

Japan Slams Lack of Access to Journalist Arrested in Far East

By [AFP](#)

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Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara. **REUTERS / Issei Kato**

Japan said Tuesday that it was "extremely regrettable" that its diplomats have been unable to visit a Japanese journalist arrested in Russia despite a bilateral protocol that guarantees the right to consular access.

Russian law enforcement authorities arrested the journalist from the Hokkaido Shimbun newspaper on the Far East island of Sakhalin last week on suspicion of espionage.

Russia has arrested several citizens of what it calls "unfriendly" countries in recent years, accusing them of working for Western intelligence services.

Japan has denied the spying allegations and demanded that Russia release the journalist.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara said a protocol signed between Japan and the Soviet Union remains in effect with Russia, ensuring the right to consular access within "a period of

no later than four days from the time of arrest or detention."

"It is therefore extremely regrettable that, despite this provision, a consular visit was not realized within the prescribed period," Kihara said.

Japan will "continue to strongly urge the Russian side to arrange a consular visit at the earliest possible time," he said, adding that Tokyo was also demanding the journalist's release and fair treatment.

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Russian media reported that the journalist would remain in custody at least until Dec. 12.

Last week, the Russian Foreign Ministry identified the arrested reporter as Yuki Imai, with spokeswoman Maria Zakharova saying he was accused of "conducting espionage activities on Russian territory."

Russia's FSB security service said a Japanese national was arrested on Sakhalin — near a disputed cluster of islands — but did not name the individual. It said the person had worked for Japanese intelligence services to collect information about Russia's defenses.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi denied the spying claim. Tokyo summoned Russian ambassador Nikolay Nozdrev to protest the arrest.

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Japan and Russia have been locked in a territorial dispute for decades over a string of islands off the northeast coast of Japan's Hokkaido prefecture and southwest of Russia's Sakhalin region.

Russia has controlled the southern Kuril Islands — known as the Northern Territories in Japan — since the end of World War II, when the Soviet Union seized them.

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