

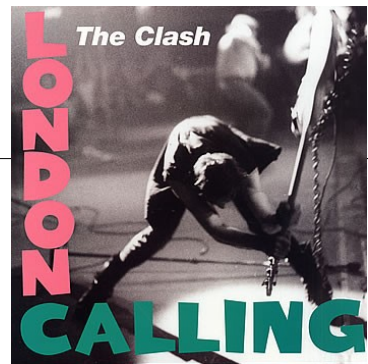
The News Quiz

Headlines

MSDF ship, freighter clip sterns in Vietnam port

From Obama to Obama, thank you.

Accept fault, free 42-year death-row inmate,
counsel tells Supreme Court



Picture



**London duns embassy for £1 million
in congestion fees**

IWC condemns Sea Shepherd's
actions

Blair to visit Japan from Friday

dun = To make repeated and insistent demand upon for payment.

Missing Words

_____ caves in Yubari pool's roof

Central Asia _____ fogs Japan

Resona to increase _____ execs

Shiseido names _____

A Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer collided with a Cambodian cargo ship in the port of Ho Chi Minh City around 12:20 p.m. Monday Japan time, less than two weeks after another MSDF warship collided with and sank a small trawler off Chiba Prefecture, MSDF officers said. The 3,050-ton Hamayuki was coming into the Vietnamese port when its stern clipped the stern of the Masan, a midsize Cambodian cargo ship, MSDF spokesman Kozo Okuda told The Japan Times. No one was injured in the collision. Okuda declined to comment on the cause of the accident, saying the investigation was still under way. A local pilot was aboard the MSDF ship at the time of the accident, according to Okuda. The Hamayuki, with about 180 crew members on board, left Kure, Hiroshima Prefecture, with two escort ships Feb. 22 for oceanic navigation training exercises, the spokesman said. The collision bent the destroyer's flag pole and dented its stern, while the Masan suffered scratches, he said. On Feb. 19, the 7,700-ton Atago, the newest MSDF Aegis destroyer, sank a 7.3-ton fishing boat in the Pacific in a collision. The boat's father-and-son crew have not been seen since. Initial reports indicated the Atago crew was largely at fault in the collision, raising concerns about the possible operational lapse among MSDF personnel. When asked to comment on the timing of the latest accident, Okuda said, "Since we are still confirming the situation, we are unable to comment on that."

Snow caves in Yubari pool's roof

SAPPORO (Kyodo) The roof of an indoor swimming pool jointly run by the bankrupt central Hokkaido city of Yubari has caved in from the weight of accumulated snow, it was learned Monday. The Yubari Swimming Center is run by a city-affiliated body that had not shoveled snow off the roof due to its financial difficulties since December 2006. No one was injured as the facility had been temporarily closed. The former coal-mining city, with a population of around 12,500, went effectively bankrupt last March when it applied for status as a special fiscal rehabilitation entity. Yubari has had 133 cm of snow accumulation, 25 cm more than average years, city officials said. The facility opened in 1971. Aging was probably one of the causes for the collapse in addition to the weight of the snow, the officials said. The roof, constructed with steel frames, fell into an empty swimming pool 25 meters long. The municipal government has already closed four other indoor and outdoor pools due to its financial problems, and the latest loss could affect gym classes at elementary schools, the officials said. "We have no prospect of rebuilding" the facility, a city official said. According to the city, the collapse was first spotted by a local resident Sunday morning. Under the status of fiscal rehabilitation body, the city's budget is monitored by the internal affairs ministry, public services are reduced and heavier taxes are imposed on the public.

Central Asia yellow sand fogs Japan

Carried by the winds for thousands of kilometers from the deserts of Central Asia and western China, yellow sand was observed in various parts of Japan late Sunday and Monday morning for the first time this year, the Meteorological Agency said. According to the agency's branch in Kumamoto, the yellow sand limited local visibility to 3 km at 9 a.m. Monday. In the afternoon, yellow sand was also seen in Tokyo, Fukushima and Sendai, the agency said. The agency urged transportation operators to exercise caution. Flights at Fukuoka airport have been suspended in the past when the sand cut visibility to 2 km, an agency official in Tokyo said. Yellow sand, or "kosa," is observed at the beginning of spring. The sand, carried aloft as high as 6 km, comes mainly from the Takla Makan and Gobi Deserts of Central Asia as well as the Loess Plateau of western China, according to the agency. Yellow sand was observed Monday in Okinawa, Kumamoto, Nagasaki, Ehime, Aichi, Okayama, Hiroshima, Tottori, Shimane, Osaka, Hyogo, Wakayama and Gifu prefectures.

