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Substance found in gummies made several ill

Japan to ban cannabis compound

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The health ministry will clamp down on a synthetic cannabis compound that was recently found in gummies that reportedly made several individuals ill after consuming them.

An expert panel at the health ministry convened on Tuesday to discuss the ban, deciding to officially add the synthetic compound to a “designated drug” list on Wednesday with the ban taking effect from Dec. 2.

After being added to the list, the manufacturing, sale, possession, use, purchase, and transfer of hexahydrocannabinol (HHCH), which is chemically similar to compounds found in the cannabis plant and can cause hallucinations and memory impairment, will be prohibited under the pharmaceuticals and medical devices law. Violators of the law may face penalties such as imprisonment for a maximum of three years, a fine of up to ¥3 million (\$20,000) or a combination of both.

Japan has already banned THC, the primary psychoactive constituent of cannabis and the substance in the drug that gives users a high. Despite this, the list of synthesized THC derivatives is growing, making it harder for the police to keep up.

The ministry has consistently implemented regulations on synthetic compounds resembling THC, listing each ingredient under the designated drug list.

But as producers of such products are able to manipulate the chemical composition to create novel, unregulated compounds, such as HHCH, there is a possibility that products incorporating similar ingredients will continue to be in circulation even after HHCH is banned.

On Monday, health minister Keizo Takemi said the government intends to start discussions on comprehensive restrictions for substances closely resembling HHCH in chemical structure.

“Products referred to as ‘marijuana gummies’ are dangerous, so we would like to cau-

tion the public not to consume them,” he said at a news conference Monday.

The same day, an on-site inspection was conducted at Osaka-based manufacturing and sales company WWE following the reports that people felt unwell after consuming the company’s gummies, which are suspected of containing a substance similar in toxicity to cannabis. After the raid, the firm was ordered to suspend sales until an analysis of the ingredients has been completed.

Another raid was conducted Tuesday at one of WWE’s gummy manufacturing facilities, with the police suspecting that the gummies contain substances with a toxicity level similar to drugs restricted by law, according to an NHK report. The bags of gummies displayed the name “HHCH” on the packaging.

Police in the Tohoku region also conducted an on-site inspection at a retail store selling the gummies in Sendai’s Aoba Ward.

Earlier this month, two individuals in Sapporo fell ill after consuming gummies and required transport to a hospital. Both individuals tested positive for cannabis, with police in Hokkaido investigating whether these candies were manufactured by the same Osaka-based company, NHK reported.

On-site investigations were also conducted at three business establishments in Tokyo and two in Osaka on Friday. HHCH was found at one of the stores in Tokyo.

Last Tuesday, the Lower House passed a bill legalizing medical products derived from cannabis, while explicitly maintaining the nation’s prohibition on other forms of marijuana.

The government strongly opposes recreational marijuana use, asserting that it is a potential “gateway drug” to other illicit substances and has maintained a zero-tolerance policy. Police have aggressively taken action against people suspected of using cannabis, as seen in recent high-profile arrests of two students belonging to Nihon University’s American football team.

Information from Jiji added



An Egyptian medic wheels a premature Palestinian baby evacuated from Gaza to an ambulance on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing on Monday. Story: page 6 AFP-JIJI

N. Korea plans satellite launch

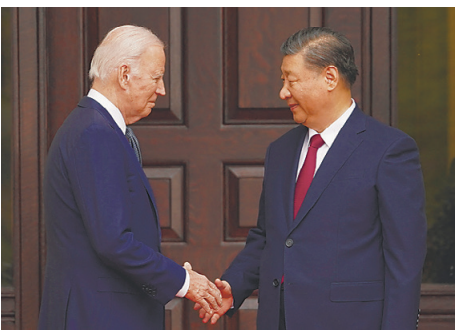
Pyongyang brushes away warnings from Tokyo and Seoul

JESSE JOHNSON
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North Korea has notified Japan of plans to launch a rocket carrying a satellite between Wednesday and Dec. 1, the Japanese government said Tuesday, with Pyongyang brushing away warnings from Tokyo and Seoul not to go ahead with the move.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s office said it had “strongly demanded” that North Korea halt preparations for the launch, with Kishida later adding that Japan was preparing for “unforeseen circumstances” and cooperating with the United States, South Korea and others.

