

I. News of the Week

COVID-19

1. Prime Minister Urges People to Stay at Home

- Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on Friday urged citizens to avoid unnecessary travel during the long holiday starting on Saturday.
- Suga was cautious about including Gifu and Mie, which requested to be put under pre-emergency measures (*man-en bōshi-tō jūten sochi*), under stricter measures saying it was too early to tell whether current measures were working.

2. First Week Into the Third State of Emergency

- National daily cases topped 5,000 at one point this week, with Tokyo and Osaka registering 1,027 and 1,260 cases respectively.
- Japan's COVID-19 death toll topped 10,000 on Monday, with 80 percent of deaths occurring since the beginning of the "third wave," which was last December.
- Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said Monday that 21 cases of the "double mutant" strain from India were detected. This strain contains two different mutations and could be more infectious than other strains.

3. Vaccine Rollout

- Suga asked the Japan Medical Association and the Japan Nursing Association on Friday to help marshal all the resources necessary to complete vaccination of the elderly by the end of July.
- Kono said Thursday on a TV program that he has heard a highly anticipated domestic vaccine may be approved sometime this year.
- Kono said Wednesday that Japan is considering introducing vaccine passports to make it easier to travel abroad. The plan is for travelers to have an app used to scan a QR code before boarding a flight.
- Suga on Tuesday instructed Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi to prepare mass vaccination sites in Tokyo and Osaka to expedite the vaccination process. The plan is for medically trained SDF personnel to administer the vaccines for three months starting May 24.
- Kono said Monday night on a TV program that the government plans to use the Moderna vaccine for state-run mass vaccination sites. The first batch arrived Friday. The health ministry said Tuesday approval may come as early as May 20.

The Weekly Observer (4/26~4/30)

4. Japan's Releases its Diplomatic Bluebook

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs [released](#) its annual Diplomatic Bluebook on Tuesday, which [emphasized](#) concerns over China's various activities. It does not mention Chinese activities around Taiwan.
- The Chinese Foreign Ministry on Tuesday [strongly criticized](#) the report, with a spokesperson saying it deliberately exaggerated China's threat and unfairly interfered with its internal affairs.
- South Korea's Foreign Ministry [summoned](#) Hirohisa Soma, a deputy chief of mission at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, on Tuesday to [protest](#) the report's claims that the Takeshima/Dokdo islands belonged to Japan and that the wartime labor and "comfort women" issues had already been resolved.

5. Japan-China Developments

- China on Thursday [amended](#) its Maritime Traffic Safety Law which enables the Maritime Safety Administration to order foreign vessels to leave its territorial waters, including around the Senkakus, if it judges that it could threaten stability.
- Beginning [September 1](#), the maritime agency, not to be confused with the coast guard, can also [block](#) foreign vessels from intruding into its waters as well as impose a fine between ¥840,000 and ¥8.4 million (≈\$77,145).
- The Foreign Ministry [lodged](#) a formal protest with China over the map of Okinawa and the Senkaku islands it published on Monday.
- China's Ministry of Natural Resources [created](#) the maps based on satellite imagery and other survey results. Reports suggest the Chinese uploaded the map to reiterate its claims over the islands.

6. Other Policy Developments

- Chief Cabinet Secretary Kato [said](#) Friday that given the dire situation in India, Japan is prepared to [provide](#) 300 respirators and oxygen concentrators for free.
- Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi [announced](#) Tuesday that he would be travelling to the U.K., Poland, Slovenia and other European countries between April 29-May 8.
- The British Embassy in Tokyo [announced](#) Monday that the U.K. aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth will lead a flotilla of ships for the first time through the South China Sea and make port calls to Japan, South Korea, India and Singapore.
- Suga and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi [spoke](#) Monday, discussing a range of issues from Chinese assertiveness in the East and South China Seas to

The Weekly Observer (4/26~4/30)

further cooperation among the Quad to bilateral cooperation in cybersecurity, decarbonization, 5G networks and supply chain diversification.

7. Economic Security

- *Yomiuri reported* Tuesday that Japan plans to establish its version of America's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) around 2023 in a bid to strengthen research on dual use advanced technologies.
- The Cooperation and Development Dialogue was [held](#) on April 25 in China, where governments and businesses from Japan, China and South Korea promoted economic cooperation. Despite tensions between the countries, China expects to continue working with Japan economically.

Domestic Politics

8. Diet Proceedings

- The revised National Referendum Law, which establishes the election rules to amend the Constitution, may be [put up for a vote](#) in the Lower House Commission on the Constitution on May 6 and passed in the Lower House on May 11.
- The 15-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership was [passed](#) by the Upper House on Wednesday. The [deal](#) covers 30 percent of the world's population/GDP and will take effect sixty days after six out of ten ASEAN states and three out of five other countries ratify it.
- The ruling coalition and opposition [reached](#) an agreement Tuesday to hold a session of intense deliberation (*shūchū shingi*) on May 10 to discuss the government's coronavirus response with Suga in attendance.

