

WORLD

# Okinawa vote paves way for arms buildup

Experts: Japan governor race may boost US security ties, raise regional tensions

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The gubernatorial election in Japan's Okinawa Prefecture could give Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's government greater leeway to expand military deployments and deepen security cooperation with the United States in the southern-most islands, experts say.

The result could heighten regional tensions and the risk of an arms race, while leaving Okinawa residents struggling to balance military build-up with economic and livelihood concerns, they said.

Genta Koja, 42, backed by Takai-chi's Liberal Democratic Party and other parties, defeated incumbent Denny Tamaki on Monday, marking the first victory by an LDP-backed candidate in the gubernatorial race since 2010.

Hiroshi Shiratori, a professor at Tokyo's Hosei University, said political constraints on the Takaichi government's plans to advance the Henoko base relocation, strengthen defense capabilities in Okinawa and deepen Japan-US security cooperation had become "almost nonexistent".

Opposition parties in Japan's Parliament are divided and have limited influence, while Okinawa now has a governor who supports the Henoko relocation, Shiratori said.

Tamaki opposed relocating the US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from Ginowan to the coastal Henoko area in Nago, as well as further Self-Defense Forces deployments in the islands and joint military exercises with the US.

Koja, by contrast, supported the relocation plan and closer coordination with the central government.

Under a 1996 Japan-US agreement, Futenma is to be relocated to Henoko despite strong local opposition. Former governor Takeshi Onaga opposed the move, a stance continued by Tamaki.

Nikkei Asia reported that only three of 12 candidate airports and ports in Okinawa had been designated for use by the Self-Defense Forces and Japan Coast Guard as of 2024. Most of the remaining sites are controlled by the prefectural government and require the governor's approval, which Tamaki declined to give.

Koja, who has described Okinawa's security environment as increasingly severe, has called further development of such facilities extremely important.

Atsushi Koketsu, professor emeritus at Yamaguchi University, said Okinawa's role as a major area for military bases and defense deployments could expand further, giving the Takaichi government greater room to respond to US security demands.

With greater political confidence, the Takaichi government could increasingly cite regional contingencies to justify a tougher security stance and rhetoric toward China, he said.

Shiratori of Hosei University warned that further military build-up in Okinawa could upset the regional balance of power and even trigger an arms race.

Japan, as a self-described "peaceful nation", should pursue peace and mutual understanding through diplomacy and seek cooperation with China to maintain regional stability, he said.

### Economic platform

Koja also broadened his support with an economic platform focused on raising incomes amid higher prices and growing pressure on household finances.

Prefectural government data show that its per capita income remains the lowest in Japan.

Shiratori said the US military base issue had become less important than in the 2022 gubernatorial election. Voters have traditionally swung

between "economic growth" and "military bases", but this time they "chose economic growth", he said.

An exit poll by public broadcaster NHK showed that 49 percent of voters cited the economy and rising consumer prices as their top concerns, with about 70 percent of them voting for Koja.

Koketsu of Yamaguchi University said conservatives had deliberately avoided making the military base issue central to the campaign, instead emphasizing livelihoods and economic revitalization.

He also attributed Koja's victory to conservative unity and divisions within the "All Okinawa" camp, a coalition of political parties, businesses and civic groups opposed to the Henoko relocation.

Takaichi said on Monday that the result reflected Okinawa residents' desire for economic growth and pledged to work with the new governor to strengthen the local economy.

Kyodo News, citing sources, reported on Monday that the government and ruling parties were considering raising the fiscal 2027 Okinawa development budget to more than 300 billion yen (\$1.93 billion), from about 260 billion yen since fiscal 2022 under Tamaki.

Following Koja's victory, the government plans to increase the budget while advancing the Henoko relocation and strengthening defense capabilities.

However, his win does not mean Okinawa has reached a consensus on the relocation. An NHK exit poll showed 53 percent of voters accepted the Henoko relocation, while 47 percent opposed it.

Koketsu said the issue's declining electoral importance did not mean its underlying problems were being resolved. Uncertainty remains over the Henoko project and Futenma's return, while construction is intertwined with local businesses, jobs and livelihoods, making it difficult to halt.

