

Wealthy country, poor citizens leave Japan in throes of doubt

TOKYO (AP) — Tumbled from its pinnacle of wealth, sparking economic growth and boundless confidence, Japan seems stuck in self-doubt.

It is still an industrial giant, and its economy appears to be edging out of a long slowdown. The standard of living remains high. Yet the country that a decade ago appeared poised to own the 21st century now has difficulty seeing beyond the next generation.

In a culture where the well-being of one's children is paramount, the uncertain outlook has many Japanese depressed.

"They'll have to work harder and harder just to stay in place," liquor company employee Toshiyuki Hozawa said of his sons during a recent family picnic. "I wonder what it will be like in 20 or 30 years."

The attitude reflects how Japan's economic status has changed over the last 10 years, how prospects have dimmed for a nation that inspired awe at home and abroad with its wealth and bravado.

"The time of high-speed growth is over," Hozawa's wife, Yuko, said as the boys, ages 7 and 3, ran around their picnic blanket beside the Tama River, on Tokyo's western outskirts.

The couple's musings are more than matched by a constant drumbeat of pessimism in editorials and commentaries that pound home one message: Japan will be left behind by the rest of the world unless something is done quickly.

"In recent years, a shadow has fallen over the safety and security of Japanese society," Japan's Economic Planning Agency repre-

sentative said in a recent wide-ranging report on the "national lifestyle."

Japanese levels of safety and civility still are tough to match. But crime, drug use and gun offenses are on the rise. More people are seeking treatment for depression, and surveys show declines

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Walter Hatch
Coauthor, *Asia in Japan's Embrace*

in optimism and job security. Many fear a growing elderly population will soon overburden the younger generation; critics blame flagging national morality for a myriad of problems.

"Society in general has lost hope," said psychiatrist and writer Kazuo Sakai, director of a clinic in Tokyo. "Japan doesn't have a religious or political ideology ... a positive way of understanding the world."

Many of Japan's most powerful institutions are being held up as in need of repair or overhaul, including schools, politicians, the health care system, and even the powerful bureaucracy.

The most glaring challenge is the economy. At the end of Japan's longest downturn since World War II, unemployment and bankruptcy liabilities hover at post-

war highs. The banking system is awash in bad debt; the government is running up a deficit; the stock market is taking a beating. Despite decent growth in 1996, forecasts for this year are less rosy.

Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto is pushing a package of reforms to deregulate the economy to make sure Japan remains a topflight power in the 21st century.

Such a plan is sure to bring painful changes as protected industries are forced to restructure. And the pain will come at a time when many were hoping to reap more benefits from decades of hard work.

"I don't know if people are willing to make the sacrifices that the government is asking them to make," said Walter Hatch, a Fulbright Scholar at Keio University and coauthor of *Asia in Japan's Embrace*.

A decade after Japan was proclaimed an economic superpower, people like the Hozawas still have no access to the larger homes and ample free time that their counterparts in other wealthy countries enjoy. And it is not certain they will anytime soon.

"I'm 33 years old and I live in an apartment, not a house," said Toshio Hirokawa, a securities company employee and father of two. "I can't buy a house yet because I had to take out a loan for a car."

The Japanese have long complained they are poor citizens of a rich country. And while the rest of the world sees Japan as a fierce competitor, people here often see themselves as underdogs struggling to keep up with the world.



Sink or Swim?

Boris Matisziw and Evan Zimmerman, senior engineering students, make some last minute changes to a submarine before testing it in the pool at the Offshore Technologies Research Center.

Death of Palestinian sparks riots that kill two others

HEBRON, West Bank (AP) — Jewish seminary students shot and killed a Palestinian on Tuesday, sparking fierce riots in which Israeli troops killed two Palestinians and injured dozens. It was the West Bank's worst violence in months.

The rioting in Hebron raged for more than five hours, with hundreds of protesters hurling stones and firebombs at the Israelis, who fired back tear gas and rubber bullets.

In Jerusalem, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called for Israeli security forces and Palestinian police to cooperate in restoring calm and warned that one more major terrorist attack could scuttle the peace process.

Palestinian police tried to prevent the protests from spilling over from the Palestinian-controlled part of the city into the enclave still held by Israel, where the shooting occurred — only to be pelted with stones by their own people.

The violence in Hebron — where 500 Jewish settlers live in uneasy coexistence with 130,000 Palestinians — came amid Arab dismay over the failure of Monday's summit between President Clinton and Netanyahu to break the deadlock.