9. State of the Economy

- Data from Teikoku Databank [released](#) Friday shows the number of companies that went bankrupt since last February reached 1,400, with a rapid increase to 100 cases in the last two weeks. Eateries have suffered the most during the pandemic.
- Researchers at the University of Tokyo [released](#) data Wednesday that shows Tokyo's economic losses could range between ¥2.6 trillion (≈\$24 billion) to ¥3.5 trillion (≈\$34 billion) depending on when the state of emergency is lifted.

10. Other Economic Developments

- The BOJ [published](#) its quarterly outlook report Tuesday, in which the central bank revised down its inflation projections for the current FY to March 2022. Real GDP is projected to grow 4 percent in FY 2021 and 2.24 percent in the next year as people get vaccinated and resume normal activities.

11. Three Months Left Until the Olympic Games

- Reports suggest the organizing committee is preparing to [designate](#) thirty hospitals for athletes who come down with the virus, as well as [asked](#) the Japan Nursing Association to dispatch 500 nurses for the games.
- The government also [plans](#) to have at least 10,000 health care workers on site during the games and available 24 hours of the day for testing and check-ups.
- The IOC [published](#) its second playbook Wednesday, a sixty page document that provides insight into what to expect in terms of COVID-19 countermeasures.
- Seiko Hashimoto, the organizing committee's president, [said](#) Wednesday that while she anticipates the possibility of hosting the games without spectators, the final decision will be made in June.

Elections

12. The LDP Swept in Suga's First Nationwide Elections

- The LDP [lost](#) its first elections under Suga in Hiroshima, Hokkaido and Nagano. The Hiroshima re-election for ex-Upper House lawmaker Anri Kawai's seat was a blow given the prefecture is historically a part of the party's base. The results are likely to [push back](#) Suga's plans to call a snap election before the Olympics.
- The leaders of the CDP and JCP met Tuesday to [discuss](#) further cooperation in the upcoming snap election. The Democratic People's Party leader Yuichiro Tamaki [said](#) Wednesday that his party will not join the coalition unless the JCP leaves. He cited policy differences will cause problems if the opposition wins a majority.

13. Mixed Results for LDP in Local Elections

- A glimmer of hope for the LDP was the [Uruma City election](#) in Okinawa. On Sunday, the LDP-backed candidate defeated the candidate backed by Governor Denny Tamaki and the All Okinawa movement.
- With this victory, the LDP have now won two-of-three battles with Okinawa Governor Tamaki ahead of the gubernatorial election next fall. The LDP wants to win the governorship to [proceed](#) with the U.S. base relocation.
- The LDP [lost](#) the Nagoya City mayoral election on Sunday, with incumbent Takashi Kawamura winning a fourth term.
- The incumbent beat the odds, [defeating](#) Toshiaki Yokoi, a candidate backed by the LDP, Komeito, CDP and the DPP. He is also at odds with the governor of the prefecture who [did not congratulate](#) Kawamura on his victory.

Other Noteworthy News

- **Fukui Approves Nuclear Plant Restart:** Three nuclear power plants at the Mihama and Takahama plants in Fukui prefecture will become the [first in the country](#) to operate beyond the forty-year limit after the governor agreed to the restarts. The forty-year limit was introduced after the Fukushima disaster, due to concerns that aging reactors were prone to accidents. The government hopes to restart nuclear plants in order to meet its goals of achieving carbon neutrality. Japan paid ¥2.5 billion (\$22 million) in subsidies to revitalize the Fukui economy per nuclear plant. But concerns remain among local communities over safety, the effectiveness of evacuation plans and how to dispose of spent nuclear fuel.
- **Government Sets Guidelines for LINE Use:** The government [crafted](#) guidelines for use of LINE by its ministries and agencies on Friday. The guidelines stipulate that when dealing with sensitive information, data must be stored outside of LINE's database. The communications ministry had [ordered](#) Monday for LINE to take measures to protect user information after Chinese affiliates were found to have accessed data without the knowledge of users. Last Friday, the government's Personal Information Protection Commission issued a separate guidance and asked LINE to submit improvement plans within a month, although it ruled there was no clear violation of the personal information protection law. LINE says data stored in South Korea will be transferred to Japan.

II. Public Opinion Polls

- A *Nikkei/TV Tokyo* poll released on April 25 showed a 47 percent approval rating for the Suga cabinet, up 2 percent from March. ([ENG](#)/[JPN](#))
 - 50 percent of respondents approved of the Japan-U.S. summit held on April 16, while 32 percent disapproved.
 - 74 percent of respondents supported Japan's engagement toward stability in the Taiwan Strait, while 13 percent were opposed.
 - 80 percent of respondents who identified as LDP supporters favored engagement; 70 percent of respondents who identified as Komeito supporters said the same; and 77 percent of respondents who identified as opposition supporters also favored the approach.
 - 74 percent of respondents older than 60, 80 percent of respondents in their forties and fifties, and 69 percent between 18-39 supported engagement.
 - 30 percent of respondents approved of the government's coronavirus response, down 8 percent from March, while 65 percent disapproved (highest to date), up 10 percent.