

national

TPP trade deal may cost Abe's LDP crucial farmers' votes

Industry voices concerns amid expected rise in imported goods

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Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Liberal Democratic Party faces a major test of its support from farmers in the coming Upper House election, the first nationwide vote since Japan and 11 other countries signed a trade pact that opens the agricultural sector to increased international competition.

DECISION 2016

The Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement is a key growth policy for Abe's government, enabling Japanese companies to make deeper inroads into overseas markets to make up for shrinking domestic demand amid the country's declining population.

But farmers have persistently opposed the trade initiative since Japan joined talks on the pact in 2013, saying it will put the country's heavily protected farm sector into fierce competition with products from major agricultural exporters such as the U.S. and Australia.

A large number of small-scale farmers in Japan have resisted consolidation of farmland that would create more large-scale farms, generate economies of scale and



Cherry farmer Yoshihiro Yoshida is interviewed on his farm in the city of Yamagata on June 21. KYODO

raise productivity. The government estimates the trade treaty will boost Japan's real gross domestic product by ¥13.6 trillion (\$133.5 billion) or 2.59 percent from the fiscal 2014 level.

But falls in prices resulting from competition with cheaper imports is expected to reduce domestic production of agriculture, forestry and fishery products by up to ¥210 billion, according to the estimate.

"We have to make aggressive reforms to protect our important agricultural sector," Abe said in a stump speech last month in Yamagata Prefecture, a major fruit-producing region. Japan will eventually remove tariffs on 95 percent of imported products in value terms under the accord.

The ruling coalition of the LDP and its junior partner Ko-meito stresses that duties on about 20 percent of agricultural, forestry and fishery prod-

ucts will remain.

But some opposition parties claim the TPP is unacceptable and the main opposition force, the Democratic Party, has denounced the ruling camp for having disclosed few details of the negotiations on the treaty, which it says makes it hard to reach an informed decision on whether it should be ratified. "Our understanding is that the TPP is something like a fatal shot," said Yoshihiro Yoshida, who runs a cherry orchard in Yamagata, Japan's largest cherry-growing prefecture.

The 8.5 percent tariff on imported cherries will be eliminated in several stages over six years after the TPP is enacted, possibly as early as 2018.

The abolition of the duty in six years' time makes farmers feel they are "being strangled gradually," the 74-year-old cherry farmer said. Cherry farmers could lose their customers not just to imported



Prime Minister Shinzo Abe puts freshly picked cherries into a plastic container in Tendo, Yamagata Prefecture, on June 9. KYODO

cherries but also to other types of foreign fruit, as consumers will have a wider variety of fruits available, he said.

Farmers have traditionally been supporters of the LDP, with their agricultural lobbying organizations backing the party's candidates.

But they have taken a different approach recently since the TPP has emerged as a

major issue potentially affecting their business.

Among regional political groups of agricultural cooperatives in six agriculture-heavy prefectures in northeastern Japan, those in five prefectures, including Yamagata, decided not to endorse any candidate in the Upper House election and let their members decide who to vote for on their own.

Providing no endorsement to ruling party candidates means the agricultural cooperatives in the five prefectures are effectively backing opposition candidates, said Shoichi Doguchi, an official of the Yamagata branch office of an agricultural association called Japan Family Farmers Movement, which opposes the trade agreement. The LDP is backing a former

senior official of an affiliate of the local agricultural cooperative in Yamagata, Kaoru Tsukino, in the prefectural electoral district in an effort to attract farm votes.

Tsukino said in a speech at a ceremony to start his election campaign on June 22 that he expects a tough election race against independent candidate Yasue Funayama, who is

being jointly fielded by opposition parties.

A representative of Tsukino's support group said at the ceremony that the opposition candidate had a lead but did not elaborate.

Funayama said that she will make the TPP the most important issue during her campaign, as she believes people in Yamagata are concerned about the agreement in the absence of full details on how the deal was reached.

Yamagata has around 100,000 farm voters, accounting for roughly 10 percent of the total number of voters in the prefecture, said Doguchi.

Banking on the effect of the TPP, Abe said during the speech in Yamagata that the government aims to boost farm, fishery and forestry exports to ¥1 trillion a year earlier than the originally targeted 2020.

Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam will remove tariffs on nearly all imported items under the TPP, which covers about 40 percent of the global economy.

For some Japanese farmers, the new trade initiative is an opportunity to expand their businesses into overseas markets.

But only a handful of farmers with good management and marketing skills can be successful, Yoshida said.

