

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Outrage in Japan, PM Abe Assassination Called Justified

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Positional relationship between former prime minister Shinzo Abe and the shooter Tetsuya Yamagami on his assassination. Sourced from Nikkei.com



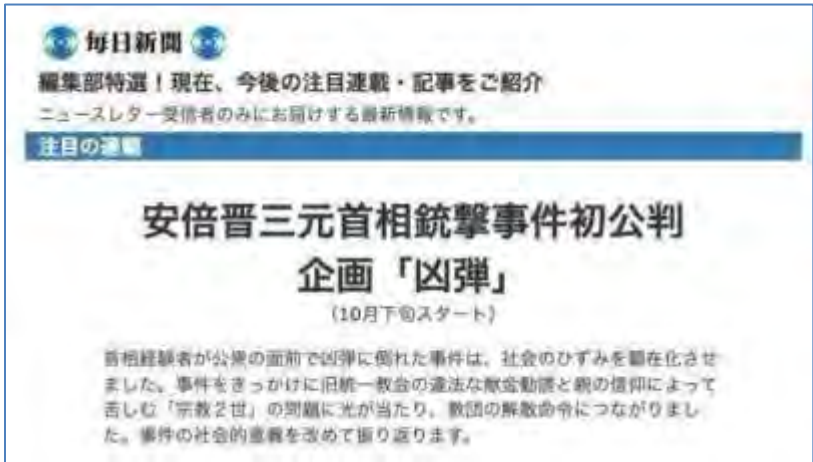
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Mainichi Shimbun, one of Japan's largest papers, forced to issue apology after describing Shinzo Abe killing as "socially justified"

Tokyo, 17th October 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Mainichi Shimbun apologizes after backlash over calling Abe assassination "socially justified" (社会的意義) in series announcement

On 15th October, the Mainichi Shimbun [one of Japan's leading newspapers] announced in its newsletter that it would begin a feature series on the trial of the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三). In doing so, it described the incident as having "social justification" (社会的意義) [See editor's note below]. After this wording sparked outrage online, particularly on X (formerly Twitter), the paper issued an apology on 17th October, calling the phrase "an inappropriate expression".



Screenshot of the Mainichi Shimbun newsletter that became a hot topic on X (formerly Twitter)

by editorial staff of [Sekai Nippo](#)

In the July 2022 assassination of Abe, suspect Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也) has been indicted on charges including murder and violation of the firearms and swords law. The pretrial procedures are

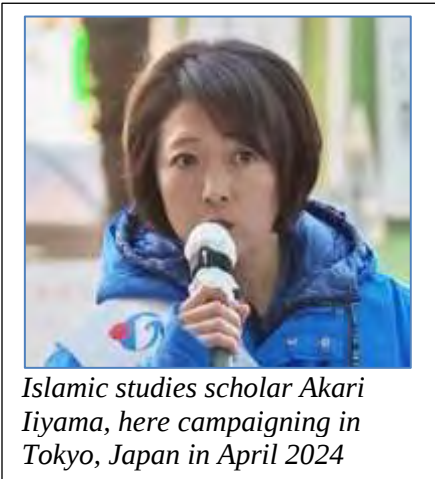
ongoing, and the first hearing is scheduled for 28th October at the Nara District Court. The verdict is expected in January 2026.



In its newsletter, Mainichi announced that it would launch a serialized feature titled "The Bullet" (凶弾) in late October. It explained:

"The incident drew attention to issues such as the illegal donation solicitations by the former [Unification Church](#) and the suffering of 'second-generation believers' whose parents' faith caused them hardship. This ultimately led to a [dissolution order](#) against the [organization](#). We will take another look at the social justification for the incident."

Following this announcement, fierce criticism poured in from politicians, commentators, and ordinary users, with comments such as "Are you justifying murder?" and "You're promoting terrorism." As of 3 p.m. on the 17th, total engagement - likes, shares, and comments - had exceeded 210,000.



Islamic studies scholar Akari Iiyama, here campaigning in Tokyo, Japan in April 2024

On October 15, Islamic studies scholar Akari Iiyama (飯山陽), who is running for the Tokyo 15th district by-election with the Japan Conservative Party, posted on X:

"It seems the Mainichi Shimbun is launching a series later this month claiming there was 'social justification' for Abe's assassination."

Her post quickly went viral. By 17th October, X had listed the topic under its "Today's News" section, titled

"Mainichi Shimbun Faces Backlash Over Abe Assassination Series: Accusations of Terrorism Endorsement Flood In."

