

Political leaders, go global

Japanese officials sidelined by lack of communication skills

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Lower house speakers from the Group of Eight major developed nations are to meet Sept. 2 in Hiroshima to get to know each other and discuss global issues. This is the seventh such meeting, and the first time for Japan to be host.

International conferences like the Hiroshima meeting are important to discuss policy issues, both national and inter-

national, at the political level. Participants in such forums can forge personal relationships of mutual trust typically through unofficial chats during break times or on other casual occasions, and these relationships sometimes turn out to be instrumental to a country's diplomatic activities and trade talks with other nations.

As such, lawmakers should be encouraged to attend international conferences. In Japan, however, I am worried about legislators' tendency to avoid doing so, partly because it is difficult for them to be away from the country while

the Diet is in session.

One vital attribute for lawmakers hopping to build relationships at international meetings is the ability to communicate, including foreign language skills. At the G-8 summit in July in Hokkaido, dignitaries from participating nations were seen actively conversing with each other, but reportedly

only a few of the Japanese could join in the conversations and most of them looked bored.

Inward looking

Inward direct investment accounts for a paltry amount, less than 3% of Japan's nominal gross domestic product, the

lowest among major developed countries. Relatively heavy regulation of companies and a lack of transparency in policies are among the reasons for the low level of investment, but the lack of effort by political leaders to officially and unofficially explain Japan's position is also be responsible.

Some private-sector companies, which faced the threat of globalization much earlier on, have started to conduct board meetings in English. Now the global point of view is needed on the way when key figures make policy even for domestic affairs. An international point of view and English speaking ability are becoming important requirements for lawmakers.

