

Protest against construction on Takeshima

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The South Korean government has decided to launch large-scale construction projects on and around Takeshima Island. The government already selected a contractor for building a marine science base on an underwater rock some 1 kilometer northwest of the Japan-claimed island. The 30 billion won (2.2 billion yen) base construction work is to start soon and to be completed in 2013. Meanwhile works to improve a heliport on the island started in mid-March and are expected to end in May. We protest against both projects that shake the friendship between the two countries. Any Japan-South Korea dispute may only please the Kim Jong Il regime in the North and the communist party dictatorship in China. We would like to urge the South Korean government and people to pay attention to this fact and make a wise decision.

Construction runs counter to friendship

The South Korean government and people have made arrangements to support Japan as sympathy with Japanese people over the March 11 earthquake-tsunami disaster has spread in that country. The South Korean government quickly sent a rescue team to the disaster-hit region, while all newspapers and television stations participated in a campaign initiated by The Chosun Ilbo newspaper for donations to support Japan.

Amid such developments, the Japanese government in late March announced newly authorized junior high school textbooks. Descriptions about Takeshima in the new textbooks increased under revised education guidelines, although I see the descriptions as still insufficient. In response to the new textbooks, South Korean media and the public strongly criticized Japan as “biting the hand that feeds one.” The Lee Myung-bak government has separated the support for Japan from the Takshima issue and decided to launch the marine science base construction project which had been postponed while continuing to support Japan over the disaster.

“The Lee Myung-bak government may take a restrained posture,” said a Korean intellectual well versed in Japanese affairs. “The previous government led by Roh Moo-hyun stood at the forefront in criticizing Japan

and took extreme actions such as the suspension of bilateral cultural, sports and local government exchanges, allowing the territorial problem to be known better to the world. This eventually injured national interests of South Korea that already effectively controls the island. The present government might have acknowledged this fact.”

The Lee government in fact maintained its principle of refraining from expanding the Takeshima problem to affect other issues and made no protest against school textbook descriptions about wartime comfort women and the like. But the decision to launch the marine science base construction project close to Takeshima Island has put an end to the restrained posture.

Japan has kept restraint

Leftist propaganda in South Korea has led to a growing recognition that “the Japanese government has toughened its Takeshima policy as Japan has drifted to the right.” This recognition is groundless. Since the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1965, Japan has maintained its territorial claims to Takeshima Island while refraining from expanding the territorial issue to other areas and striving to promote bilateral friendship. Japan has persistently kept this restrained policy.

The recent South Korean decision to start the marine science base construction project in protest to the school textbook descriptions could trample the restrained Japanese policy. I would like to frankly tell our South Korean friends that Japanese people growingly feel it is heartless for South Korea to take such action when Japan is suffering from the disaster.

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