It summarized:

"The incident involved Tetsuya Yamagami, who, motivated by resentment toward the [Unification Church](#), shot and killed Abe with a homemade gun. The planned series has sparked debate over media ethics and reporting attitudes."

As of 6 p.m. that day, there were more than 27,000 posts on the topic.



Eitaro Ogawa, here during a [symposium in Nagoya](#) October 19, 2025

Literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川栄太郎) commented, "I'm too enraged for words."

Writer and journalist Takamasa Kadota (門田隆将) said, "I feel that this company has completely lost its reason to exist."

Other harsh comments included: "A terrorism-glorifying newspaper," "Society would be better off without Mainichi Shimbun," and "It was simply a crime - nothing more, nothing less."

On 17th October, Mainichi Shimbun issued an apology:

"In the introduction to the feature series 'The Bullet' mentioned in our newsletter sent on the 15th, we used the phrase 'the social justification of the incident.' This was an inappropriate expression. We apologize. We will correct and resend it."

In the revised introduction, the wording was changed to:

"We will take another look at the impact the incident had on society."

According to Kōjien (a major Japanese dictionary),

"igi" (意義, significance) is defined as "the value or importance something holds in relation to other things."

The Practical Japanese Expression Dictionary explains it as

"something that is rational and worth doing" or "something that has inherent value."

[Editor's note: The Japanese expression "社会的意義"(shakaiteki igi) literally means "social significance". 意義 (igi) = meaning, significance, value, or importance. But contextually, it often implies something closer to "something that has value or justifiable importance in society." It tends to carry a positive or purposeful nuance - not just a neutral observation.

In Japanese public discourse, when people say: 「この事件には社会的意義がある」 ("This incident has social significance"), it often implies "This event was meaningful for society," or "This act had a justifiable purpose or impact in a social sense."

It can sound like approval or moral validation, even if that wasn't intended.

So when Mainichi Shimbun used it to describe the assassination of former PM Abe, readers interpreted it as "The assassination had social value or justification." That felt deeply inappropriate, given the act was a murder.]

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prosecutors' methods in the **Kim Beom-su** (Kakao)-SM Entertainment case but also a broader institutional anxiety over the direction of state power, especially under the **newly empowered special investigation units**. At its heart lies a familiar warning: that the **pursuit of prosecutorial glory – disguised as justice** – can easily **curdle into coercion and institutional overreach**.

The **editorial** recounts how the *Seoul Southern District Court* acquitted Kakao founder Kim Beom-su (김범수), **rejecting the prosecution's case as built upon coerced and untrustworthy testimony** obtained through **"separate investigations"** – a term referring to the practice of **opening ancillary or tangential cases to pressure suspects or witnesses in the primary case**. The court's explicit language – that such methods "distort the truth" and lead to "unjust results" – is **unusually strong for a judicial ruling**. Even more significant is the paper's interpretation: this was **not an isolated incident** but a symptom of a **deeply rooted prosecutorial habit**, one born from "ambition and self-promotion" among officials eager for personal advancement rather than genuine public service.



Korean businessman Kim Beom-su. Photo (2012): [acrofan.com](#) / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#)

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Institutional Patterns and the "Special Prosecutor Syndrome"



One of the many **ambitious prosecutors**: Chief Special Prosecutor **Min Jung-ki** (민중기) who summoned **Dr. Hak Ja Han** and Pastor Son Hyun-bo for questioning. Min is the head of a huge team of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers. Image generated by Chat GPT September 2025.

The **editorial**'s critique extends well beyond the Kakao affair. It draws attention to a disturbing continuity in South Korea's investigative culture – one that transcends administrations and political camps. The **practice of coercive, separate, and highly publicized investigations has long served as a proving ground for ambitious prosecutors**, who seek to demonstrate effectiveness through arrests and indictments rather than fair process or evidentiary soundness. Even after successive reforms, the **paper** notes, the practice persists across all major investigative bodies, including the Prosecution Service, the National Police, the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials (CIO), and now the special prosecutors' offices.

The **editorial** explicitly connects this dynamic to

ongoing special investigations, particularly the **Kim Keon-hee** (김건희) case, where more than half of the 14 individuals arrested so far have reportedly faced charges unrelated to the First Lady herself. Such statistics bolster the perception that these probes, while politically explosive, often become sprawling fishing expeditions – designed to manufacture **leverage or public spectacle rather than to uncover narrowly defined wrongdoing**. The **Segye Ilbo** warns that when prosecutors begin to conflate institutional momentum with moral legitimacy, the rule of law is imperiled.



