128th year | No. 44,185

# the independent voice in asia the in

INCORPORATING

The New York Times

INTERNATION



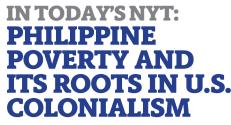
#### NATIONAL: DONATIONS PICK UP STEAM

Here are some ways you can help victims of the quake | **PAGE 2** 



## SPORTS: WAITING FOR A NEW YOKOZUNA

Terunofuji's injuries raise fears of empty top rank | PAGE 10



PAGE 1



**月 MONDAY**, JANUARY 8, 2024

Abe faction's Ikeda booked; Nikai questioned

## First lawmaker arrested amid funds scandal

KYODO

A lawmaker from the largest faction within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party on Sunday became the first to be arrested over allegations linked to a political fundraising scandal that has engulfed the party.

Prosecutors suspect Lower House law-maker Yoshitaka Ikeda received a total of ¥48.26 million over five years through 2022 from slush funds created by the faction once led by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

His policy secretary, Kazuhiro Kakinuma, 45, was also arrested. The two are accused of having failed to declare the money Ikeda received in political fundraising reports.

Prosecutors decided to arrest the 57-yearold Ikeda on grounds that he could conceal or destroy evidence. The prosecutors have determined that the fourth-term lawmaker colluded with Kakinuma, who was in charge of creating a report on income and expenditures.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Sunday that the LDP decided to expel Ikeda from the party.

"The fact that a member of the Diet belonging to our party has been arrested is a matter of great regret and serious concern. This is a regrettable situation, and we take it very seriously," he said.

Ikeda's intraparty group is alleged to have failed to declare hundreds of millions of yen of fundraising party revenue in funding reports to transfer to its members, sources said.

The amount is believed to have totaled about ¥500 million over a five-year period through 2022, for which the statute of limitations has not expired under the political funds control law, the sources added.

The political funds control law requires an accountant to submit a report on income and expenditure, and failure to report can result in imprisonment for up to five years or a fine of up to X1 million.

or a fine of up to ¥1 million.

Lawmakers can be accused of committing a crime when they are thought to have col-

luded with an accountant in charge. Kaki-

THE YEAR AHEAD

4 : WEATHER

numa is responsible for Ikeda's reporting.

Several Abe faction lawmakers are alleged to have pocketed a portion of the revenue they collected through the sale of party tickets above their quotas, with the total sum reaching at least ¥80 million over the period, the sources added.

In the Abe faction, known as Seiwaken, or the Seiwa policy study group, the majority of its 99 members are suspected of having received funds, but Ikeda allegedly took significantly more than others, the sources said.

Following the arrest of Ikeda, the faction has issued an apology and said it will cooperate with the investigation.

Prosecutors searched the offices of the Abe faction and Ikeda to collect documents and other materials related to the allegations.

The prosecutors are investigating the involvement of senior lawmakers, including some who served as the faction's secretary-general, as they are believed to have known about the flow of money within the group.

Former LDP Diet affairs chief Tsuyoshi Takagi is currently holding the faction's secretary-general post, while former Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno and former trade minister Yasutoshi Nishimura previously held the post. All have been questioned on a voluntary basis.

Prosecutors are also investigating another faction headed by former LDP Secretary-General Toshihiro Nikai and have questioned him on a voluntary basis over similar funds allegations, the sources said. Former reconstruction minister Katsuei Hirasawa, a member of the Nikai faction, was also questioned on a voluntary basis.

Hirasawa previously served as the faction's general secretary, a role in which he would have had knowledge of the flow of money.

#### Related story

Kishida forced to rely more on 'kingmaker' Taro Aso PAGE2



Police inspect an area near a market where a large fire broke out days earlier, as snow falls Sunday in Wajima, Ishikawa Prefecture. DANIEL TRAYLOR

## Snow complicates quake relief

Woman in her 90s rescued after five days under collapsed home

**SUZU, ISHIKAWA PREF.** AFP-JIJI, KYODO, STAFF REPORT

A woman in her 90s trapped for five days under the rubble by a huge earthquake in Ishikawa Prefecture was rescued against the odds, but snow and storms were expected to complicate relief efforts Sunday.

As of Sunday afternoon, at least 128 people died in the magnitude 7.6 temblor on New Year's Day and during its aftershocks — a toll that is sure to rise, with 222 others reported missing to local authorities.

The jolt and its aftershocks toppled buildings, sparked a major fire and triggered tsunami waves of over a meter high.

The hope of finding survivors usually fades three days after a destructive quake. But the elderly woman spent five days under the wreckage of a collapsed house in the city

of Suzu before being saved on Saturday.

She was taken to the hospital for treating the same saved on Saturday.

She was taken to the hospital for treatment and was responding clearly to questions, according to NHK.

"Hang in there!" rescuers were heard calling to the woman in police footage from the scene published by local media.

"You're gonna be OK!" they shouted as rain fell around them. "Stay positive!"

The earthquake is the first to kill more than 100 people in Japan since the 2016 Kumamoto quakes in the country's southwestern region that caused 276 deaths.

The New Year's quake caused extensive structural damage and fires in the prefecture, and city officials in Wajima believe there are about 100 locations where people are still trapped under collapsed buildings.

