

Japanese executed in China for drugs

Three more convicted smugglers face capital punishment this week

BEIJING (Kyodo) China executed convicted Japanese drug-smuggler Mitsunobu Akano on Tuesday, a move that could spark new friction in otherwise improving bilateral relations.

Akano, 65, was executed around 9:30 a.m. at a facility in Dalian, Liaoning Province, Japanese diplomats said, the first time China has executed a Japanese national since the two countries normalized diplomatic relations in 1972.

"The courts had clear and irrefutable evidence of drug-smuggling, and the death sentence was handed down and carried out in line with Chinese law," the official news agency Xinhua quoted the Supreme People's Court as saying.

China has said it plans to execute three more Japanese men later this week over separate drug cases, underlining Beijing's strict treatment of both Chinese and foreign criminals, given a sharp increase in drug-related crimes in the country.

Last July, Japan executed a Chinese national convicted of murder.

Japanese officials voiced repeated concern about China's plan to execute Japanese nationals. On Saturday, Deputy Prime Minister Naoto Kan told Premier Wen Jiabao that many people in Japan feel the penalty is too harsh, when compared with Japan.

Akano was convicted of attempting to smuggle about 2.5 kg of stimulants from China to Japan with an accomplice. The Dalian Intermediate People's Court sentenced Akano to death in June 2008.

According to Xinhua, Akano was caught carrying more than 1.544 kg of illegal drugs at an airport in Dalian when he went through a security check in September 2006. Police also

found another 1.008 kg of drugs in the luggage of his accomplice. Both were attempting to take the drugs to Japan.

In Tokyo, the Foreign Ministry said China reported Tuesday's execution to the Dalian office of the Japanese Consulate General in Shenyang in the morning.

Akano met his family at a detention facility in Dalian on Monday, according to a source involved in bilateral relations.

China notified Japan on March 29 of its intention to execute Akano.

Akano appealed his sentence, but it was finalized by the High People's Court of Liaoning in 2009.

Bar chief concerned

Kyodo News

Kenji Utsunomiya, president of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, expressed concern over China's execution of a Japanese man Tuesday.

"It is extremely regrettable, and we, the JFBA, must strongly ask the Japanese government to urge the Chinese government not to execute the three other Japanese men," Utsunomiya said, referring to three more death-row inmates expected to be executed within the next few days.

The comment was issued after China carried out the death penalty imposed on Mitsunobu Akano, 65, for smuggling drugs.

The new JFBA chief also showed dissatisfaction with Japan's handling of the issue.

The government "only expressed concerns over the imminent execution, and failed to prevent it," he said. "It was reported that the executed Japanese man contended the qualification of his interpreter at the court, and there are extremely strong suspicions that he was not guaranteed the right to stand a fair trial as stipulated in the International Covenants on Human Rights."

The Japan Times: Wednesday, April 7, 2010
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