

Report alleges PM met head of affiliated group

Kishida denies Unification Church link

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STAFF WRITER

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday dismissed allegations of ties to the Unification Church after a media report said that he had met with the head of a group affiliated with the scandal-ridden religious organization in 2019 during his time as policy chief of the Liberal Democratic Party.

The Asahi Shimbun reported Monday that, when meeting with a delegation in Tokyo that included former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, Kishida had an exchange with Masayoshi Kajikuri, the head of the Universal Peace Federation Japan, a group closely associated with the Unification Church.

Kishida told reporters on Monday that he wasn't aware of Kajikuri's presence in the delegation and didn't remember the exact content of the conversation.

"The former speaker said he wanted to pay a courtesy visit to (Japan's) former foreign minister," said Kishida, who was foreign minister from 2012 to 2017. "He was accompanied by a large number of people and I didn't know exactly who was who."

The assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in July 2022 and the renewed scrutiny of Unification Church practices that followed have seen the government's attitude toward the church toughen significantly.

In the summer of 2022, as party heavyweights such as incumbent LDP policy chief Koichi Hagiuda and late Lower House Speaker Hiroyuki Hosoda faced criticism for their ties with the church, Kishida denied any personal links to the organization and asked all party members to sever any connections to it.

After months of probing into the church's activities, in October of this year the government officially sought a court order to strip the group of its legal status. Ruling and opposition parties are currently discussing a law to offer further protection to the victims of the church's wrongdoing and will likely reach a conclusion this week.

Gingrich, a former Republican lawmaker who served as speaker of the U.S. House from 1995 to 1999, traveled to Japan in late 2019 and gave a keynote address at an event in Nagoya organized by the Universal Peace Federation.

Hak Ja Han Moon, the wife of Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon and co-founder of the Universal Peace Federation, attended the event.

On that occasion, Gingrich met with LDP lawmaker Daishiro Yamagiwa, who was later appointed as economic revitalization minister in a Cabinet reshuffle in the summer of 2022. He resigned months later after he was found to have hidden his ties with the group.

While the controversy will likely subside in the coming days, increased scrutiny could further undermine Kishida's political capital at a difficult time for his administration, with it experiencing low approval ratings and soaring criticism over widespread political misconduct.

A JNN poll conducted over the weekend found that, while Kishida's popularity remained roughly stable, 89% of respondents thought that the underreporting of political funds within the LDP was problematic.

The administration is directly affected by the scandal, as former secretaries-general of the faction led by Abe, the group most affected by the ongoing investigation, occupy key positions in the government.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno has so far evaded questions on the matter, while economy minister Yasutoshi Nishimura reportedly said he has been handling the funds "properly."

To make matters worse, 73% of survey respondents were unconvinced by Kishida's plan to cut residence and income taxes next June, despite months of government efforts to convince the public of the benefit of cutting them.

Debate within the tax committee of the LDP will reach a climax this week, while the government will face further scrutiny by a galvanized opposition in the last parliamentary debates before the end of the current session.



Mariko Hayashi, chairperson of Nihon University, speaks at a news conference in Tokyo on Monday. KYODO

Nihon University head vows reforms

Chairperson pledges to stay in post despite calls for her to resign

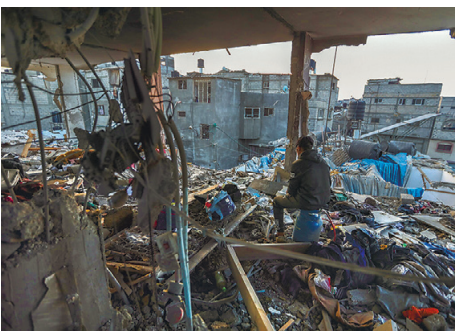
YUKANA INOUE AND TOMOKO OTAKE
STAFF WRITERS

Mariko Hayashi, chairperson of the scandal-hit Nihon University, said Monday that she intends to remain in her position and follow through with reforms, despite calls for her to step down and the planned resignations of two other executives.

"I am still in the middle of implementing reforms, so I need to achieve that — I would like people to understand my strong intent," she said in her first appearance in front of the media since August.

