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Posted 5/23/2003 9:02 AM

Japan Passes Privacy Protection Law

TOKYO (APOnline) — Japanese lawmakers voted into law Friday a set of privacy protection bills that have been criticized as potentially restricting freedom of speech.

The legislation gives individuals the right to obtain information companies have collected about them and puts restrictions on the use and sharing of such personal data. Government bureaucrats are similarly regulated.

The upper house of Parliament approved the bills in a plenary session Friday morning, two weeks after they were passed in the lower house. They were supported by Japan's three-party ruling conservative coalition, which holds a majority in both chambers.

Backers of the new legislation say it responds to consumer complaints about personal information circulating in dubious databases and mailing lists.

Critics counter that operators of Internet sites and other businesses will be overwhelmed by requests from individuals to delete personal information.

The legislation has also drawn fire from the media and opposition parties on the grounds it could restrict freedom of speech.

Its provisions were amended to exempt news reporting by media organizations, but magazine publishers have complained they may not necessarily be protected because they are not specifically mentioned in the law's definition of a media organization.

Enacting the privacy laws was a key goal of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's government during this session of Parliament.

Individuals who believe their personal information has been misused by a company can complain to the government, which is empowered to order a halt to such activity or slap violators with penalties of up to six months in prison or up to 300,000 yen (\$2,500).

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