"Okinawa residents will continue struggling to find a way to address both 'war and the economy' and 'war and people's livelihoods'," he said.

## Scorched wreckage



Palestinians gather to inspect the damage at the site of an Israeli attack on a civilian vehicle in Gaza City on Sunday. Two Palestinians were killed in the attack. HAMZA Z.H. QRAIQA VIA GETTY IMAGES

# Self-determination push gains pace in UK

By **JONATHAN POWELL** in London  
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In a rare show of unity, the first ministers of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland signed a joint pledge on Monday asserting their nations' right to decide their constitutional futures.

In a memorandum of understanding, the leaders of the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru in Wales, and the pro-Irish unity Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland declared: "Our nations have the right to self-determination. No Westminster government has the right to block democracy or undermine the principle that our people will decide their own future."

For the first time in the devolution era, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are all led by first ministers who support leaving the United

Kingdom. The agreement follows intensifying debate over referendums, with the first ministers urging the UK government to endorse ballots in their respective nations.

The three nationalist leaders, John Swinney of the SNP, Plaid Cymru's Rhun ap Iorwerth, and Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill, gathered in Cardiff, Wales, to sign the pact that demands the right to hold referendums.

The three met in their capacity as party leaders rather than as officials in their respective governments, and were joined by Sinn Fein President Mary Lou McDonald, leader of the opposition in Ireland's Parliament.

The group also outlined plans to collaborate on the economy, energy and international cooperation.

The agreement said, "The political landscape across these islands is changing.

"For the first time ever, people

across these islands have first ministers in Scotland, in Wales and in the North of Ireland who are all committed to independence from the United Kingdom.

"For people watching across these islands — for people watching around the world — there could be no clearer sign that Westminster's time is coming to an end."

There was speculation last week that UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham could authorize another Scottish independence vote after he told lawmakers in the UK Parliament that a poll would be considered if there was a "clear consensus".

After Swinney wrote to Burnham asking for clarification on how the right to a referendum could be enshrined in law, the latter replied that no such consensus currently existed and repeated his view that another referendum was "off limits".

## ACFTU Special

# Cable job 'like putting roller skates on a dragon'

*From model workers and master craftsmen to factory hands and gig-economy workers, China's vast workforce is the bedrock of national development. Launched by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, this series shines a spotlight on the responsibility and resilience of the modern Chinese working class, documenting their struggles and stories from the front lines to showcase the dedication, craftsmanship and pioneering spirit driving progress across every sector.*

By **YUAN SHENGGAO**

Short hair, spectacles, work clothes and a trusty backpack; this is the signature look of He Guanghua, a veteran cable engineer.

He, head of the cable operation and inspection center at State Grid Wuxi Power Supply, has dedicated more than 20 years of her life to front-line cable construction, operation and maintenance, earning the nickname "female cable doctor".

In 2000, He joined State Grid Wuxi after graduation. In 2003, she became the cable division's first female technician.

She still recalls her first descent into a cable shaft: workers hunched in a narrow chamber, gripping thick cables to splice joints by hand. Grease smeared their clothes and rubber fumes burned their throats.

"A single joint took six or seven hours of squatting. Many developed lumbar strain in their 20s," He said. "I knew then we couldn't keep asking our masters to work like that."

High-voltage cables as wide as a bowl weigh dozens of kilograms per meter, far beyond what humans can carry. Joint failures account for 50.8 percent of all cable faults. These invisible risks could cause blackouts at any moment.

In 2006, He took on a world-class challenge: the laying of high-voltage cables across steep elevation drops. With no data, models, or precedents, she and her team set up shelters on-site, took measurements at more than 1,000 projects, and filled stacks of notebooks.

"At the darkest moments, we ran models hundreds of times and failed thousands of times," she said.

The breakthrough came from



He Guanghua, head of the cable operation and inspection center at State Grid Wuxi Power Supply, on a routine field inspection. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

innovative thinking. He created segmented arc models and algorithms for different working conditions, steadily narrowing the error in traction-force calculations for curved cable sections and enabling the precise pinpointing of overload points. This amounted to installing a "navigation system" for cable laying.

