



YOUR WEEKLY RECAP OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN JAPAN!

# The Weekly Observer

Feb. 26-March 1

THIS WEEK IN NUMBERS

## Political Ethics Hearing Committee Yields Little

On Thursday and Friday, the Lower House convened its **Political Ethics Hearing Committee** sessions, which heard from **Prime Minister Kishida Fumio**, **Nikai faction Secretary-General Takeda Ryota**, and **four senior Abe faction members**.

The four senior Abe faction members **all denied involvement in the kickback scheme**, with **ex-METI Minister Nishimura Yasutoshi** saying that the **faction presidents (Abe/Hosoda)** were in charge of the scheme.

On Thursday, Kishida became the **first sitting prime minister** to appear before the Committee, a decision that **prompted the others to appear** before a public session of the Committee.

He indicated that the party would consider reform measures like **guilty-by-association rules**.

## FY 2024 Budget Passes Lower House Before Deadline

On Saturday, the **FY 2024 budget** passed the Lower House ahead of the **deadline for “natural passage”** by the end of the fiscal year, which is **enacted with or without a vote in the Upper House** thirty days after the Lower House passes the bill.

The budget came to a total of **¥112.57 trillion**, the second largest budget and the second consecutive year it has surpassed ¥110 trillion.

The budget vote was **delayed** by the opposition, which argued that discussions had focused on the political scandal more than the budget, demanding more time. It **unsuccessfully attempted to remove Lower House Budget Committee Chair Onodera Itsunori** and **Minister of Finance Suzuki Shunichi** through no-confidence motions.

## Cabinet Approval



**25%** (-2 pts.)

**67%** (+1 pt.)

[Nihon Keizai Shimbun](#) (Feb. 26)

## State of the Economy

### **Consumer Confidence Index (February):**

39.1 (+1.1 pt.) | 5<sup>th</sup> month rise  
Confidence is “improving”

### **Employment Stats (January):**

Effective jobs-to-applicants: 1.27x  
Unemployment: 2.4% (-0.1 pt.)

### **Service Producer Price Index (January):**

109.8 (+2.1%)  
In 2% range for 6<sup>th</sup> straight month

### **Number of Births (2023):**

758,631 (-5.1%) | Record low  
8<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in decline