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Police and yakuza prepare for 2020 Olympic battle – adapted from Japantoday.com

You may have heard of the 30 Years War, the 100 Years War and perhaps even the Six Day War. According to Spa! (Oct 1), Japan is now on the verge of a “Seven Years War,” to be fought between the nation’s crime syndicates and the police. The reason is Tokyo being picked to host the 2020 Summer Olympics.

On Sept 9, the first working day after the selected Tokyo as the host venue, the National Police Agency and Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department met to establish an Olympics Task Force. “This speedy reaction shows the police are in high spirits over the Olympics,” says a reporter who covers the police for a nationally circulated newspaper, adding, “They’re eager to clean up dangerous areas of ‘anti-social’ elements, and have already held numerous meetings. Even before the IOC decided on Tokyo, when the delegates visited here, the cops rounded up the homeless people in Yoyogi Park and moved them into apartments, out of sight. That’s how badly they wished Tokyo would win.”

Why? As veteran crime author Atsushi Mizoguchi writes, “Since large numbers of civil servants from the postwar baby boomer generation began retiring, the police have had a hard time placing their people in second careers via the ‘amakudari’ system. Hosting the Olympics is their golden opportunity. In addition to the Olympics, there will be other chances, like the proposed new law to allow casinos. I expect trouble between the police and gangs in areas where their interests have clashed before.”

The juiciest prize will be 10 construction projects, including the athletes’ village, centered around Harumi in Chuo Ward. Costs for new building facilities in Chuo Ward alone are estimated to reach 460 billion yen. The large general contractor firms will farm out the majority of work to subcontractors, which will hire construction companies which may have ties with organized crime. Other likely sources of revenues are as job brokers and demolition firms, both of which have long ties to gangs.

“If the police come out in force, then I suppose there will be less that trickles down to us,” sighs a gang boss based in Kansai. “Basically the general contractor firms have their own business style. For instance, Company S tends to lean toward the police. Company K deals with both the police and gangs, and Company T tends to work closely with the yakuza. Of

these, Company S has a lot of retired police officials. They are expected to work even harder at keeping out the ‘antisocials,’ so it’s not going to be easy for yakuza to get involved.

“I suppose at the most you’ll see them using the gangs as subcontractors to recruit workers. But the Kodokai (the Nagoya-based, second-largest affiliate of the Yamaguchi-gumi, Japan’s largest designated crime syndicate with an estimated 50,000 members) is likely to snatch up the really good opportunities.”

According to the same source, yakuza are becoming increasingly poor and the situation for many is far worse than the average person realizes. “Several years ago, the junior sub-bosses in the secondary gang affiliates used to easily earn over 100 million in annual income. But after the newest wave of anti-gang regulations and other crackdowns, they have become increasingly estranged from society. All it takes is the smallest crime to get arrested and fined. They don’t have much money.”

Spa! predicts that at this stage in the struggle for supremacy, it looks like the police will take the gold medals.

Questions

1. The article suggests that life is becoming harder for yakuza. Do you think this is true? Why? Why not?
2. Do you think the yakuza are a big social problem in Japan? Are there any positive aspects to the yakuza?
3. Have you ever had any experience of dealing with yakuza? What happened?
4. What do you think about the “amakudari” system? Should it be used by the police to place their retired staff in Olympic positions? Why? Why not?
5. What do you think about the proposal to have a casino in Tokyo? Is it a good idea? Why? Why not?

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