“Even if the purpose is to launch a satellite, using ballistic missile technology is a violation of a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions,” Kishida told reporters.



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TSMC weighs building third chipmaking plant in Japan

TAKASHI MOCHIZUKI
AND JANE LANHEE LEE
BLOOMBERG

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. is considering building a third plant in Japan that would make advanced 3-nanometer (3nm) chips, according to people familiar with the matter, potentially turning the East Asian nation into a major global chipmaking hub.

The go-to chipmaker for Nvidia and Apple has told its supply chain partners it’s mulling construction of a third factory, code-named TSMC Fab-23 Phase 3, in Kumamoto Prefecture, the people said, asking not to be named as the information is not public. TSMC is in the process of building one fab in Japan for less advanced chips, and plans for a second facility have been reported earlier. It is unclear yet when the company would start construction of the third fab.

The 3nm process is the most cutting-edge chipmaking technology commercially available right now, though by the time TSMC’s potential fab is up and running, the technology would likely be one to two generations behind that. If the plan is realized, it would be a major win for Japan, where Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s administration has been providing trillions of yen in subsidies to lure investments from domestic and foreign semiconductor companies.

In addition to TSMC, Tokyo has successfully secured investments from Micron Technology, Samsung Electronics and Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing. Japanese officials are also helping domestic startup Rapidus set up production lines for cutting-edge 2nm chips in Hokkaido.

Tokyo has moved more quickly in building up a domestic semiconductor ecosystem than Washington, which is also trying to build domestic capabilities for economic and national security reasons. The Japanese government has handed out subsidies to firms while the Biden administration has yet to distribute a dime to any company from the Chips and Science Act that earmarked more than \$50 billion for the semiconductor industry.

A 3nm fab is likely to cost about \$20 billion, including the machines for production, Continued on page 4 →

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Health care options expand
New treatment for obesity to be covered by public insurance | NATIONAL, PAGE 2

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Hawaii may ease entry for Japanese visitors

KYODO

The U.S. state of Hawaii is working with its national authorities and Japanese immigration to create a system that allows Japanese tourists to complete immigration and customs procedures before departing from Japan, Hawaii Gov. Josh Green said.

Currently, Daniel K. Inouye International Airport in Honolulu on the island of Oahu is the main gateway to other islands in Hawaii from Japan. If travelers can complete immigration procedures before departure, it will simplify entry to Hawaii and pave the way for direct flights to other islands, such as Maui, Green said in an interview during his recent visit to Japan.

The new initiative would allow direct flights to even those with no immigration facilities, making travel more convenient and in turn boosting local economies that have seen a downturn in tourists from Japan since the COVID-19 pandemic, he said.

Maui was devastated in August by wildfires that left more than 100 people dead or missing. Green said bringing in more tourists to the island is essential in rebuilding its economy.



“It’s very important that people travel to Maui because our recovery will be accelerated if people do visit anywhere in Maui, anywhere at all,” Green said.

According to Hawaiian authorities, around 1.17 million people traveled to Hawaii from Japan between January and September 2019, before the pandemic, compared with about 380,000 people in the same period this year.

Japanese visitors have been slow to return compared to tourists from elsewhere, including the mainland United States, with Green attributing it to the yen being “weaker than normal” and younger people showing less interest in travel.

Japan previously agreed on a similar pre-departure immigration clearance initiative with South Korea in 2002, when the two East Asian countries hosted the football World Cup.

But the United States is believed to be concerned about creating offshore immigration procedures, and the federal immigration authority will decide whether to implement them.

Japanese tourists to Hawaii spent \$1.65 billion between January and September 2019, but \$608.5 million in the first nine months of 2023, according to the Hawaii Tourism Authority.

“Japanese tourists have traditionally been among our best tourists because they are very thoughtful about the culture and also spend a great deal of resources,” Green said, adding he aims to do what is necessary to promote travel between Japan and Hawaii.

<Foreign Residents Support World 2023>

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