

Grave Concerns about Noda's Asian Diplomacy

Tadae Takubo

I am ashamed to make a lot of noise by criticizing Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda for his coward diplomacy. But I feel that Noda was pressed unilaterally by South Korean President Lee Myung Bak over the comfort women issue at their meeting in Kyoto on December 18. Lee reportedly threatened that the second and third comfort woman statues would be set up unless Japan takes sincere measures over the matter. As had the past Liberal Democratic Party-led governments done, Noda failed to rebut such threat. How can he tide over the difficult international situation while remaining complacent with being a sandbag?

What will PM seek in China and India?

Prime Minister Noda plans to visit Beijing on December 25 and 26 for a meeting with President Hu Jintao and visit New Delhi on December 27-29 to hold talks with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.. Noda has extremely limited his direct messages to the Japanese people, failing to discuss objectives for the visits to China and India. But he should have some specific objectives in implementing such busy schedule.

I would like to refrain from using such grandiose words as a “coalition against China” in this respect. But I believe that Prime Minister Noda's recent talks with U.S. President Barack Obama were fairly significant. Had Noda failed to vow to “enter consultations with relevant countries” in a bid to take part in negotiations on the planned Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement, China's Premier Wen Jiabao would have been rejoiced. While vowing a “peaceful rise,” China has run counter to international law and trade rules. In fact, calls for China to become a law-abiding country are now growing in the United States, Japan, South Korea, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Australia and India. Have Prime Minister Noda and his Democratic Party of Japan really recognized such tide?

S. Korea's questionable attitude

South Korean President Lee might have been under domestic political pressure to take extraordinarily strong attitude against Japan over the comfort women issue. However I question why the president has taken up the resolved problem at a time when South Korea has been plagued with Chinese fishermen's repeated attacks on South Korean coast guard officers during their illegal operations in South Korea's exclusive economic zone in the Yellow Sea. South Korea's sense of direction is questionable. South Korea is similar to China in that they make light of neighboring

countries. The Japanese and South Korean leaders may lack a broad international viewpoint.

What attitudes Prime Minister Noda should take in Beijing and New Delhi are clear. As a matter of course, Noda should promote Japan-India relations in New Delhi. In Beijing, he may make some demands but should not make any concession or apology. Former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda from the Liberal Democratic Party once said: "I personally don't do what my friends don't like. This is the same case with relations between countries." Politician should not confuse personal relations with international relations.

Tadae Takubo is Vice President, Japan Institute for National Fundamentals.