Vice President Yasuhiro Sawada and President Takeo Sakai have decided to resign to take responsibility for a drug scandal involving Nihon University's American football team, which precipitated the institution's current crisis, while Hayashi will receive a 50% pay cut for six months.

The university has said it plans to disband the team — triggering a mixed reaction —



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Agnes Chow, Hong Kong activist, flees to Canada

KATHLEEN BENOZA
STAFF WRITER

Prominent Hong Kong pro-democracy activist Agnes Chow — who was jailed for months in a 2020 crackdown on the movement following massive protests the previous year — revealed Sunday that she has decided to stay in Canada, where she is studying, likely never to return home to meet her bail conditions.

Known in Japan as the "Goddess of Democracy," Chow — the co-founder of the now-disbanded Demosisto party — updated her Instagram account for the first time in nearly two years to mark her 27th birthday, writing that she is currently in Toronto and had left Hong Kong in September to study at a university in Canada.

"Maybe I won't return to Hong Kong for the rest of my life," she said, citing her personal safety as well as her physical and mental health.

In an interview Monday with TV Tokyo, Chow also said that she was considering applying for asylum in Canada.

Since her release from prison in June 2021, Chow has been required to comply with bail procedures, including regular check-ins with authorities, she said, adding that she had not engaged in any public activities and had refrained from being involved in political activities, even avoiding contact with old friends.

The long wait to have her passport returned, restrictions on her freedom and frequent interactions with the police took an especially large toll on her mental well-being this year, according to her Instagram post. Despite being under investigation for "collusion with foreign forces to endanger national security," she obtained permission to travel to Canada for studies, receiving her passport only a day before departure.

To have her passport returned, Chow was required to go on a police-escorted trip to mainland China, with no option to decline.

She wrote that although there were no arranged meetings with officials or Chinese Communist Party members and that she did not undergo interrogation by police, she felt like she was under constant surveillance. Upon returning, Chow was requested to write letters of gratitude to the authorities

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Nikai-led group faces scrutiny
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Labor shortage spurs new ways to fill jobs

KANOKO MATSUYAMA
AND SUPRIYA SINGH
BLOOMBERG

Japan's shrinking and aging population is spurring efforts by businesses to find new ways to keep the elderly employed for longer, as they seek to address a chronic and expanding labor shortage.

Earlier this year, the government committed ¥3.5 trillion (\$23.6 billion) on measures to increase the birthrate, but the shortfall in available workers has been challenging employers for some time. Although Japan has taken steps to relax immigration controls, that hasn't been enough to make up for a shortfall.

All of this has forced companies to come up with new ways to find labor and keep their operations running smoothly, sometimes with novel ideas. Here are some of the steps that shops, restaurants and other businesses are taking to attract and retain older staff.

Elderly care
Care for elderly people is one area that has seen an acute shortage of labor. What's inter-



esting is that many of the people tending to those who need help with their aging bodies are also on the older side themselves.

The average age of caregivers in Japan is 50, already about seven years higher than the average across all industries; that figure is projected to rise further as facilities struggle to attract new workers. Labor shortages in the sector are predicted to triple to 690,000 by 2040, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

Job-matching site Sketter was designed so

The government plans to raise the retirement age of drivers of privately owned cabs to 80, from 75 currently, as rural areas in particular suffer from a shortage of transportation for the elderly.
GETTY IMAGES / VIA BLOOMBERG

that nonessential jobs in nursing homes can be advertised. Tasks such as cooking, cleaning and meal support can be handled by paid volunteers, providing caregivers more time to devote to their main tasks of taking care of the elderly.

"Seniors are searching for ways to engage in society even after they retire," said Ryohei Suzuki, who founded Sketter in 2019. "They might be able to work full time, but they are looking for lifework and means for life."

Aging taxi drivers
The government has said it plans to raise the retirement age of drivers of privately owned cabs to 80, from 75 currently.

Rural areas are suffering from an acute shortage of transportation for the elderly, as local governments cut back on public transport, especially buses, due to declining populations in villages and towns. As a result, cabs are becoming the only option for those who no longer drive and need to get to hospitals, or shop for daily goods.

A government official said that taxi drivers tend to make more money in cities and are

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