"It's impossible (to export cherries) because they don't keep for a long time," he said.

"Freshness is the only strength we have in competition with foreign products," he added.

Japan gets with the Twitter program at U.N. council

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As Japan's presidency at the U.N. Security Council kicked off in July, the communications team at its mission has been hard at work honing its presence on Twitter.

Launched in May, the account @JapanMissionUN has gained more than 900 followers on the social media platform. The first tweet on May 17 had 30,000 impressions — the number of times a tweet shows up on the site.

The impetus to increase outreach through social media came shortly after the mission's new spokesman, Hiroyuki Mase, arrived in New York last summer.

Settling into the United Nations, the Osaka native quickly realized how pervasive social media was at the international body.

Looking to "giants," such as the United States, France and Britain, whose followers collectively number over 200,000, the idea was planted. "I noticed there were a great number of colleagues and diplomats using Twitter and Facebook quite skillfully, and that was the starting point for me," Mase said in a recent interview at Japan's mission in Manhattan.

Besides Britain, France and the United States, Russia and China — the other Security Council permanent members — are also active on social media.

Mase pointed to other nonpermanent Security Council members, notably Spain and New Zealand, which frequently used such platforms as well.

There are 88 diplomatic missions at the United Nations with Twitter handles, with Japan being the latest to join after Kenya.

Another driver in opening the account came last fall, when Japan was elected for a record 11th time to take up a two-year seat as a nonpermanent council member.

Beginning in January, it joined Malaysia as the other Asian seat holder.

Japan is set to mark another milestone at the U.N. this year, with its 60th anniversary as a member state falling on Dec. 18.

Mase said social media play an important role in other areas of the international body, including the General Assembly.

Two recently hired staffers, Jessica Wang and Marissa Trierweiler, have been tasked with running the Twitter account and improving the mission's Facebook account, which was launched in 2012.

Mase described the "trial and error" process of navigating the content and frequency of posts. His team has found that more followers tune in from 1-3 p.m. in New York during their lunch breaks.

They also discovered 6 p.m. in New York was the optimum time to reach morning commuters in Japan who are seeking the latest U.N. news.

After the buzz from the initial launch, the team pointed to other popular tweets. While on a recent trip to Africa with the Security Council, for example, Deputy Ambassador Yoshifumi Okamura's observations from meetings with Somali and Kenyan leaders were a hit.

Meanwhile, individual ambassadors or representatives do not have Twitter accounts. This is unlike other Security Council members, whose ambassadors, such as American Samantha Power and Britain's Matthew Rycroft, are adept tweeters with lively online followings.

WWII fighter pilot keeps tale of conflict alive

Jesse Johnson
STAFF WRITER

World War II veteran Jerry Yellin has a new mission: keeping the memory of the conflict alive.

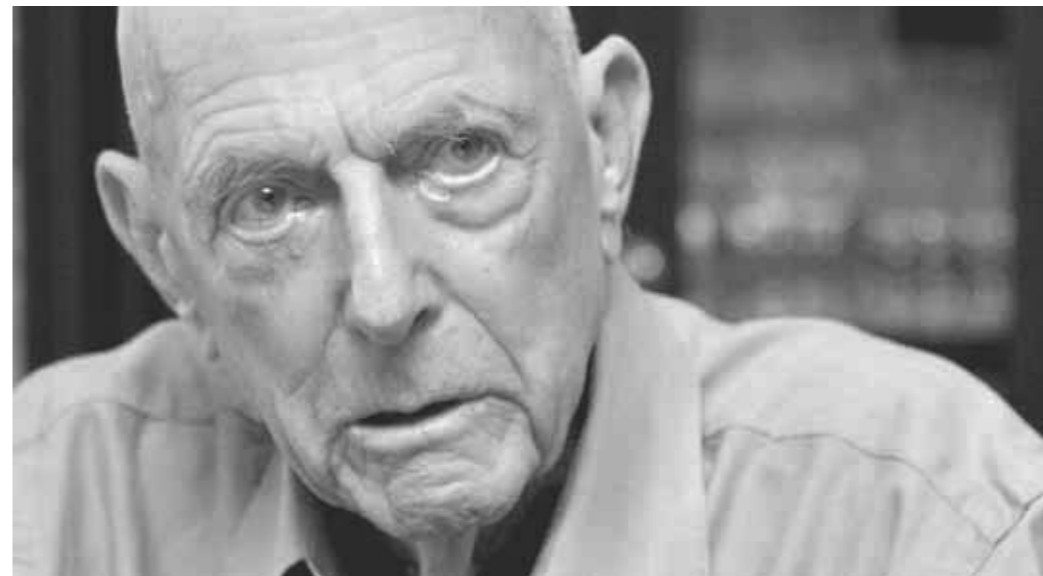
As Hawaii prepares to mark 75 years in December since Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor thrust the United States into the war, Yellin is reaching out to children to tell his tale.