The low-friction pulleys designed by He's team incorporated internal bearings, reducing friction by more than 60 percent. "It's like putting roller skates on a giant dragon," she said.

Eight years and thousands of trials later, her team delivered the damage-free construction technology. Work efficiency increased five-fold, the number of cable joints required dropped sharply, and workers no longer had to squat for

# Trump steps up pressure on Canada as trade fight widens beyond tariffs

By **YANG GAO** in Toronto  
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The trade dispute between Canada and the United States escalated further after Ottawa imposed retaliatory tariffs on US goods, prompting US President Donald Trump to restrict imports of selected Canadian products.

Trump's latest measures have taken the trade dispute beyond tariffs and into import restrictions. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Canada's retaliation would have little effect on US inflation.

Jiang Wenran, founding director of the China Institute at the University of Alberta in Canada, said the latest moves marked a significant shift in the way Washington was approaching its trade dispute with Canada.

"Yes, this is a new phase — but selective coercion, not blanket decoupling," Jiang said.

The use of measures targeting alcohol, dairy, paper and other products, along with an outright ban on most alcohol and threats involving autos and Bombardier, showed Washington was moving beyond conventional trade negotiations, he said.

"This is no longer normal tariff bargaining — it is selective, statutory coercion under Section 338, including outright bans, and it treats even USMCA-compliant goods as targets," he said, referring to the trade pact US-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

The strategy resembled a supply chain "choke point" approach, targeting goods where the other side is exposed and using uncertainty as leverage, Jiang said.

At the same time, Washington appeared to be managing the escalation, he said.

"Because energy, potash and most fish are still largely spared, it is

managed escalation — designed to maximize political pressure while limiting immediate US inflation pain," he said.

On the potential economic impact on the US, Jiang said Bessent's assessment was reasonable at the national level, but did not capture the uneven effects of tariffs on individual industries and consumers.

"US importers and consumers pay the border duty; affected sectors — wine, spirits, selected dairy, aluminum inputs, paper/wood, and eventually auto parts — see sharper price/cost rises," he said.

Canada, meanwhile, is more exposed to the economic consequences because of its heavy reliance on the US market, he said.

"Canada, with about 70 percent of exports to the US, bears larger GDP/volume damage, but US manufacturers and farmers hit by retaliation also lose," he said.

"Net: America feels small, macro inflation, sectoral spikes; Canada feels bigger output loss; neither wins," he said.

### 'Doubling down'

Ronald Stagg, a history professor at Toronto Metropolitan University, said he expects Trump to continue applying pressure after Canada responded with its own tariffs.

"Trump never wants to lose. When Canada responded to his new tariffs with matching ones, his response, of course, was to double down," Stagg said.

"We can expect more pressure on Canada," he said.

The Canadian government had indicated that it had gone as far as it wanted to go in retaliating, while Trump continued to seek leverage over Canada, he said.

"Trump still wants to humble Canada and bring it under America's control," he added.

Stagg agreed that the latest tariffs would not have a major immediate effect on either country's overall economy, but said the consequences would be uneven.

"It is true that the new tariffs will have little effect on the US economy, and as well on the Canadian economy, but they will hit certain states and certain parts of the US population harder than others," he said. "The same is true of Canada."

The cumulative effect of Trump's broader trade measures could nevertheless become more noticeable for Americans, Stagg said.

"While these tariffs will have little effect on the American economy, taken in combination with other steps that Trump has taken, they will gradually drive up costs for the American population," he said.

Jiang said the latest measures appeared to serve several purposes beyond generating tariff revenue, including extracting concessions from Canada and using tariffs as leverage in the review of the USMCA.

The pressure could strengthen Canada's efforts to diversify its trade relationships, he said. China and other Asian countries could provide new markets for Canadian agricultural products, energy and critical minerals, though he said they could not replace the US market.

Jiang identified canola, peas, seafood, liquefied natural gas, crude oil, nickel, lithium, uranium and potash as areas where Canada could expand exports to Asian markets.

"Asia absorbs volume and reduces US-only pricing power, but geography, terminals, rail, investment review and US political pressure cap the speed," he said.

Jiang said Canada's goal should not be to sever its deep economic ties with the US, but to reduce the risks associated with excessive dependence on a single market.