

## Japan PM Takaichi Faces Backlash Over Lawmakers' Gift



Published on February 27, 2026

Document Date: Sat, Apr 18 2026 11:05:55 am

Category: ,English,International - ,Snippets

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Source: Xinhua

TOKYO, Feb 27: Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is facing mounting political pressure after reports revealed that congratulatory gift catalogs were distributed to more than 300 ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lawmakers following their election victory, a move critics say may breach political funding rules and deepen public distrust.

Japanese media reported that gift catalogs worth about 30,000 yen (approximately 192 U.S. dollars) per recipient were sent to 315 LDP lawmakers, totaling nearly 10 million yen. The catalogs reportedly carried the prime minister's name and a congratulatory message, raising questions about compliance with Japan's Political Funds Control Law, which restricts personal donations to politicians.

Takaichi acknowledged the distribution and said the gifts were funded through political resources of the LDP's Nara prefectural chapter she heads, not from personal funds. She described the gesture as an expression of appreciation toward newly elected party members. However, opposition leaders and political analysts argued that using party funds in this manner could amount to personal political promotion and reflect insensitivity to public economic hardships. Opposition parties warned the controversy could delay parliamentary deliberations on Japan's fiscal 2026 budget, which the government aims to pass before the end of March. Critics also linked the issue to earlier allegations involving Takaichi's political funding practices and her handling of the LDP's recent slush-fund scandal.

Analysts say the episode has revived broader concerns over money and politics in Japan and could erode public confidence in the administration. Some ruling party lawmakers privately expressed concern that prolonged scrutiny may damage both Takaichi's leadership standing and the LDP's

public image.