

Annex 6. Editorial of The Asahi Shimbun (22nd Mar, 2016)

EDITORIAL: Politicians bully Korean school students for acts of Pyongyang

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Korean schools across Japan are attended by Korean residents' children, who are taught subjects in line with Japan's official curriculum guidelines and also learn Korean language and culture.

Almost all of these schools are in financial distress. Many local governments of areas hosting Korean schools provide the institutions with subsidies similar to the financial support received by private Japanese schools and other international schools.

But some politicians of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and other parties are calling on the education ministry to terminate public subsidies to Korean schools.

These lawmakers are casting their proposal as part of Japan's sanctions against North Korea, which has failed to respond to Tokyo's demands concerning Japanese citizens abducted by Pyongyang decades ago and has refused to stop its provocative actions, such as nuclear tests.

Some local governments have already suspended their subsidies to Korean schools.

But children attending Korean schools are not at all responsible for North Korea's nuclear weapons program or the abduction issue.

Punishing schools that educate young Korean residents of Japan for North Korea's actions is tantamount to bullying of the weak driven by misplaced anger.

It is inappropriate, in the first place, for the education ministry to interfere in the issue, which is under the jurisdiction of local governments concerned.

The Japanese government started offering tuition-free high school education six years ago, when the Democratic Party of Japan was in power. But this benefit has not been applied to Korean schools.

The DPJ-led government kept dragging its foot on abolishing tuition fees at Korean schools. And the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which was inaugurated in December 2012, swiftly removed Korean schools from the list of institutions eligible for the program.

Students at Korean schools and other people concerned have sued the government in Tokyo, Osaka and other cities, arguing that the exclusion of their schools from the program due to political reasons is illegal.

In the international arena, some U.N. agencies, including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, have criticized the Japanese government's policy concerning the issue. These organizations have recognized the exclusion of Korean schools from tuition-free high school education as a form of discrimination. They have also urged the Japanese government to apply the program to these schools and exhort local governments to continue the subsidies.

Last year, the bar association of Saitama Prefecture rebuked Saitama Governor Kiyoshi Ueda for his move to suspend the prefectural government's subsidies to Korean schools within the prefecture. The association warned that Ueda's action constitutes an "extremely serious violation of human rights."

At many Korean schools, members of the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon) are involved in school administration.

But education should be kept insulated from politics. Kanagawa Governor Yuji Kuroiwa has continued subsidies to individual Korean students instead of their schools. Kuroiwa has said children are blameless.

Aside from differences in perceptions about history, problems with the curricula at Korean schools, if any, should be solved through talks between the government and the institutions.

In fact, the content of education at Korean schools has been changing significantly.

The community of Korean residents in Japan has become diversified. At many Korean schools, children of South Korean nationality make up a majority.

It is wrong to think that Korean schools are attended only by children of people who worship the North Korean regime.

More than anything else, students at Korean schools are also members of our society.

Any attempt to close the door to children who can build bridges between Japan and its neighbors would only increase the number of people who harbor antipathy toward Japan.



Japanese citizens and parents of students at Korean schools rally in front of the Nagoya city office on March 9, calling on Mayor Takashi Kawamura to retract his plan to suspend part of the municipal subsidies to a Korean school in the city. (The Asahi Shimbun)