

# Japan’s new PM Takaichi confronts ancient sumo taboo that bars women from the ring

NEW DELHI, NOV 22

Sanae Takaichi made history by becoming Japan's first female prime minister in October. She must now decide whether she'll break another barrier: the taboo barring women from the sumo ring.

The winner of the Kyushu Grand Sumo Tournament that ends Sunday will be presented with the Prime Minister's Cup. Some of her male predecessors, including former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, have entered the ring to hand over the cup.

Takaichi, a staunch conservative who supports Japan's traditional gender and paternalistic values, may not break the taboo. In any case, she won't face a decision on whether to enter the sumo ring this time because she returns a day later from the Group of 20 summit in South Africa.

Her next chance to make a decision will come at the New Year's tournament in Tokyo.

But a debate on the taboo against women likely will continue, in no small part, because a woman now leads Japan. There also is criticism that the ban in sumo and other religious places is out of touch with the changing place of women in Japanese society.

Women are still banned in some sacred places and festivals.

The sumo ring is only part of the controversy.

In Japan, female worshippers have for centuries been banned from certain holy mountains, religious training sessions, temples, shrines and festivals.

Other places in the world have similar taboos, but the one in Japan stems from the belief in female "impurity" associated with menstruation and childbirth, as well as certain misogynic Buddhist views, says Naoko Kobayashi, an Aichi Gakuin University professor and expert on religion and gender.

The female ban at holy mountains, including Mount Fuji, and religious establishments has been largely eliminated over the



years. But it lingers at certain shrines and festivals.

Many of these bans are from the 19th century Meiji era or later, Kobayashi said, and the taboo has been hard to break because women were also kept from political and religious decision-making over the years.

Sumo has a 1,500-year history, but the female ban is not ancient tradition.

Sumo's origins are linked to rituals for Japan's indigenous religion of Shinto, which is largely rooted in animism and the belief that thousands of kami, or spirits, inhabit nature. The first sumo matches date back 1,500 years as a ritual dedicated to the kami, with prayers for bountiful harvests, dancing and other performances at shrines.

The dohyo where sumo takes place is an elevated ring made of special clay, with its edge marked by a circle of rice-straw separating the inner sanctuary and the outside world of impurity. It's off-limits to women in professional sumo. Some experts say sumo follows the Shinto belief in female impurity.

The Japan Sumo Association has denied the female ban is based on the Shinto belief of impurity.

"This interpretation is a misunderstanding," said the association chief, Nobuyoshi Hakkaku, in 2018. He said sumo rituals are tied to folk beliefs like being thankful for a good harvest and are not about rigid religious principles.

"We have consistently denied sexist intentions," Hakkaku said.

"The rule that makes the dohyo a serious battleground for men is only natural for wrestlers, making the dohyo a male-only world and (leading to) passing down the practice of not having women go up there."

Citing a seventh century document called "Ancient Chronicles of Japan," historians say female court members were the first to perform sumo at the request of an emperor. There are documentary records of female sumo wrestlers in 16th century documents.

Sumo gained prestige when matches were attended in 1884 by the Emperor Meiji and later earned the status of a national sport with the completion of the original Ryogoku Arena in 1909.

Barring women from the ring has been criticised for decades

In 1978, a female labour ministry bureaucrat, Mayumi Moriama, protested after the sumo association prevented a girl who had won a local children's sumo qualifying match from advancing to the finals at a real sumo ring.

In 1990, Moriama, as government spokesperson, expressed her desire to enter the ring for the presentation of the Prime Minister's Cup but was rejected by the sumo association.

In 2018, the mayor of Maizuru in northern Kyoto collapsed during a speech in a sumo ring. Two female medical experts rushed in and started performing first aid as several male sumo officials watched. Two more women tried to join the first-aid

effort before announcements demanded the women leave the ring. Sumo officials threw salt afterwards, a gesture of purification.

Days later, the association refused to allow Tomoko Nakagawa, then-mayor of Takarazuka city, to enter the dohyo to give a speech for an exhibition tournament. Nakagawa, forced to speak from the side of the ring, said she was mortified to be rejected just because she is female.

The sumo association chief apologized over the "failure to take appropriate action in a life-threatening situation" and for making Nakagawa uncomfortable, and formed a panel of outside experts to examine the female ban. Seven years later, a decision is still pending.

"Excluding women under the premise of male-centred traditions and customs can be no longer justified under the values of the times," Kobayashi, the professor, said.

Takaichi backs Japan's traditional views on gender

Takaichi is not considered a feminist. She has supported paternalistic family values and keeping the succession of Japan's monarchy open only to men. She also opposes changing a 19th-century law that would allow married couples the option of keeping separate surnames.

