Record 85% favor death penalty

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The percentage of people in favor of the death penalty has reached a
record high, with 85.6 percent of survey respondents saying capital
punishment is "unavoidable," according to a government poll released
Saturday.

The highest percentage since the government began the surveys in 1994
indicates the public is seeking strict punishment for heinous crimes following
a spate of such incidents, including a stabbing rampage in Tokyo's
Akihabara district in 2008.

About 55 percent of respondents described the extension of the statute of
limitations for capital crimes, including murder, to 25 years from 15 years in
2005 under the revised Code of Criminal Procedure, as "too short."

Of those who said the period is too short, 49.3 percent said the statute of
limitations should be abolished, according to the survey.

For the latest survey, which is conducted every five years, the Cabinet
Office polled 3,000 men and women aged 20 or older nationwide in
November to December, receiving valid responses from 64.8 percent.

The proportion of respondents in favor of the death penalty rose by 4.2
percentage points from the previous survey in 2004, indicating that the
number of people who hold such a view has been steadily increasing since
posting 73.8 percent in the first survey.

Only 5.7 percent said the death penalty should be abolished, down 0.3 point
from the 2004 poll.

In expressing their preference for execution, 54.1 percent said the feelings
of victims and their families would not be satisfied if the death penalty were
abolished, while 53.2 percent said perpetrators of heinous crimes should
pay for their crimes with their lives.

In addition, 51.5 percent said they believe the number of such crimes would
increase if the death penalty were abolished.

Of the respondents who said execution should be abolished, 55.9 percent
said the perpetrators should be kept alive to pay for their crimes, while 43.2
percent said miscarriages of justice would be irrevocable if the death
sentence were carried out.

In a related development, an advisory body to the justice minister proposed
in January the abolition of the statute of limitations for crimes whose
maximum penalty is the death sentence.

The Legislative Council will report its proposals to the justice minister
shortly, and a bill to revise the Code of Criminal Procedure is expected to be
submitted to the ongoing Diet session.

In the survey, respondents were allowed to give multiple answers to why
they are in favor of the death penalty, seek the abolition of capital
punishment and think the period of the statute of limitation for capital crimes
is too short.