

## Nine "Technopolis" Plans Approved

The government gave the go-ahead March 24 to regional development plans of nine prefectures aimed at creating "technopolises," attractive new communities—including schools and residential areas—built around high-tech industries.

In all, there are 14 such "technopolis" plans involving 15 prefectures. The plans of the nine prefectures were given the green light after prefectural governors answered questions about their proposed development plans posed by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and other ministries.

The nine prefectures are Niigata, Toyama, Shizuoka, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Oita, Kumamoto, Miyazaki, and Kagoshima.

The remaining five technopolis plans are expected to be approved when each prefecture works out how to solve issues raised by the concerned ministries.

Authorized technopolis projects will get various kinds of national assistance, including exemptions from taxes on funds invested in "industrial technology promotion organizations," which will play a leading role in carrying out the projects. They will also benefit from sharply reduced municipal property taxes, government-supported finance with low interest rates, and other advantages.

MITI will take more action in fiscal 1984 to promote technopolis schemes including increased budget appropriations for improving regional technological levels.

Other measures planned are a "technopolis promotion tax system," as an incentive for promoting investment by high-tech enterprises in technopolis areas, and the strengthening of existing loans systems of the Japan Development Bank and the Hokkaido-Tohoku Development Corporation designed to encourage regional technological development.

## JETRO Survey Puts Japan 4th In World Investments

The balance of global overseas direct investments remained little changed at the end of 1982, showing a 0.3% increase from a year before to \$484 billion, estimates the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). The negligible rise was due to investment restraints in industrial countries plagued by the protracted global recession and high U.S. interest rates, according to JETRO's 1984 annual report on investments. Investments by the United States declined by \$5 billion to \$221.3 billion for the first drop since World War II. But Japanese investments remained high, centering on those in advanced nations and increasing \$4.5 billion to \$29 billion. This represented the fourth largest investment in the world, permitting Japan to outpace France and follow only the United States, Britain and West Germany.

Japan's direct investments abroad in fiscal 1982 (ending March 31, 1983) totaled \$7,703 million on a report basis, down 13.7% from the previous year's record annual high, but still the second largest on record.

## Patent Office to Go "Paperless"

The Patent Office is about to begin a 10-year program of computerizing its procedures and examinations. The program, known as the "Paperless Project," will involve the electronic filing of some thirty million pieces of patent-related information. Along with enabling the Patent Office to carry out its business by computer, this will make the information on file accessible to all interested persons.

Once entered in the electronic file, information will be immediately available at Patent Office branches throughout Japan and overseas as well, according to the project's aims.

The Patent Office of Japan, the United States Patent and Trademark Office, and the European Patent Office have agreed to assist each other in an effort to carry the project forward as efficiently as possible.

Because joint financing is needed for the program, special legislation going into effect on July 1, 1984 will allow the direct appropriation of application, registration and other fees collected by the Patent Office.

## Education Reform To Be Studied

The government on March 27 submitted a bill to the Diet for the establishment of an advisory body to Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone to study comprehensive reforms of the nation's education system.

The Interim Council on Education will be made up of government officials, school teachers, scholars, and representatives from various sectors of society.

Nakasone, in a policy speech before the Diet on Feb. 6, cited education reform as one of the most important tasks facing his administration. He said Japan's present education system is too uniform and hinders the healthy development of students.

## Economy Recovering Steadily

The Japanese economy has been recovering steadily and with previously depressed business capital spending gradually improving, future prospects are brightening, according to two reports.

The Bank of Japan's quarterly survey of business activity points to the improving performance of major manufacturing companies. The business performance index—the percentage of companies which felt their business is in "good" shape minus the percentage of those finding their business in a "bad" state—came to minus 4 in the latest survey, a significant improvement from minus 17 in the previous quarterly survey taken last November. The companies polled also predict that their production will increase 0.6% and sales 2.1% in the January-March quarter compared with the preceding quarter.

A survey of business capital spending by the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, a leading business daily, shows the 1,190 firms covered plan to increase investments in new plant and equipment by 1.1% in nominal terms in fiscal 1984 (ending March 31, 1985). Expected to recover remarkably are manufacturing firms, which plan a 5.1% spending rise after reduced investments the previous year. Leading the manufacturing investments will be electrical machinery and general machinery—which will enjoy a booming demand for office automation equipment—up 25.1% and 17.1% respectively.



