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Yomiuri Shimbun

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By Yomiuri Shimbun

[There are growing indications of a business and political backlash against a range of policies associated with Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro. These include mounting criticisms of economic policies leading to growing income polarization, of restrictive immigration policies that confront Japan with a declining labor force, and Koizumi's insistence on visiting Yasukuni Shrine with the inevitable poisoning of Japan-China and Japan-Korea relations. For the first time, a major business organization, the Japan Association of Corporate Executives, whose chairman Kitashiro Kakutaro is Chairman of IBM Japan, has added its voice to critics calling for a new Yasukuni policy that would contribute to strengthening relations with Japan's neighbors. The call comes at a time when rising nationalism is inflaming both Japan-China and Japan-Korea relations.]

The Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai) urged the prime minister to cease his visits to Yasukuni Shrine and instead build a national memorial for the war dead in a set of written proposals regarding Japan-China relations released Tuesday.

It was the first time a key business body had called for a halt to prime ministerial visits to the shrine, which honors Class-A war criminals along with the war dead.

Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro showed his annoyance with the proposals Tuesday, telling reporters: "I've been told by a business group to refrain from visiting [Yasukuni Shrine] so as to take business into consideration. But I say it [business] has nothing to do with politics."

At a separate press conference, Keizai Doyukai Chairman Kitashiro Kakutaro said it was not good for a prime minister to visit the shrine when circumstances surrounding the visits and the objectives of the visits are not fully understood in China.

"There can be no stable development while national sentiments are in conflict," Kitashiro said.
The proposals say Koizumi's visits to the shrine have become an obstacle to interaction between Japanese and Chinese leaders.

Kitashiro Kakutaro

Koizumi insists the objective of his visits is to pledge that Japan will not wage another war. But the proposals say the prime minister has not received a public mandate saying Yasukuni Shrine is an appropriate place to meet this objective, adding it is important he reconsider the visits.
Keizai Doyukai said an appropriate place would be a newly built national memorial free of religious overtones.

In an open message to the Chinese government,

the business body said it hopes Chinese citizens understand that Japan has reflected on its wartime aggression and successive prime ministers have apologized for it. The body also pointed to bilateral economic cooperation that has been built up since the resumption of diplomatic ties between the countries.

The Keizai Doyukai proposals contain concrete ideas for improving bilateral relations, such as forming a collaborative research group to discuss controversial history textbooks by involving experts from a third country in the discussions.

The proposals were compiled in response to strong concern within the business community that a continued deterioration of the relationship with China would badly affect the economic relationship, including trade and investment.

However, some association members opposed to the proposal said during its executive meeting Tuesday that Koizumi should visit Yasukuni Shrine. The group therefore held an extraordinary vote, calling for the approval of 80 percent of members, before announcing the proposals.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe Shinzo told reporters Tuesday that Koizumi visited Yasukuni Shrine simply to offer his sincere respects to the war dead. "If they're misunderstanding [his visits], it's important to try to clear the matter up," Abe said.

This article appeared in The Yomiuri Shimbun on May. 10, 2006. It is posted at Japan Focus on May 10, 2006.