



Jiji Press/Courtesy of Shojiro Sakai

An alligator gar is seen in the moat of Nagoya Castle earlier this summer.

## Alligator gars in castle raise ecosystem concerns

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NAGOYA (Jiji Press) — Since an alligator gar was first spotted in the moat of Nagoya Castle seven years ago, repeated attempts to catch the carnivorous nonnative fish have been unsuccessful, raising concern over the adverse impact on the ecosystem around landmarks of Nagoya.

After the discovery of the first alligator gar, a second one was found three years ago. Both are now about 1.5 meters in size.

Indigenous to North America, alligator gars are one of the world's largest freshwater fish, growing to nearly 3 meters. With hard scales and sharp teeth, they look like alligators and are said to prey on carp, turtles and ducks.

Juvenile alligator gars are available at reasonable prices and popular as aquarium fish. Many of them in Japan were imported in the 1980s.

Some that grew too big to keep in captivity were abandoned and returned to the wild. The fish in the Nagoya Castle moat are believed to be examples.

The Nagoya council for biodiversity protection, which surveys and preserves living organisms in the city, has unsuccessfully attempted many times to capture the pair of alligator gars in the castle moat.

Struggling to narrow down the search area in the expansive moat, which is about 60 meters wide and about 1.8 kilometers long, the group relied on sighting reports and laid nets, but it has been unable to catch either of them.

According to the Nagoya Castle management office, the castle moat has been confirmed as inhabited by catfish and other creatures not often

found in urban settings. The moat is connected with Horikawa river, which runs through central Nagoya.

Yoshinori Taniguchi, assistant professor of animal ecology at Nagoya-based Meijo University's Faculty of Science and Technology, is worried about adverse effects the alien fish may cause to the local ecosystem. "The habitat [of alligator gars] may spread to other water areas through Horikawa river and they may propagate," Taniguchi said.

Alligator gars have a weak sense of smell and only feed on nearby prey, according to Hijiri Yamanaka, a 43-year-old company worker in Odawara, Kanagawa Prefecture, who had the experience of catching one in the Mississippi River in the United States.

"I suggest draining some water from the moat so that the fish can be sighted easily, then creating a feeding place and setting a net there," Yamanaka said.

But the castle management office is cautious about draining the moat. "We've never drained the water in the past," an official said. "We aren't sure about the potential effects on the castle's stone walls."

Officials and other related parties are still racking their brains for feasible solutions.

Due to worries that alligator gars could harm local species in Japan, the Environment Ministry named it in March as a candidate for addition to the list of invasive alien species, planning for designation in 2018.

Once designated, new permission will not be granted to keep alligator gars as pets and applications will need to be submitted to put them on display at aquariums.

# Still wrinkles

## N. Korea's nukes, China loom large as concerns

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Monday marked one year since the passage of the security-related legislation that significantly broadened the scope and content of activities the Self-Defense Forces can conduct. However, at a time when the security situation surrounding Japan is increasingly severe — with North Korea's nuclear and missile development, and China's assertive maritime advances — many issues regarding the laws remain unresolved.

On Sept. 12, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe spoke to senior SDF officials assembled at the Defense Ministry. "The framework is in place," Abe told the officials. "Now is the time to put it into practice."

On Sept. 14, the Ground Self-Defense Force's Aomori-based 9th Division, which is scheduled to be dispatched on a U.N. peacekeeping operation to South Sudan in November, started practical training to prepare them for new missions enabled by the security-related laws. This includes going to the rescue of U.N. staffers and others who come under attack from an armed group.

Although the legislation package came into force in March, training and other tangible developments were put on ice due to concerns about their possible impact on summer's House of Councillors election.

The government appears set to wait

until the last minute before deciding based on careful observation of the situation on the ground, whether to assign these new missions to SDF personnel involved in the upcoming election.

This is because the security situation in South Sudan rapidly deteriorated in July after fighting broke out between followers of the president and supporters of the former vice president.

"I won't assign these missions unless the conditions enable them to be safely and properly fulfilled," Defense Minister Tomomi Inada said to reporters in Washington on Thursday. "Whether to assign these missions is a major decision."

### Defending U.S. vessels

In 2016, North Korea has launched 21 ballistic missiles and charged with two nuclear tests. Since then, the Japanese government has issued a missile intercept order, and has taken steps to buttress the nation's defense, such as dispatching Aegis ships to the Maritime Self-Defense Force in the Sea of Japan.

The security-related laws enable the SDF to protect U.S. vessels, a mission for providing a seamless Japanese response in peacetime or during an emergency to the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

The MSDF is currently operating alone in the Sea of Japan, but as Pyongyang ramps up its provocations, Japan and the United States need to jointly be involved in a watch in the region. In that situation, it can be assumed that MSDF ships could protect U.S. Aegis ships from intercepting a North Korean missile. This scenario would be called "protecting U.S. vessels in peacetime."

If a war broke out between North Korea on one side and the United States and South Korea on the other, and the Japanese government is in a "survival-threatening situation" that endangered Japanese existence, the government also could

## Abe-Obama talks in N.Y. being set up

WASHINGTON (Jiji Press) — Arrangements are being made for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and U.S. President Barack Obama to hold a brief meeting during their stay in New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly session, diplomatic sources said Sunday.

Abe and Obama are expected to discuss responses to North Korea's provocations, including its fifth nuclear test, and prospects for U.S. congressional approval for the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement.

## Majority v

TOKYO (Jiji Press) — A portion of Japanese people think they would likely face problems about roads in their neighborhoods in the event of a disaster caused by an earthquake, a Cabinet Office survey showed Saturday.

The reading was up 3.2 percentage points from the previous survey in 2012.

The figure was particularly high at 67.0 percent in Tokyo's most densely populated 23 wards.

Since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in eastern Japan, there have been growing needs for road improvement and preparation for disasters, according to the transport ministry.