to give the

prime minister's office greater power in steering foreign and defense policies amid security threats in Asia.

The NSC, whose headquarters will be set up within the Cabinet Secretariat early next year, is designed to bolster coordination and avoid sectionalism among the ministries and government agencies concerned.

Under the law, the prime minister will meet with the chief Cabinet secretary and the foreign and defense ministers twice a month to discuss a range of diplomacy and defense issues.

In the first meeting slated for next Wednesday, the four ministers are likely to take up Japan's new defense program guidelines and security strategy, as Tokyo is expected to finalize both the guidelines and strategy by the end of the year, according to the government source.

Shotaro Yachi, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's foreign policy adviser, is expected to serve as head of the organization with around 60 staff members.

"We'd like to accelerate preparations so it (the NSC) will take command of the government's strategic policy-making in diplomacy and defense," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a press conference.

The enactment of the law came a day after the ruling bloc passed a bill in the House of Representatives to impose tougher penalties on leakers of state secrets, even as concerns persist that the public's right to know and freedom of the press will be compromised by tighter state control of information.

Abe has said the secrecy law will enable the NSC to function effectively as having a legal framework for preventing leaks of state secrets is a prerequisite for Japan to share sensitive information about security with other countries, namely the United States.

Tokyo is particularly concerned about Beijing's maritime assertiveness around the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, which are claimed by China as Diaoyu. China's announcement of a controversial air defense identification zone that requires foreign aircraft to identify themselves has raised fears of unforeseen occurrences.

The House of Councillors started deliberating the controversial bill for the secrecy law on Wednesday, as Abe sought to ease public concerns to pave the way for enactment of the legislation before the current extraordinary Diet session ends Dec. 6.

Critics of the bill have argued that Cabinet ministers and government agency chiefs who are authorized to choose special secrets could essentially withhold as much information as they want because the definition of what falls under the category of special secrets remains vague.

Kyodo News, November 27, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131127p2g00m0dm050000c.html>

Fukushima residents furious at lower house passage of contentious secrecy bill

FUKUSHIMA — Residents here are angry over the ruling bloc's railroading of a highly controversial state secrets protection bill through the House of Representatives on the evening of Nov. 26 — just one day after voicing strong opposition to the legislation at a public hearing.

At the lower house special committee's public hearing on the legislation held in Fukushima on Nov. 25, all of the seven local residents who were invited to state their opinions voiced opposition to or concerns about the government-sponsored secrecy bill. They voiced fear that information related to the Fukushima nuclear disaster could be designated as "special secrets." Their opinions, however, were not reflected in Diet deliberations. Therefore, they became infuriated at the quick-and-dirty passage of the bill through the lower house. One of the residents angrily said, "How far are they going to go in fooling us?"

Tamotsu Baba, mayor of Namie near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, who had stated his opinion at the public hearing, said on Nov. 26, "I was surprised because the public hearing was held yesterday, and the bill was passed today. What was the public hearing for? What did I attend the public hearing for? I don't have the faintest idea." He then raised his voice and said, "That was too hasty. There should be much more discussion."

Mitsugi Araki, a lawyer who stated his opinion at the public hearing, also said furiously, "That trampled on the sentiments of the Fukushima people." He went on to say, "We were feeling that our opinions could be used as an excuse. But still, all of us spoke up with our utmost efforts. But our thoughts were ignored." However, the bill has not been enacted yet. Araki added, "I want legislators to discuss it carefully."

Saki Okawara, a 61-year-old resident of Miharu, said, "The public hearing was something like a sneak attack. Okawara went to the venue for the public hearing, but was not able to sit in on the hearing. Tickets to the hearing were distributed to political parties and many people who have no connections with political parties did not even know the public hearing had been planned, Okawara said." Fukushima was nothing but one of the pieces leading up to the vote. Even if we raise our voice, it would never be heard. It is sad that politicians don't have any intention to accept our opinions," Okawara said.

Kazue Morizono, a 51-year-old housewife from Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, who could not sit in on the hearing, raised her voice and said, "I was sort of hoping that the frank opinions of the speakers would put on the brakes. But how far are they going to go and try to fool Fukushima?" She went on to say, "Because our relationship of trust with the government has crumbled this far, it would affect not only the bill but also every piece of reconstruction work."

Reiko Hachisuka, 61, who had served as a member of the Diet's investigation committee on the Fukushima nuclear disaster, said, "I hope information involving the lives of residents will not be made secret. The government must have learned lessons from the accident. I want the government to distinguish between information it needs to safeguard and information involving people's lives and handle such information in good faith."