Being investigated while detained: Former South Korean First Lady **Kim Keon-hee**, here in Washington DC 10th July 2024. Photo: [Jim Bourg/U.S. Department of State](#). [Public domain](#) image. Cropped

This pattern of prosecutorial expansionism – what some scholars term the "special prosecutor syndrome" – **thrives on political polarization**. When society is divided, the investigative apparatus becomes a convenient instrument of both **moral theater and bureaucratic self-interest**. In such an environment, **truth risks being overshadowed by narrative, and justice by ambition**.

The Human Cost: The Cases of Hak Ja Han and Pastor Son



It is in this broader climate that the cases of **Hak Ja Han** (한학자), the 82-year-old religious leader widely known as "**Mother Han**," and Pastor Son Hyun-bo (손현보 – 63) acquire particular resonance. Both have reportedly been subjected to



Also detained: Pastor Son Hyun-bo (1962-), here August 2025. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

prolonged interrogation sessions and extended pre-trial detention, despite advanced age and deteriorating health. Their circumstances echo the editorial's central concern: that **prosecutorial institutions, driven by internal and external pressures to "produce results," may lose sight of proportionality and humanity**.

While the details of their ongoing cases differ from the Kim Beom-su or Kim Keon-hee investigations, the underlying mechanisms of coercion – **excessive questioning, selective detention, and reputational targeting** – reflect the same pathology identified by [Segye Ilbo](#). When prosecutors treat individuals as instruments toward a larger institutional goal, rather than as citizens entitled to dignity and due process, the justice system ceases to serve the public and begins to serve itself.

The [editorial](#)'s implicit call for introspection – urging investigative authorities to "refrain from separate investigations" – therefore resonates far beyond one court ruling. It amounts to a warning that **the instrumentalization of law enforcement for personal or political ends corrodes both legitimacy and compassion**.

In the cases of **elderly defendants like Hak Ja Han**, such overreach takes on an even more troubling moral dimension. The law's humanistic purpose – to balance accountability with mercy – risks being eclipsed by bureaucratic vanity and procedural aggression.



Mother Han on 31st August 2025, soon before being taken into detention. Screenshot from video by [FFWPU](#)

Reform Fatigue and the Crisis of Trust

For decades, South Korea's justice system has oscillated between reformist zeal and institutional backlash. Repeated efforts to curtail prosecutorial power – by redistributing investigative authority to police or establishing the CIO – have yielded limited success. Each new reform creates new bodies that, over time, reproduce the same incentives and vices: public performance over prudence, coercion over credibility. The [Segye Ilbo editorial](#) underscores this cycle by emphasizing that "regardless of which agency conducts it, separate investigations must be abandoned."

Public trust in the judiciary and prosecution is fragile. When ordinary citizens perceive that the system rewards ambition more than fairness, they lose confidence not only in individual cases but in the moral foundations of governance. In this sense, the editorial's warning functions as both diagnosis and plea: the justice system must rediscover restraint before it loses the people's consent to wield authority.

Toward a Humane Standard of Justice

The [Segye Ilbo's](#) intervention may thus be read as part of a larger moral debate within South Korea's democracy – one that pits institutional pride against constitutional principle. Its **critique of "ambition and self-promotion" among prosecutors** recalls similar moments in South Korean history when judicial overreach provoked public outcry, from the authoritarian decades to recent political trials. What is new today is the breadth of institutional complicity – from prosecutors to special counsels to newly empowered watchdog agencies – all operating under the same cultural logic of performance-driven justice.

If the cases of Kim Keon-hee, [Hak Ja Han](#), and Pastor Son share a common thread, it is the erosion of proportionality – **a drift from truth-seeking toward spectacle, from impartial inquiry toward self-legitimizing prosecution**. The judiciary's rebuke in the Kakao case offers a moment of moral clarity: that justice pursued without humility becomes indistinguishable from coercion.

In heeding the court's and [Segye Ilbo's](#) warnings, South Korea faces a choice: to persist in the cycle of prosecutorial self-assertion, or to build a justice system grounded once again in balance, humanity, and truth.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor, written based on English translation of the original Korean article.

Featured image above: South Korean judges. Illustration: Chat GPT, October 2025.

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