From Obama to Obama, thank you.

U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, who is running for the Democratic presidential nomination, has sent the mayor of Obama, Fukui Prefecture, a letter of gratitude for the city's show of support, city officials said Tuesday. "We share more than a common name; we share a common planet and common responsibilities," the Feb. 21 letter addressed to Mayor Toshio Murakami says. "I am touched by your friendly gesture, and I wish you all the best." The letter closes with the candidate's signature. The city supports the senator because his name, although not Japanese, is coincidentally the same as the city's, officials say. In January 2007, the mayor sent Obama a letter and a local specialty — lacquered chopsticks. Last month, the city sent out another letter and a lacquered "daruma" doll with a wish for Obama's decisive victory in the nomination. Obama is a port town with a 1,300-year history. It was once a center of trade between ancient Nara and China and the Korean Peninsula.

Accept fault, free 42-year death-row inmate, counsel tells Supreme Court

Lawyers seeking a retrial for a former professional boxer on death row for 42 years filed their final statement Tuesday with the Supreme Court, demanding that the court "have the courage to acknowledge its misjudgment" and free their client. Iwao Hakamada, 71, has demanded a retrial after he was convicted of murdering a family of four in 1966. His death sentence was finalized in 1980 by the Supreme Court, but a retrial plea has continued since 1981. "The court has imprisoned a man and will execute him, despite the unreasonable, unnatural and questionable facts in the rulings," the final statement by his lawyers said. "Such a reckless act cannot be accepted." Katsuhiko Nishijima, who heads Hakamada's defense, said a decision by the Supreme Court regarding the retrial plea could "come any minute." He said that chief evidence, including the weapon allegedly used in the slayings, was "fabricated" to convict the former featherweight boxer. Hakamada was convicted by lower courts of murdering a miso maker, his wife and two children in Shizuoka Prefecture on June 30, 1966. The scene of the crime was torched and ¥200,000 was stolen. Hakamada was arrested the following August. The former boxer, who was a live-in employee of the miso factory, resided next door to the victims' house. He was charged with murder, robbery and arson, and was sentenced to hang by the Shizuoka District Court. The Tokyo High Court upheld the sentence as did the Supreme Court. However, Nishijima and his team claim that coercive questioning, including beatings by interrogators, led to Hakamada's initial confession. They also argue that evidence provided by police lacks credibility. Bloodstained garments found at the miso plant by police in August 1967, more than a year after the killings, were too small to fit Hakamada, the lawyers said.

Resona to increase women execs

Kyodo News

Resona Holdings Inc. wants to sharply boost the number of women in managerial positions at the four banks under its wing to around 1,200 from the current 700 by the end of March 2012, sources said Tuesday. The banking group hopes the measure will energize the group's operations, the sources said. About 40 percent, or 6,000, of the banking group's employees are women. Women currently account for 11 percent of management-level employees at Resona Bank, Saitama Resona Bank, Kinki Osaka Bank and Resona Trust & Banking Co. The aim is to raise the ratio to around 20 percent, which would be extremely high compared with ratios at other major banking groups, the sources said.

Shiseido names first female No. 2

Kyodo News

Shiseido Co. has announced that Managing Executive Officer Kimie Iwata will be promoted to executive vice president April 1, becoming the first woman to assume the post at Japan's biggest cosmetics maker. Iwata, 60, will acquire the right to represent Shiseido in late June, the Tokyo-based company said. The right will effectively make Iwata the second-highest-ranked executive at Shiseido, after President Shinzo Maeda, 61. Iwata, a former bureaucrat in the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry, joined Shiseido as an adviser in December 2003 and took her current post last April. Iwata, wife of Deputy Bank of Japan Gov. Kazumasa Iwata, is credited for her initiative in upgrading Shiseido's child-support and manpower-development programs for employees. The promotion of Iwata to the No. 2 post is expected to encourage female workers, who account for some 70 percent of Shiseido's domestic workforce.