Meanwhile, about 300 members of women's groups marched through the Ginza shopping street in central Tokyo to protest against the secrecy bill on Nov. 26. Members of women's groups from around the country took part in the rally proposed by writer Karin Amamiya. Carrying placards, some of which read: "What is secret?" and "That is secret," they shouted, "We will never tolerate forcible passage (of the bill)." The rally started after the bill was railroaded through the lower house

special panel on security. Yuri Horie, president of the Japan Federation of Women's Organizations (Fudanren), said, "We must not allow for a repeat of the mistake that led to the war with women's eyes, ears and mouths shut off."

A separate protest rally was also held near the Diet building in Tokyo's Nagatacho district until around 9 p.m. on Nov. 26. When protesters heard the news that the lower house plenary session had just passed the bill, they shouted, "No!" and "Kill the bill!"

Mainichi Shimbun, November 27, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131127p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Nobel laureates, scholars launch group against secrecy bill

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Thirty-one scholars in Japan including Nobel laureates have launched a group to protest against a controversial bill to toughen penalties for leakers of state secrets, calling the legislation rushed and with one scholar comparing it to a Nazi German law.

In a statement released Thursday, Nobel winners Toshihide Masukawa and Hideki Shirakawa said with their fellow academics that the bill "threatens the pacifist principles and fundamental human rights established by the Constitution."

"In the name of scholarship and good sense, we oppose the bill, which paves the way for creating a secretive military state," it said.

The group consists of scholars from a variety of academic fields. Masukawa is director general of the Kobayashi-Maskawa Institute for the Origin of Particles and the Universe at Nagoya University. Shirakawa is a professor emeritus at Tsukuba University.

They also include Yoichi Higuchi, a constitutional law professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, Yoko Kato, a history professor at the University of Tokyo, and Kang Sang Jung, a political science professor at Seigakuin University. There are 304 others listed as endorsing the group.

The bill was forced through the lower house on Tuesday with the backing of the ruling coalition, paving the way for deliberations in the upper house. Opposition lawmakers are calling for greater scrutiny.

"The attitude of the ruling bloc trying to enact the bill at any cost despite widening criticism among the public is reminiscent of the pre-war government that took away the freedom of press and thought while marshaling the nation to war," it said.

"The bill equals the Enabling Act of Nazi Germany that controlled all information," Akira Kurihara, a professor emeritus of political sociology at Rikkyo University, said at a press conference Thursday.

Atsushi Sugita, a professor of political science at Hosei University, said the bill was crudely made and almost entirely lacks a checking mechanism on the power to classify government information. "It may be designed to concentrate power in the administrative branch and to deprive others of the right to speak," he said.

Yoichi Komori, a University of Tokyo professor of literature, said that part of the bill's official Japanese name, "himitsu hogo," meaning protection of secrets, is deceptive. "In essence, it's a law to cover up state secrets. It will fundamentally deprive the people of sovereignty. It will clearly lead to a move to reinterpret the Constitution," he said.

Kyodo News, November 30, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131130p2g00m0dm022000c.html>

Newspapers across Japan blast state secrecy bill in editorials

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Newspapers across Japan took aim at the government's secrecy bill after its passage through the lower house Tuesday, with most saying parliamentary debate was insufficient and slamming the legislation for restricting the right to know and other areas they see as problematic.

"We must say it was a high-handed act by sheer force of numbers," The Kyoto Shimbun said of the ruling coalition's railroading the bill through the House of Representatives' Special Committee on National Security and immediately putting it to a vote at the house's plenary meeting.

The Ehime Shimbun said, "It is tantamount to abandoning being accountable to the nation. We beseech the ruling coalition to engage in serious soul-searching."

The Okinawa Times took issue with the hearing the house special committee held in Fukushima city, where citizens expressed concern that the government's limited information disclosure about radiation from the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant made it difficult to find the best evacuation route after the March 2011 disaster.

All seven people at the hearing including Mayor Tamotsu Baba of Namie town in Fukushima Prefecture expressed opposition or a cautious stance toward the secrecy bill. "It was an act of betrayal of the people of Fukushima," the Okinawa newspaper said.

The Yamanashi Nichinichi Shimbun questioned the nature of the hearing, held just the day before lawmakers voted on the bill in parliament. "We wonder if it was intended just as an excuse to show that they had heard the views of citizens."

The Ryukyu Shimpo in Okinawa Prefecture, the host of major U.S. military installations, said information about U.S. military bases may also be kept secret. "Holding a hearing in Okinawa should be given top priority but even that has not been done."

Many newspapers frowned on the talks between ruling and opposition lawmakers to revise the original bill, as a result of which information may be kept classified for "up to 60 years" from "30 years or less in principle" in the pre-revision bill.