Rescue operations were being hampered by rain and hail, and more rain is expected through Sunday followed by snow in the region.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told officials from related ministries and agencies in a meeting of the disaster response headquarters at his office to "tenaciously and thoroughly conduct rescue operations to save as many lives as possible."

Authorities are still struggling to deliver relief supplies due to quake-damaged roads in Ishikawa, where around 30,000 people are staying in some 370 shelters.

The Self-Defense Forces have sent a total of

5,900 troops to help out with the relief mission, according to the Defense Ministry. Nine ships, 30 planes and 12 sniffer dogs are also part of the operation.

Those numbers were in addition to police and firefighters dispatched from across the country.

Around 23,800 households were without electricity in Ishikawa Prefecture, and more than 66,400 without running water.

Power and water outages have also affected hospitals and facilities taking care of elderly and people with disabilities.

In Suzu, where dozens of homes lie in ruins, a dog barked while reporters filmed the clean-up operation on Friday, the signal of a grim discovery.

"Training for disaster rescue dogs begins  $Continued \ on \ page \ 2 \rightarrow$ 

### Kamikawa makes surprise visit to Ukraine

**JESSE JOHNSON**STAFF WRITER

Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa made a previously unannounced visit to Ukraine on Sunday — her first trip to the war-torn nation as Japan's top diplomat — amid concerns of dwindling support in some countries for Kyiv's nearly two-year attempt to fend off an invasion by Russia.

Immediately after arriving and prior to meeting a spate of dignitaries, Kamikawa visited the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, where scores of residents were allegedly massacred by Russian forces, to pay her respects at a memorial site there, according to the Foreign Ministry.

The top Japanese diplomat was due to meet Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Kyiv, where she will "directly convey Japan's position that Tokyo will stand by and support Ukraine even in the current difficult international situation," the ministry said in a statement.

Japan has been among the most vociferous supporters of Ukraine's fight against Russia following Moscow's Feb. 22, 2022, invasion of its neighbor, with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida repeatedly stressing the importance of beating back aggression and noting that "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow."

Kishida's comments have been widely interpreted to be a veiled reference to China's desire to unify democratic Taiwan with the mainland.

One key part of Kamikawa's visit, the Foreign Ministry said, is for Japan to "demonstrate its determination" to uphold the international rules-based order and stress that "unilateral changes in the status quo by force, such as Russia's aggression in Ukraine, must never be allowed."

Kamikawa will also discuss Ukraine's economic reconstruction ahead of a conference on rebuilding the country in Tokyo slated for Feb. 19, the ministry said, with Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal planning to attend.

"Japan will strongly demonstrate both domestically and internationally its commitment to the reconstruction of Ukraine via the public and private sectors," the ministry said. "The two countries will also discuss how to strengthen cooperation for a successful conference."

Continued on page 2  $\rightarrow$ 

#### **INSIDE TODAY**

**OUR PLANET** 

CLIMATE

ASIA 5	SPORTS <b>1</b>
WORLD 6	
SUSTAINABLE JAPAN <b>7</b>	

### The shape of power in 2024 Top thinkers discuss whether the world is more

polarized | **THE YEAR AHEAD, PAGE 9**ISSN 0289-1956 © THE JAPAN TIMES, LTD., 2024

Consumption tax included (本体価格¥273) **¥300** 

4910856470840 00273

## Can fishing net waste be the future of fashion?

YUKANA INOUE KUJUKURI, CHIBA PREF. STAFF WRITER

In 2021, Kotaro Seki was unsatisfied with his work at a major travel agency. He was good at his job, but he felt like something was missing.

Anyone could do the job he was doing at the agency, he thought. And few were bothered — as he was — by the fact that the money spent by tourists wasn't making its way to local businesses.

This frustration turned into a burning desire to do something that actually had an impact on the lives of the people he wanted to support — local businesses and fisheries in rural areas — which led him to ultimately quit his stable job despite having recently become a father.

He initially set up his company, Ellange, in 2021 with the business model of selling locally caught fish to restaurants, but it was when he was making his rounds to pick up fishers' catches that something caught his eye: fishing nets.

"When I would go around having business



talks, there would be times when fisheries would have nets piled up (on the side) and times when they wouldn't," Seki said.

Without a proper place for disposal, the fishers felt compelled to throw the fishing nets into the ocean after they became unusable, a practice that Seki later learned was widespread in Japan.

Bags of fishing nets in Ellange CEO Kotaro Seki's storage space along Kujukurihama beach in Chiba Prefecture YUKANA INOUE Now, visionaries like Seki are on a mission to find a way to turn used fishing nets into materials to make clothes, and give back to fishing communities in the process.

#### Fishing net waste

Fishing waste is an issue that plagues oceans around the world. A study published in 2018 found that out of the 79,000 tons of plastic waste that was collected in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch — a gyre of marine debris found in the North Pacific ocean — 46% of it was fishing nets.

Domestically, 38% of overall waste collected on the shores of Japan is tied to the fishing industry, according to a survey conducted by the Environment Ministry in 2021, with nets ranking fifth by weight out of all plastic materials.

What makes fishing nets so difficult to dispose of is the fact that they are made from materials that do not decompose. Although different types of nets are used depending on the fish, they all tend to be big and heavy and are most commonly made of nylon. Fisheries continue to use the same fishing nets for *Continued on page 3*  $\rightarrow$ 

