

DOMESTIC

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# Former 'comfort women' go on strike in front of Diet

Three elderly South Korean women who claim they were forced into the Imperial Army's network of "sex slave" brothels during World War II began a sit-in outside the Diet on Thursday to demand Japanese government compensation.

"Bring Murayama out here," cried 68-year-old Kang Soo-ae, one of the three Koreans who have launched a 10-day protest. She was referring to Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, who has followed his predecessors in denying compensation to so-called "comfort women."

Historians say that up to 200,000 women who lived in Asian nations occupied by Japan were forced into sexual slavery for Imperial Army soldiers.

"I was duped by Japanese police to go to Palau when I was 14," Kang said as she braved an autumn chill to sit on the pavement in front of a Diet Building in central Tokyo.

"My friends and I have sacrificed ourselves in unspeakable ways," she said. "Murayama must know what happened in the war."

The three women, wearing white headbands and bundled in thick coats, were joined by three offspring of Koreans who died while serving the Imperial Army.

Some 40 young Japanese

supporters flanked the Korean protesters. Some of the demonstrators are holding a hunger strike.

They have also petitioned members of the Diet to support the demand that Tokyo officially compensate the victims and apologize for the systematic use of forced prostitution.

The Japanese government has been steadfast in its contention that Tokyo has settled war claims through reparation payments to the governments of occupied nations, and refuses to pay individuals for the personal miseries caused by Japanese troops.

Murayama's coalition government has backed the creation of a privately funded 100 billion yen program that will be used partially to make payments to former comfort women.

One of the three South Korean women in front of the Diet on Thursday called the private fund "nothing more than giving alms."

"We don't want it," said a 73-year-old woman who identified herself only by her Japanese pseudonym, Kimiko Kaneda. "They must wish that the old women like us will die soon."

Kaneda is one of the 40 Koreans who have filed a class-action suit for compensation from the Japanese govern-



Kang Soo-ae, a former South Korean "comfort woman," cries out as she starts a 10-day hunger strike near the Diet in Tokyo. She was joined by other former comfort women and three Korean women (background) representing bereaved families of World War II dead. They are demanding compensation from the Japanese government. (AP)

ment.

Hwang Keum-joo, 69, who was taken to northeast China when she was 17 and forced into sexual slavery there for

seven years, said, "How can the Japanese government force the old people like us to suffer this way?"

"The issue should be settled

as soon as possible," she said.

A similar demonstration is being held in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. (AFP-Jiji)