## MITI Committee Reports On Robotics Industry

An increasing number of industrial robots will be used not only in the manufacturing sector but for the operation of nuclear power plants, welfare services and other non-manufacturing purposes, predicts a MITI committee on robotics industry trends. Summing up two years of work in an interim report, the committee says the number of robots operating in Japan will rise to about 560,000 units in 1990 from the current 120,000. Japan has the largest number of robots in operation in the world, accounting for about 40% of the global total. With greater international robotics use and trade expected in the future, the committee recommends global coordination in such aspects as development of new robots in order to forestall possible trade friction in this area.

Robots will help reduce labor costs and ease an expected future shortage of young workers, the report says. In addition, they will make "qualitative" contributions such as improving labor conditions by reducing working hours. The use of robots will also boost productivity and permit technological development in other industries, due to the spreading effect of robotics on high technology. Terming robots indispensable for Japan's socio-economic development, the report stresses the need for policies allowing them to become smoothly established in the country's socio-economic community.

## Import Promotion Discussed

Improvement of the import settlement bills system and the establishment of a yen-denominated bankers acceptance (BA) market were proposed at a recent meeting of the Manufactured Products Import Promotion Committee, an affiliate of the Trade Conference chaired by the prime minister.

At the meeting, held March 26, some committee members called for relaxing requirements of the import settlement bills system, including a softening of bill discount terms. Many committee members recommended early establishment of a yen-quoted BA market.

Some committee members also urged the government to step up imports from not only industrialized but developing countries.

## Revision of the Nationality Law

The Justice Ministry has submitted bills to the Diet for revising the Nationality Law and the related Family Register Law to bring Japan into step with the United Nations treaty to abolish discrimination against women. The government has decided to ratify the treaty, which it signed in 1980, by 1985.

The revision of the Nationality Law, proposed by the Legislative Council, an advisory body to the justice minister, will enable children of Japanese women with foreign husbands to have Japanese nationality.

At present, only the offspring of Japanese men are acknowledged as Japanese and entered in the family registers of their fathers. The law has been criticized as violating the principle of equality of the sexes.

Meanwhile, the revisions to the Family Registration Law—proposed by the Civil Affairs Administration Council, another advisory body to the justice minister—will allow children of Japanese women with foreign husbands to adopt foreign names. Under the existing law, Japanese nationals are required to have Japanese names.

## Foreign Test Data To Be Accepted

In another move to promote imports by simplifying product standards and certification procedures, the Japanese government will accept the test data produced by authorized foreign testing laboratories. The use of foreign test data has already been permitted under certain laws in response to specific individual requests.

The latest measure will allow the acceptance of foreign data in connection with all seven laws relating to standards and certification under MITI's jurisdiction. These include the Electric Appliances and Material Control Law (registration), the Gas Utility Industry Law (registration and type approval), the Weights and Measures Law (designation of manufacturing business of special containers) and the Law Concerning the Securing of Safety and the Optimization of Transaction of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (registration and type approval).

This will mean a significant simplification of the procedures required of overseas companies involved in exporting such products as home electric and gas appliances to Japan.

## Advisory Body Urges Increase in ODA

The Peace Problem Research Council, an advisory body to Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, has recommended a sharp increase in Japan's official development aid (ODA) as one way of ensuring the nation's own national security.

The recommendation was contained in an interim report on national security policy submitted to the prime minister recently.

The council, headed by Kyoto University Professor Masataka Kosaka, was requested by Prime Minister Nakasone last summer to work out a strategy for Japan's comprehensive security.

The interim report covered only the economic aspects of national security. The council is now studying defense and diplomatic factors, and will draw up a final report this autumn.

The interim report concluded that Japan, as a leading economic power, must make major contributions to the world as part of the price of guaranteeing its national security.

In view of the changing world economic and political situation, it said, Japan must help ensure that world systems function properly. It urged the government to bring home to the Japanese people the importance of making such a sacrifice.

The report called on the government to abide by its international pledge to double ODA by 1985, despite huge fiscal deficits.

The report also recommended that the government increase the ratio of official development aid to gross national product (GNP) from the present 0.29% to 0.39%, which is the average for other member countries of the Development Assistance Committee.