



Miyazawa Urges Closer Ties in Seoul Visit

Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa made an official visit to South Korea from January 16 to 18 in his first overseas trip since assuming the reins of government, and appealed for the establishment of future-oriented cooperative relations between the two neighboring countries.

Miyazawa, who became the first Japanese leader to deliver a speech to the South Korean National Assembly, conferred with President Roh Tae Woo and other leaders and agreed to chart an action plan to grapple with bilateral trade problems. In his address to Korean legislators, Miyazawa touched on Japan's past colonization of Korea and the issue of "comfort women," a term applied to Korean women forced to serve in Imperial Army frontline brothels before and during World War II. He said, "I cannot help feeling acutely distressed over this, and I express my sincerest apology." Reflecting on Japan's past stance, he said, "While Japan has been working to disseminate correct understanding about the relationship between our two countries, we intend to continue to work hard to that end."

Miyazawa also called for closer Japan-South Korea cooperation at the United Nations and in the Asia-Pacific region.

Noting that \$8.79 billion of South Korea's \$9.66 billion trade deficit in 1991 came from Japan-South Korea transactions, Miyazawa agreed with his Korean hosts to draft an action plan by the end of June through joint vice ministerial talks on trade, industrial and technological cooperation.



Trade Surplus Soars To \$103 Bil. in 1991

Japan's calendar 1991 trade surplus on an IMF basis jumped 62% over the previous year to \$103.2 billion, topping \$100 billion for the first time, according to preliminary figures released by the Finance Ministry.

The invisible trade account was \$18.2 billion in deficit, down \$4 billion from \$22.3 billion in 1990, reflecting reduced overseas travel by Japanese due to the Gulf War.

The current account surplus rose 103% over the year before to \$72.5 billion, the first year-on-year increase in four years,

reversing the downward trend that had lasted since 1987. The turnaround resulted from the yen's appreciation, which depressed total imports, and from steady exports of higher-priced automobiles and household electronic products to the United States and Europe.

According to trade watchers, the surplus is not likely to shrink rapidly in the near future and a recession-plagued United States and European countries are likely to increase pressure on Japan to cut the trade surplus.




Double R&D Spending, Panel Urges Gov't

An advisory body on science and technology has urged that Japan double its official R&D spending to reinforce projects at national universities and research institutes.

The proposal, entitled "Comprehensive and Basic Science and Technology Policy toward the New Century," was issued in January by the Council for Science and Technology chaired by the prime minister. The report said Japan should contribute to humankind through scientific and technological development, so that its international status as a major economic power will be globally recognized.

It contained 16 more recommendations than the previous report seven years ago, including preservation of the environment, preventing a shortage of researchers, and dealing with the growing proportion of old people.

Japanese government R&D spending currently accounts for 0.5% of GNP, about half the level of other industrialized countries. Japan has been internationally criticized for its low level of government R&D expenditure in contrast with that of the private sector.



Toys "R" Us Opens First Japan Stores

Toys "R" Us, the U.S. toy store chain that claims to be the world's largest, has launched a full-scale expansion into Japan with the opening of two retail outlets.

The first outlet opened in Arakawaoki, Ibaraki Prefecture, east of Tokyo, last December and the second outlet in Kashiwara, Nara Prefecture, southeast of Osaka, in January during U.S. President George Bush's visit to Japan.

Attending the opening ceremony of the Kashiwara store on January 7, Bush said the revision of Japan's Large-scale Retail Stores Law following the Japan-U.S. structural impediments initiative talks has opened the way for U.S. distributors' expansion into Japan and widened Japanese consumers' options for buying products at inexpensive prices.

The arrival of Toys "R" Us has already had a big impact on Japan's distribution system, internationally criticized for being closed to imports. Some supermarkets and "home improvement center" chains are moving quickly to have more spacious outlets or considering restructuring their operations.

Toys "R" Us plans to open six more outlets in Japan within 1992 and increase the number to 100 by the year 2000.



Space Agency to Share Know-how with Firms

The Science and Technology Agency has decided to partially transfer intellectual property rights on space technology, so far owned solely by the governmental National Space Development Agency of Japan, to the private sector.

As the first step in this direction, the Science and Technology Agency plans to transfer technology related to the development of the H-2 rocket to Rocket Systems Corporation, a Tokyo-based rocket procurement company.

Japan developed space technology after World War II as a government initiative with U.S. technological assistance, but legislation practically barred the private sector from participating. The shift in government policy was prompted by a growing belief that the private sector must be involved if Japan is to embark on international space business.

The move is aimed at bolstering Japan's competitive position in space development including cost reductions and enhancement of technological reliability. To prevent possible monopolization, the proposed technological transfer will take the form of establishing the right to use specific technology, not sales of technology itself.



Panel OK's Transplants Using Brain-dead Donors


A government advisory panel has opened the way for Japanese surgeons to perform legal organ transplants from brain-dead donors.

The Provisional Commission for the Study of Brain Death and Organ Transplantation gave its conditional assent to transplants using brain-dead donors in a recommendation submitted to the prime minister on December 22, 1991. The commission had studied the matter for nearly two years.

The report urged that 1) the will of the deceased be respected as much as possible; 2) the removal and grafting of organs from a brain-dead person be possible without the written consent of the donor, but a third-party system be established to protect next of kin from pressure; and 3) a nationwide network be established to ensure that all concerned receive a thorough explanation and reach a consensus.

The report detailed a dissenting view among a minority of panel members headed by Takeshi Umehara, a noted philosopher who refused to recognize brain death as signifying death when the commission presented its mid-term report last June.

The government is now expected to work out steps to give legal sanction to such transplants, but experts believe it will take some time before this issue wins wide-ranging social recognition.



Majority Supports Market Opening, Int'l Role

A majority of Japanese people are in favor of wider market opening and positive international contributions, according to a government-sponsored public opinion poll conducted in October 1991.

The 15th annual survey on foreign relations by the Prime Minister's Office, announced January 25, showed that Japanese people supporting the promotion of market opening, including those conditionally in favor, totaled 51.4%, up 2.3 points from the previous survey conducted a year earlier. The poll covered 3,000 people aged 20 or more.

Those having reservations about market opening for domestic reasons totaled 34.6%, higher than those unconditionally in favor, but 3.4 points less than in the previous survey. Those conditionally supporting wider market opening say that action by Japan needs to be balanced by similar action on the part of the other industrialized countries.

As to Japan's international contributions, some 64% favored action in concert with the United Nations, and 49.4% considered it necessary to make not only monetary but also personnel contributions. (The poll was taken shortly after the Diet voted to continue deliberations on a bill providing for Japan's participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations.)

Some 78% said they felt a sense of intimacy with the United States, up from 74% in the October 1990 poll, showing that the Japanese still feel close to the U.S. In contrast, 51% said they did not feel close to South Korea and 44% felt no sense of closeness to China.