Lawmakers have also failed to incorporate a pledge to establish a third-party organ to oversee the procedures for designating secrets.

The Iwate Nippo said, "In some points, secrecy has even been reinforced" through the revision. The Kitanippon Shumbun in Toyama Prefecture said, "Major problems have not been addressed."

The Kahoku Shimpō in Miyagi Prefecture said, "Rarely does a pending dossier carry so many items for revision. It means that it is 'defective legislation' pregnant with so many problems."

The Niigata Nippo said, "Citizens cannot raise opposition to decisions (for classifying information) made behind the veil of secrecy and will be forced to comply tacitly ... It is like prewar society."

The Chugoku Shimbun in Hiroshima Prefecture said, "The range (of secrecy designation) should naturally be restricted as much as possible and it should not be allowed to undermine the right to access (information)."

The Hokkaido Shimbun said a civic group could risk being prosecuted if, for instance, it monitors activities at a Self-Defense Force base or acquires information about a nuclear power plant in order to formulate an evacuation plan. "People's lives will be in danger in their day-to-day activities," the newspaper said.

The Kumamoto Nichinichi Shimbun said, "What is conspicuous is a lack of perspective that all information is the common asset of citizens." It stressed the need for information disclosure and appropriate management of public documents.

The Nishinippon Shimbun in Fukuoka Prefecture expressed uneasiness about prioritizing secrecy without securing measures to ensure information disclosure. "Would it not lead to eradicating the spirit of democratic society in Japan built on personal freedom of activity and speech?" the newspaper said.

The Shinano Mainichi Shimbun in Nagano Prefecture has taken up the secrets legislation in more than 20 editorials since late October. On Wednesday, it noted a provision that in principle allows the government to keep information secret even from the Diet, the supreme organ of state power. "Each political party should place the legislation under critical scrutiny. Ramming it through voting deserves to be called 'a suicidal act by the Diet'."

The Kochi Shimbun blasted the bill not only editorially but also in a special commentary by its chief editor on the front page. "The opening chapter of a war begins even before we hear the sound of military boots," it said. "History teaches us what kind of path was taken by a secretive society that suppressed speech through severe punishments — that of a surveillance society or a police state."

The legislation is currently being deliberated in the House of Councillors. The ruling bloc wants to pass it for enactment before the end of the current parliamentary session on Dec. 6.

A public opinion survey by Kyodo News on Nov. 23-24 showed 62.9 percent said they do not believe the people's right to know would be protected if the secrecy law is enacted, while 26.3 percent said it would be protected.

The legislation itself, however, drew support from 45.9 percent, while 41.1 percent expressed opposition.

Kyodo News, November 30, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131130p2g00m0dm023000c.html>

LDP's Ishiba likens civic group rallies to terrorism

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The second-in-command of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party has branded rallies by civic groups and others against a controversial bill to toughen penalties for leakers of state secrets as tantamount to “acts of terrorism.”

“The tactic of merely screaming is in essence little different from acts of terrorism,” LDP Secretary General Shigeru Ishiba wrote on his blog on Friday. “I don’t know who they are, but it will never inspire public sympathy, even if they loudly assert their claims and disturb social peace.”

The bill to enhance government control over information concerning foreign and defense policy as well as spying and terrorist activities was passed by the House of Representatives last month, but opposition lawmakers slammed Ishiba as deliberations on the bill are continuing in the House of Councillors.

Critics are concerned that strengthened regulations under the secrecy legislation, which will toughen penalties for leakers of state secrets, could undermine freedom of the press and the public’s right to know.

Ishiba tried to justify his comments Sunday, saying during a speech in Nanto, Toyama Prefecture, “It is doubtful if it is in line with democracy to appeal in a threatening manner, ‘We will never accept it,’” while retracting part of his post which likened demonstrations to terrorism.

“I retract that part as demonstrations do not fulfill all of the conditions necessary to constitute terrorism,” Ishiba told reporters after the speech. “I see the loud noise as a problem...Demonstrations in general should be welcomed as long as they follow democratic rules, regardless of how many people they draw.”

Regarding Ishiba’s post, Akihiro Ohata, secretary general of the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan, said Sunday during a street speech in Mito, Ibaraki Prefecture, “It is guaranteed under the Constitution to stage demonstrations,” urging Ishiba “to change his mindset.”

Tadayoshi Ichida, head of the Japanese Communist Party secretariat, told reporters, “It is an unacceptable remark as it declares the people’s voice as terrorism.”

Mizuho Fukushima, deputy chief of the Social Democratic Party, said, “I cannot trust the ruling party, whose member makes such a comment, even if it says it will respect the right to know.”

Kyodo News, December 1, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131201p2g00m0dm037000c.html>
