

Russia Arrests Japanese Journalist on Suspicion of Spying

By [Reuters](#)

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Screenshot / Russian Federal Security Service

Russia said on Tuesday it had detained a Japanese journalist on suspicion of espionage and accused Tokyo of using media correspondents to gather intelligence, marking a new low in bilateral relations that have deteriorated sharply in recent months.

Russia's Foreign Ministry identified the journalist as Yuki Imai and the FSB security agency said he worked for the Hokkaido Shimbun newspaper, which is a regional newspaper for Japan's northern island.

He was detained in the far eastern Sakhalin region the day before he planned to leave the country, the FSB said without specifying the date. It accused him of collecting and storing information on Russia's defense capabilities for intelligence purposes that it said could be used against Russian security.

The Hokkaido Shimbun did not confirm the journalist's identity, saying only that it was still confirming details and that the reporter's safety was its top priority.

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Kihara stopped short of condemning Moscow, saying only that Tokyo would take appropriate action.

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Japan summons Russian ambassador

A senior official of the Japanese Foreign Ministry later summoned the Russian ambassador to Japan and lodged a protest for detaining the Japanese national and unilaterally issuing statements regarding the matter without providing an explanation to Tokyo, the ministry said in a statement.

The director-general of the Foreign Ministry's European Affairs Bureau, Kimitake Nakamura, also asked the ambassador, Nikolay Nozdrev, to set up an opportunity swiftly to meet the detained journalist, the ministry said.

In a Russian state TV video report, three masked men in black uniforms handcuffed a man lying on the ground as a voice off camera said he was suspected of spying.

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The video showed the man being accompanied by two FSB servicemen onto a plane, then in a cage in a Moscow court, which ordered him detained for nearly two months.

It is the most high-profile detainment of a foreign journalist since the 2023 detention of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich.

Gershkovich, who says his arrest was a carefully planned FSB sting, was found guilty of espionage by a Russian court, sentenced to 16 years and then freed in an East-West prisoner swap in August 2024.

Long-running tensions

The case adds to long-running tensions between Russia and Japan, which have yet to sign a formal World War II peace treaty due to a territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands, known in Japan as the Northern Territories.

Those tensions heightened when Japan joined Western sanctions against Moscow over the war in Ukraine, with Russia regarding Japan as an "unfriendly" country. But business ties remain with Japan a purchaser of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Then in August, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited one of the disputed islands, causing an uproar in Japan. On Tuesday, a delegation from a Chinese province visited the same island, in what appeared to signal closer coordination between Moscow and Beijing in their criticism of Tokyo.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said on Tuesday that Japan had refused to consider Moscow's concerns about what she called Tokyo's "remilitarization." She criticized Japan's alleged use of accredited journalists in Russia to gather information that could undermine Russian security.

"We have to note that what has occurred will become an additional factor clouding the atmosphere of Russian-Japanese relations," Zakharova said.

Asked whether improving relations between Russia and the U.S. and Japan's purchases of LNG from Russia made it difficult for Tokyo to take countermeasures, Kihara said: "It is true that there are many issues between Japan and Russia.

"From Japan's perspective, despite the difficult situation in Japan-Russia relations, Japan has taken resolute measures based on its position. At the same time, Russia is a neighboring country to Japan, and communication is necessary to resolve these issues."

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