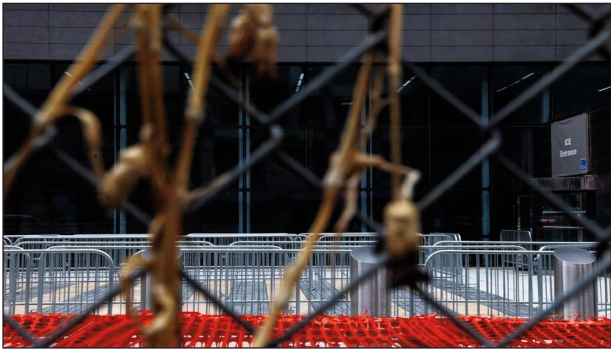
Takaichi is trying to win back support from right-wing voters who have been drawn to emerging populist groups in recent elections. An attempt to present the trophy in the ring would be seen as defying sumo's traditions and could harm her image with those voters.

She has not commented on how she'll handle the trophy presentation, but her top government spokesperson has indicated Takaichi is not considering stepping into the ring.

"Prime Minister Takaichi intends to respect the tradition of sumo culture," Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara told reporters.

# New Orleans identified as next target in Trump’s city-by-city immigration sweep

UNITED STATE, NOV 22



President Donald Trump's administration intends to focus on New Orleans in the next stage of its city-to-city immigration crackdown, one current and two former U.S. immigration officials said on Friday, confirming plans reported earlier this month.

U.S. Border Patrol agents could arrive in the Southern city as soon as Saturday, and the operation could run into January, the current official said, requesting anonymity to discuss plans.

Operations were expected to decrease over the Thanksgiving holiday on Thursday and Christmas, the official said. New Orleans, with a population of around 384,000, would be the latest city with a Democratic mayor targeted in Trump's mass deportation push.

Since the summer, federal immigration officials have surged to Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington, D.C., sparking criticism over aggressive tactics and arrests of non-criminals. The deployment in New Orleans would follow an operation in Charlotte, North Carolina, led by U.S. Border Patrol's roving commander Gregory Bovino.

Local officials said on Thursday that operation had concluded while the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said it would continue. Reuters and other outlets reported earlier this month that Bovino planned to take the enforcement push to New Orleans after Charlotte. A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees Border Patrol, declined to comment on future actions in Charlotte or New Orleans. New Orleans Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick said in a statement that she welcomed the arrival of Border Patrol but the department would not take part in immigration arrests. The office of New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell, a Democrat, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

# Grizzly bear mauls school group in British Columbia valley; officers race to track animal

COLOMBIA, NOV 22

A grizzly bear attacked a school group on a walking trail in British Columbia on Thursday, seriously injuring three children and one adult.

Officers were still searching for the animal on Friday. The attack happened in the town of Bella Coola on the central coast of Canada's westernmost province and residents have been told to remain indoors until further notice.

The B.C. Conservation Officer Service said in a statement on Facebook the bear has yet to be captured despite teams working overnight.

The students and teachers had stopped along a trail near the river when a grizzly bear emerged from the forest and attacked, according to the statement.

Multiple teachers intervened, using bear spray and a bear banger to drive the bear away, it said.

Paramedics provided emergency medical treatment to four patients and transported them to hospital, the Provincial Health Services Authority told Reuters by email, with two patients in critical condition and two in serious condition. A further seven people were cared for at the scene but did not require transportation to hospital.

"I want to thank the teachers for their heroism," B.C. Premier David Eby said at a press conference on Friday.

"I want to send my heart out to the parents and kids and loved ones and everyone who has been injured and is in hospital right now and I hope for their quick recovery."

The group was from the Acwsalcta School, run by the Indigenous Nuxalk Nation, which was closed on Friday.

The Nuxalk Nation Chief and Council said in a statement on Friday the bear attack had impacted children and so many loved ones.

# South Africa’s G20 draft sidelines US, drawing ire as Trump boycotts summit

UNITED STATE, NOV 22

Leaders of the Group of 20 top economies gathered for a U.S.-boycotted summit in South Africa on Saturday, seeking a deal on a draft declaration drawn up without U.S. input in a surprise move that a senior White House official described as "shameful".

G20 envoys have agreed on a draft leaders' declaration ahead of the weekend summit in Johannesburg, in which several of the top agenda items are about climate change. The draft was drawn up without seeking U.S. consensus, four sources familiar with the matter said on Friday.

One of those sources confirmed late on Friday that the draft made references to climate change, despite objections from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, who doubts the scientific consensus that warming is caused by human activities.

Trump has indicated that it will boycott the summit because of allegations, widely



discredited, that the host country's Black majority government persecutes its white minority.

The U.S. president has also rejected the host nation's agenda of promoting solidarity and helping developing nations adapt to weather disasters, transition to clean energy and cut their excessive debt costs.

