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## **Japan to extend copyright term**

The Japanese government has announced plans to strengthen the existing copyright law, which would see the period of copyright protection in the country increase from 50 to 70 years.

The government proposed the changes to the parliament on January 20, when the latter convened for a four-day meeting.

If the proposals are approved, Japan's copyright terms will fall in line with the norms of industrial nations.

Such a change is necessary to bring copyright protection on Japanese animations, videos and computer game software to an international level, according to Takenori Hiroe, patent attorney at Hiroe & Associates.

"The Japanese government felt that following the US would be an essential industrial strategy since Japanese goods would lose their rights in 50 years, thereby lowering their international competitiveness," said Kim Knudsen, partner at Ryuka Law Firm.

Under the TRIPs Agreement, copyright material that has been produced overseas can still only be protected for as long as the protection period lasts in the copyright holder's country.

If the parliament passes the bill, the law could come into force by the end of 2003 or early 2004, according to Daisuke Tatsuno at Baker & McKenzie in Tokyo.

The law would also change the burden of proof – while previously the copyright owner had to prove infringement, the responsibility would in future shift to the copyright infringer, who would have to prove that the suspected product was legal.

The law would also see more relaxed rules on the use of copyright-protected material for educational purposes.

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