Popularly known as the fighter pilot who flew the last combat mission of the war, Yellin, at the age of 92, remains a captivating storyteller.

"I'm just an ordinary man who's had an extraordinary experience in life," he told The Japan Times in an interview in Tokyo last week.

This is a statement that reflects his modest demeanor and the respect that is often associated with his generation, something that he hopes to show youth on both sides of the Pacific soon.

"I'm putting together an international symposium of eighth- and ninth-graders that will meet together to discuss the war in depth, so that they will know what it was all about," Yellin said. "It's called the Philip Schlambert International Symposium of Peace



Former U.S. Army Air Corps Capt. Jerry Yellin is interviewed on June 22. YOSHIKI MIURA

and Understanding."

Schlambert was Yellin's wingman for the fateful last combat mission. He was also the war's last casualty in the fighting.

Yellin hopes to use the symposium, slated for Aug. 14 in the U.S., to speak of his experiences during the war and to issue a warning about the dangers of nuclear conflict.

"Science has brought us to the position where the smallest nuclear weapon in the Ameri-

can nuclear arsenal is 1,000 times bigger than the bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki," he said.

"And if we go to nuclear war, we're going to wipe out the ability of the world to sustain life. Period. End of conversation."

"And we're close to that with what's going on now. I'm reading in the headlines of 2016 the same headlines that I read 80 years ago when I was 12 years old about terrorism, about kill-

ing what you believe, about race, about religion, about the differences between human beings. And we are no different. We are all human beings in the eye of nature."

Still, while he now warns of the dangers of nuclear destruction, Yellin, like many veterans who fought in the Pacific, remains unwavering in his belief that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were necessary.

"Japanese people don't understand that when we dropped the atomic bombs, we saved a million American lives. ... and millions more Japanese were gonna die," he said.

"The war ended because we dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Millions and millions of Japanese were prepared to die for the Emperor. And they don't understand that, they don't teach that in school. And that's one of my missions, to teach the young people."

Now, Yellin said, "It's time for the story of healing and peace to be told between our countries because of nuclear weapons. These are very dangerous times." Yellin has also been invited to speak at a Dec. 6 conference in Honolulu to plan for a separate annual youth symposium each August on the anniversary of WWII's end, according to Warren Hegg of the nonprofit organization Keep the Spirit of '45 Alive.

Hegg said a group of approximately 30 junior high school students from Nagaoka, Niigata Prefecture, are expected to participate in this year's program in the Hawaiian capital, and organizers are eager to welcome additional youth participants from Japan.

TIMES GALLERY



Left photo (from left): Senior Technical Officer of the Panama Consulate Samuel Guevara and his wife Adriana Nunez; Ayana Hatada, wife of the ambassador of Panama to Japan; and Charge d'Affaires a.i. of Panama David De Leon pose during a Panama Day program promoting the country's history, culture and cuisine at the JICA Global Plaza in Tokyo on June 26; Right photo: (from left) Maritime Bureau of Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Director-General Ichiro Hao; Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Hitoshi Kikawada; Ayana Hatada, wife of the Panama ambassador; Instituto Cervantes Tokyo Director Antonio Gol de Carrasco; Charge d'Affaires a.i. of Panama David De Leon; and House of Representatives member Tsuneo Akaeda prepare to toast at the opening of the "Panama Canal: Expanding World Trade to the World" photo exhibition, which runs through July 5, at Instituto Cervantes Tokyo on June 28. YOSHIKI MIURA



Madagascar Charge d'Affaires a.i. Rosette Rasoamanarivo (third from left) and her spouse Michael Rajoharimanana (fourth from left) are joined by, from left, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director-General for African Affairs and Ambassador Norio Maruyama; Djibouti Ambassador Ahmed Aaraita Ali; Ministry of Foreign Affairs TICAD Ambassador Junzo Fujita; General Delegate of the Government of Quebec to Tokyo Claire Deronzier; Japanese Ambassador to Madagascar Ichiro Ogasawara; and JICA Africa Department Director-General Hideo Eguchi, in a cake-cutting ceremony during a reception to celebrate the country's 56th Independence Day at the embassy on June 26. YOSHIKI MIURA