The boycott had put a dampener on President Cyril Ramaphosa's plans to trumpet South Africa's role in promoting multilateral diplomacy, but some analysts suggested it might benefit it, if other members embrace the summit's agenda and make headway on a substantive declaration.

It was not clear what concessions had been made on the language to get everyone to agree. The United States had

objected to any mention of climate or renewable energy in the discussion, and some other members are often reticent about it. Three out of four of South Africa's planned top agenda items - preparing for climate-induced weather disasters, financing the transition to green energy, and ensuring the rush for critical minerals benefits producers - are largely about climate change.

The fourth is about a more equitable system of borrowing for poor countries.

The United States will host the G20 in 2026 and Ramaphosa said he would have to hand over the rotating presidency to an "empty chair". The South African presidency has rejected the White House's offer to send the U.S. charge d'affaires for the G20 handover.

# MAGA favourite Marjorie Taylor Greene exits Congress after rift with Trump, says she won’t be his ‘battered wife’

UNITED STATE, NOV 22

Saying she refused to be a "battered wife," U.S. Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene announced on Friday she was resigning from the House of Representatives in the wake of a dramatic falling out with President Donald Trump.

Her exit marks a stunning turn of events that few would have imagined months ago. Greene, a Republican from Georgia, was once one of Trump's closest allies and an outspoken advocate of his "America First" agenda, but the rift between the two widened in recent months over the release of government files related to sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and other matters.

In a 10-minute video posted on social media, Greene said she was spurred to resign by the prospect of having to face a Trump-backed Republican primary challenger and the potential takeover of the House by Democrats in next year's midterm elections. She also complained that Congress has largely been "sidelined" since Trump returned to the presidency in January.

RUPTURE PROMPTS CONCERNS OVER MAGA BASE BEFORE MIDTERMS

"I have too much self-respect and dignity, love my family way too much, and do not want my sweet district to have to endure a hurtful and hateful primary

against me by the president we all fought for, only to fight and win my election while Republicans will likely lose the midterms," Greene said.

"I refuse to be a battered wife hoping it all goes away and gets better," she added.

Interviewed by ABC News, Trump said Greene's resignation, to take effect on January 5, was "great news for the country. It's great."

Greene lamented the state of American politics, contending that neither Republicans nor Democratic lawmakers were working to solve the nation's problems, including the rising cost of living.

She said voters were tuning out Washington because "they know how much credit card debt they have, they know how much their own bills have gone up over the past five years, they actually do their own grocery shopping and know food costs too much, their rent has increasingly gone up, they have been outbid by corporate asset managers too many times when they put in an offer to buy a house."

The public dispute between Trump and Greene had fueled concerns among some Republicans that Trump's "Make America Great Again" base could fracture a year before the midterms, when Democrats hope to regain control of Congress.

Greene's resignation will

narrow the Republican majority in the House to 218 members over the Democrats' 213. Republicans have a 53-47 majority in the Senate.

Greene had been increasingly exhibiting her independence from Trump, joining a House effort to force the release of the Epstein files over his objections, blasting House leadership for not doing more to address healthcare costs during the recent government shutdown and calling Israel's assault on Gaza a genocide.

Trump, in turn, became more critical of her.

Before the House voted overwhelmingly to release the Epstein files, he called her a "traitor" and "disgrace" to the Republican Party. He withdrew his support for her and called her a "ranting lunatic."

GREENE SAYS ORDINARY AMERICANS BEING 'CAST ASIDE'

In her video, Greene defended her Epstein vote.

"Standing up for American women who were raped at 14, trafficked and used by rich powerful men, should not result in me being called a traitor and threatened by the president of the United States, whom I fought for," she said.

Greene said she was proud of her conservative voting record, adding, in a swipe at Trump, that "loyalty should be a two-way street."

Her ally in the House, Representative Thomas Massie, posted on X that Greene "embodies what a true representative should be."

Barbara Comstock, a former Republican House member and a Trump critic, lauded Greene's decision on social media.

"She doesn't want to be a Republican 'battered wife' taking Trump's abuse and getting death threats and pretending it's all ok only to end up in the minority. Good for her," Comstock posted.

Greene won her northwest Georgia district with 64% of the vote in 2024. Residents there said this week they hoped her rift with Trump would soon heal and expressed a willingness to support both of them. But Greene made clear on Friday that she had no interest in sparring with a Trump-backed opponent.

Even if she prevailed, she said, she likely would be in the House minority after the midterms and would have to defend Trump in impeachment proceedings, a situation she called "absurd" and "completely unserious."

"If I am cast aside by MAGA Inc and replaced by Neocons, Big Pharma, Big Tech, Military Industrial War Complex, foreign leaders, and the elite donor class that can't even relate to real Americans, then many common Americans have been cast aside and replaced as well," she said.