

Outflow of organization’s assets targeted

Lower House OKs bill for church victims

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STAFF WRITER

A bill that aims to prevent a religious organization's assets from being transferred overseas so that it can be set aside to provide relief to potential victims passed the Lower House on Tuesday after days of negotiation between ruling and opposition lawmakers.

The ruling coalition — the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito — along with the opposition party Democratic Party for the People submitted amendments to their special bill based on discussions with other opposition parties, namely the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan and Nippon Ishin no Kai.

The bill was sent to the Upper House, paving the way for it to pass both chambers in the current parliament session that ends on Dec. 13.

The bill submitted by the LDP, Komeito and the DPP focuses on keeping better tabs on religious groups that may be at risk of losing its religious corporation status.

The revised bill added a clause that says that it will be reconsidered within three years after its enforcement, including how the assets should be preserved, in consideration of the opposition parties.

The CDP and the Nippon Ishin, meanwhile, had proposed a separate bill that would have allowed the court to order the comprehensive preservation of all assets when a request to revoke the status of a religious corporation is made to the court. That bill, however, was rejected at the Lower House Judicial Affairs Committee.

The CDP, Nippon Ishin and the Japanese Communist Party decided to only support the amended portions.

In previous discussions between the ruling and opposition parties, the CDP and Nippon Ishin had raised concerns about the ruling coalition's bill, which required victims

to seek the preservation of individual assets through civil lawsuits.

LDP lawmaker Masahiko Shibayama said at the judicial committee meeting that if issues arose, a review would be conducted without needing to wait for three years, gaining the support of opposition parties for the amendment in the proposed bill.

“If there are signs of asset dissipation or concealment, it is necessary to start discussions on asset preservation at any time when needed,” said Chinami Nishimura, a veteran CDP lawmaker.

The House of Representatives’ Judicial Affairs Committee voted on two bills aimed at preventing the outflow of assets before a court is ordered to strip a religious corporation of its status, as part of relief efforts for victims of the Unification Church and other religious corporations.

The bill submitted by the LDP, Komeito and the DPP states that when a court has been requested to strip a religious corporation of its status, it is mandatory for the group to notify relevant government authorities before disposing of its assets, including real estate.

Former followers of the Unification Church and their families, who are seeking compensation for the large donations they made to the religious organization, have been asking ruling and opposition lawmakers to draft a law so that the refunds will continue to be made in the future.

“For us (those seeking refunds from the church), the biggest concern is that there won't be financial resources left” once the court rules that the Unification Church needs to repay the donations, a man in his 70s, who did not disclose his name due to privacy reasons, told a news conference in Tokyo last week.

He and his wife donated about ¥10 million to the church between 2008 and 2013.

Staff writer Kanako Takahara contributed to the report.



An Israeli soldier fires from a window in the Gaza Strip on Monday. The United States has cautioned Israel to do more to avert civilian casualties as military operations shift to the south. ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES / VIA REUTERS

Two civilian deaths per Hamas fighter’s: Israel

AFP-JIJI

Around two civilians have been killed for every dead Hamas fighter in the Gaza Strip, senior Israeli military officials admitted on Monday, adding that the army was deploying high-tech mapping software to try to reduce noncombatant deaths as it moves into southern Gaza.

The Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza says Israel's military campaign, in the wake of Hamas' attacks on Oct. 7, has killed around 15,900 people so far, most of them women and children.

Asked about media reports that 5,000 Hamas fighters had been killed, one of the senior officials told reporters at a briefing: “The numbers are more or less right.

“I'm not saying it's not bad that we have a ratio of 2 to 1.”

The official added that the use of human shields was part of Hamas’ “core strategy” in the conflict.

“Hopefully it (the ratio) will be much lower” in the coming phase of the war, they added, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The rising death toll and unfolding humanitarian crisis in Gaza have sparked outrage in much of the world.



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U.S. to deploy new missile launcher to Pacific in '24

JESSE JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

The U.S. military has confirmed that it plans to deploy to the Indo-Pacific next year a new ground-based missile launcher capable of firing weapons with a range of up to 2,500 kilometers.

The U.S. Army Pacific intends to deploy the “Typhon” Strategic Mid-Range Fires (SMRF) system to the region in 2024, spokesman Col. Rob Phillips told The Japan Times on Tuesday, pointing to earlier remarks by Gen. Charles Flynn, the commander of the U.S. Army's forces in the Pacific.

Flynn told reporters at the Halifax International Security Forum last month that the system, which employs SM-6 missiles and Tomahawk cruise missiles and modifies them for ground launch, would be deployed next year. Tomahawks are believed to have a range of between 1,250 km to 2,500 km, while the SM-6 has a maximum range of 240 km.

“I'm not going to say where and when, but I will just say that we will deploy them in the region,” Flynn had said.

The U.S. Army conducted successful tests of the system, which has four trailer-based launchers and other supporting equipment, with the Tomahawk and SM-6 missiles earlier this year. When employing SM-6 missiles, which the U.S. military says are its only real defense against highly maneuverable hypersonic weapons, the system could also be used in a defensive manner.

The system is unlikely to be deployed in Japan, with media reports citing difficulties in securing public understanding — fielding them in the country would effectively make the sites a target of China's own arsenal — as well as Tokyo's plans for a so-called counter-strike capability that includes Tomahawks and indigenously built missiles.

A deployment of the weapons to Asia — potentially to the U.S. territory of Guam, home to a sprawling military base — would be the first since the Cold War, and would come as China continues to build up its stockpile of potent missiles capable of striking U.S. military bases in Japan and across the Pacific.

Under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) between the

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COP28 crowds: Distraction or sign of success?

VALERIE VOLCOVICI
DUBAI
REUTERS

Flashy country pavilions, corporate-sponsored cocktail parties and a smorgasbord of side events have turned the annual U.N. climate summit into what some say is a trade show or circus.

In this year's gleaming host city of Dubai, billboards advertise the benefits of wind energy, climate ambition and ExxonMobil's carbon-capture projects.

And with a record 84,000 registered attendees, this year's Conference of the Parties, or COP28, is a far cry from the first in Berlin in 1995, a low-key affair with fewer than 4,000 delegates focused on multilateral climate change cooperation.

This is seen by some as a sign of success and by others as a dangerous distraction from the business of combating climate change, as over nearly three decades global oil demand, carbon emissions and temperatures have marched steadily upward.

“It's a lobby fest where polluters can schmooze with politicians, all under the



guise of tackling climate change,” Pascoe Sabido, a researcher at the Corporate Europe Observatory, which scrutinizes corporate influence on policymaking, said.

The United Nations and COP backers say the planet would be much worse off without them.

People walk through Dubai's Expo City during COP28 on Monday. REUTERS

For Alden Meyer, a senior associate at think tank E3G who has attended every COP, the carnival-like atmosphere is a positive sign of increasing global engagement with the climate crisis, even if it meant long queues for food and coffee.

“It's a three-ring circus, and it is a good thing. It means the issue has reached critical mass,” Meyer said.

Lisa Jacobson, president of the 65-member Business Council for Sustainable Energy, which represents the energy efficiency, natural gas and renewable energy industries, agrees.

Jacobson recalls that in 2000 in The Hague the turnout was so low that everyone fitted into one auditorium. Having more than 80,000 people attend is something she only dreamed of.

“It's all we wished for,” she said.

Countries have adopted a strategy of announcing voluntary pledges and initiatives at the start of COPs. These are meant to set a positive tone as delegations grind through two weeks of tough negotiations.

In Dubai, this process went into overdrive,

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