

Metropolis plan rejected in referendum

- ① OSAKA (Kyodo) --Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto's proposal to reorganize the city administration into a metropolitan government similar to Tokyo's was rejected in a tight referendum on Sunday, with voters dismissing his argument that the initiative could save hundreds of billions of yen in taxpayers' money.
- ② After Sunday's vote, Hashimoto said he took the outcome seriously and his proposal was perceived by voters as "mistaken."
- ③ "I will continue on as mayor until my term expires, but I will retire from politics after that," Hashimoto told a press conference, reiterating his earlier promise to retire from politics when his current term expires in December.
- ④ The proposed plan was designed to cut administrative overlap between the Osaka city and prefectural governments. It aimed to dissolve the current 24 city wards in April 2017 and reorganize them into five wards focusing on the provision of welfare and other basic services, while leaving infrastructure and certain wide-area services to the prefectural government.
- ⑤ Under the plan, mayors and assembly members would have been elected for each of the special wards, like those of Tokyo. The result of the referendum is legally binding.
- ⑥ The Osaka Restoration Association political group led by Hashimoto had said the administrative reform could save the five special wards 270 billion yen (\$2.3 billion) over 17 years, including by privatizing the city subway and awarding garbage disposal to private contractors.
- ⑦ But the other political parties, including the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, had insisted that many costs can be cut without the reform. The parties had forecast that direct savings would be limited to about 100 million yen in a single year from merging redundant entities, as with the Tokyo offices of the city and prefecture.
- ⑧ With the transition itself thought likely to cost as much as 68 billion yen, opponents had slammed the plan as a waste of money, but Hashimoto remained adamant the costs would be easily recouped.
- ⑨ According to the Osaka electoral management committee, voter turnout stood at 66.83 percent, 5.91 percentage points higher than in the last Osaka mayoral election in 2011 held simultaneously with a gubernatorial election for Osaka Prefecture.
- ⑩ "I don't want (the current form of) Osaka city to disappear," said 35-year-old part-time worker Akinori Sato, who voted against the plan. "There is also uncertainty about the future if the metropolis proposal goes through."
- ⑪ Those who voted for Hashimoto's signature policy expressed hope to change the status quo.
- ⑫ "The relative decline of Osaka city has been sharp," said a 35-year-old company employee. "If it's a ship that's sinking, we need to change something about it."
- ⑬ Official campaigning for the referendum started April 27, after a blueprint of the reform plan was approved by the prefectural and city assemblies in March.
- ⑭ Hashimoto, who served as prefectural governor from 2008 and became mayor in 2011, has been pushing for an overhaul of the administration in western Japan's biggest city since 2010.
- ⑮ He had said the plan would cut costs by streamlining the currently overlapping functions of the city and prefectural governments.【May 17, 2015/Nikkei】

①initiative:構想 ⑤legally binding:法的拘束力がある ⑦redundant::余分の⑧slam:酷評する adamant:強固な、頑強に主張する
recoup:取り戻す⑪signature:特徴的な status quo:現状⑬blueprint:詳細な計画⑭overhaul:分解点検、解体 ⑮streamline:合理化する

★Ice breaker for active discussion★

1. Are you for or against Mr. Hashimoto's proposal. Why?
2. Why are there administrative overlap between the Osaka city and prefectural governments?
3. Tell me more about Mr. Hashimoto. What were his previous careers before becoming a politician?
4. What do you think of his announcement of retiring from politics after the referendum?
5. What do you think is the future of Osaka?
6. Recently the voting age of Japan is lowered from age 20 to age 18.
What do you think about its impact to Japan's society?
7. Make sentences using the following words: initiative, legally binding, redundant, adamant, recoup, status quo, overhaul and blueprint.

橋下氏は、2008年大阪府知事に初当選。2年後「都構想」の実現へ向け地域政党「大阪維新の会」を立ち上げ、2011年4月の統一地方選、11月の知事・市長ダブル選挙で圧勝し自らは市長に初当選。高い支持率を背景に国政に働きかけを強め、都構想実現に必要な大都市地域特別区設置法を成立させた。しかし思いのほか党勢は伸びず、昨年都構想案は一旦大阪市議会に否決。その後公明党の協力を得てほぼ同じ案が承認され、住民投票へ道を開いた。