The Israeli leader, however, insisted that "interesting ideas" on how to restart talks had come out of the Washington summit. Further

progress, he said, depended on the prevention of further violence.

Although Tuesday's fighting was the bloodiest, Palestinians and Israeli soldiers have battled in the streets of the West Bank almost daily since Israel broke ground March 18 for the Har Homa housing project in east Jerusalem, the sector Palestinians want as their capital.

In Washington, Clinton urged both sides to prevent the violence from stopping progress toward peace. "We've just got to keep going," he said Tuesday.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich, speaking to a pro-Israel lobby, blamed the crisis on Arafat, saying the Palestinian leader was an active

accomplice in a campaign of "terror and coordinated propaganda" that was aimed at defeating Israel.

Netanyahu accuses Arafat of orchestrating the riots and authorizing militant attacks, including a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv last month that killed three Israeli women.

Arafat spokesperson Marwan Kanafani accused Netanyahu of having "blood on his hands" after Tuesday's shootings. Arafat himself, speaking before the shooting, said Netanyahu's refusal to suspend settlement building means "he does not want peace."

The Supreme Court removed the last legal challenge to the project on Tuesday, rejecting a Jewish

land owner's attempt to prevent Israel from confiscating his 140 acres — about one-third of the construction site.

There were conflicting reports about the shooting in Hebron.

Palestinians said the attack was unprovoked, while Israelis insisted it was brought on by Palestinians who sprayed two Jewish seminary students with tear gas as they walked to the Tomb of the Patriarchs. Both students had tear gas burns, police spokesperson Linda Menuchin said.

The students opened fire with Uzi submachine guns, Hebron police commander Benny Baharon said. One shot hit Assam

Rashid Arafah, 23, in the killing him, Palestinian police hospital workers said.

Israel Radio reported police investigation found students — identified as Deel and Zeev Mok — had been in self-defense. Police still are investigating whether they had the intent to kill.

Palestinians, angered over the shooting, lobbed gasoline and rocks, injuring at least two Israeli soldiers and several Palestinian policemen.

Israeli troops fired tear gas, rubber bullets, wounding several Palestinians. Seven of them were hospitalized Tuesday night.

Pharmaceutical giant gives away international abortion pill rights

PARIS (AP) — Threatened by boycotts from American anti-abortion groups, the European pharmaceutical giant Hoechst on Tuesday unloaded its remaining rights to the abortion pill RU-486.

The company gave the rights to one of the drug's creators, Dr. Edouard Sakiz, who plans to form a smaller company that will be less vulnerable to consumer pressure.

The move was a further attempt by the French drug company Roussel-Uclaf — a Hoechst subsidiary — to distance itself from the controversial drug. Just two years ago, in the face of boycotts, it ceded

boycott Allegra, a Hoechst and Parenthood, said he hoped the transfer of Hoechst's rights to the drug would make RU-486 available worldwide.

But Sakiz, who did not say rights to the drug, said he would only distribute the drug to countries that followed strict guidelines for its use, a requirement that would exclude most developing countries and Russia.

Sakiz's company will take over all manufacturing, marketing and distribution of RU-486. The new company is expected to make little or no profit on RU-486, though any profits from the drug would go toward medical research, Sakiz said.

Sakiz retired from Roussel-Uclaf's board a few days after setting up the new company, which will probably leave most of the production and distribution to outside companies, he said. He declined to name potential partners.

In the meantime, production will be done by Hoechst. Sakiz will personally pay start-up costs of the new company, but said he could not estimate his initial investment.

Asked if he was frustrated by the controversy surrounding the distribution of the drug, Sakiz said, "No, it's a challenge."

U.S. rights to RU-486 to a non-profit American group. Sakiz said his new company will have nothing to do with the U.S. market.

"In the United States, they're on the verge of a civil war" over abortion, he said.

The \$3.5 million in annual sales of RU-486 — also known as mifepristone — was not worth risking Hoechst's \$1.63 billion in U.S. business, Hoechst spokesperson Catherine Euvrard said.

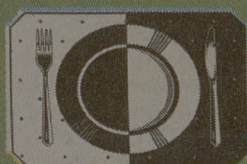
"Roussel-Uclaf no longer has the means to be able to withstand the boycott threats" from American anti-abortion groups, she told reporters in Paris. "This product can no longer be part of the strategy of an international company."

An American anti-abortion group last week threatened to

"This product can no longer be part of the strategy of an international company."

Catherine Euvrard
Hoechst spokesperson

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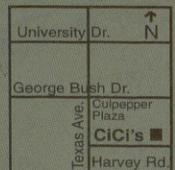
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