London duns embassy for £1 million in congestion fees

LONDON (Kyodo) The Japanese Embassy in London has racked up more than £1 million worth of unpaid traffic charges and penalty fines in a diplomatic dispute with city chiefs. Transport for London, the body that controls the British capital's public transportation network, revealed recently that the embassy owes it a total of £1,003,300 (¥207 million). This is up from last March, when the debt stood at £312,000. The embassy is refusing to pay a daily congestion charge for driving in central London, arguing that it is in fact a tax that diplomats are exempt from paying under the 1961 Vienna Convention, which governs diplomatic relations. It costs drivers £8 each to drive in the zone, which covers London's central entertainment and business district, between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m., Monday to Friday. If drivers do not pay the charge by midnight, they start incurring fines. Failure to pay within 28 days can result in a fine of £150. Several other missions have also stopped paying. The biggest debtor is the United States, which owes over £2 million. Japan is currently in second place. More than £10 million is owed by 20 embassies, according to Transport for London. The U.S. and German embassies stopped paying the charge in July 2005 and there are thought to be around 50 missions not paying now. While opposing their actions, Mayor of London Ken Livingstone knows there is nothing he can do by law to prevent the diplomats' refusal to cough up. The Japanese Embassy disputes TfL's assertion that the congestion charge is, in fact, a charge for which a specific service is being provided — namely the reduction of traffic congestion — and therefore payable by diplomats under the Vienna Convention. The British government also supports TfL's case and says British diplomats pay congestion charges in other countries. A spokesman for the Japanese Embassy in London said Tokyo had assessed the relevant laws in August 2006 and concluded its diplomatic staff should not pay. Locally hired embassy employees still pay the charge, however. Last March, the mayor caused controversy by using Japan's war role to attack the embassy for nonpayment. He told a radio station: "I think there are several problems with Japan that we could go on about here. Admitting their guilt for all the war crimes would be one thing. So if they've not got round to doing that, I doubt they're too worried about the congestion charge."

IWC condemns Sea Shepherd's actions

LONDON (AP) The International Whaling Commission has accused campaigners protesting Japan's whaling fleet of creating danger in the Antarctic Ocean. The regulator rebuked U.S. antiwhaling group, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, on Saturday for "jeopardizing safety at sea," following a three-day meeting in London. Protesters aboard Sea Shepherd's vessel, the Steve Irwin, have been involved in a series of clashes with Japanese vessels taking part in the country's whaling research program. The commission "called upon the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society to refrain from dangerous actions that jeopardize safety at sea, and on vessels and crews concerned to exercise restraint". "The commission and its contracting governments do not condone and in fact condemn any actions that are a risk to human life and property in relation to the activities of vessels at sea," it said in a statement. Sea Shepherd and other antiwhaling groups have repeatedly harassed the Japanese whaling fleet to interfere with the hunt. Japan kills about 1,000 whales every year under an internationally approved research program. Japan has accused the activists of terrorist tactics and insists it only wants to take the types of whales that are plentiful. The meeting came as strains between members of the commission worsen. Japan, Norway and Iceland lead a group keen to reintroduce commercial whaling, but other members remain firm in their stance against it.

Despite the rebuke, Sea Shepherd would continue its actions in the Southern Ocean, said Paul Watson, captain of the Steve Irwin. "This is the 21st century, and the IWC should be an organization to protect the world's whales from this barbaric practice," he said. "Here they are condemning us for throwing stink bombs, but the Japanese are attacking endangered whales in violation of an Australian court order. They are no different to poachers."

Talks spark London protest against Japanese whaling

By James Macintyre

Friday, 7 March 2008

The row over the killing of whales by Japan came to London yesterday as the International Whaling Commission began three days of informal talks amid impassioned protests by conservationists. One man was arrested after scaling the Japanese embassy in London and unfurling a banner which read: "Japan stop your illegal whaling" before chaining himself to the building. Outside the hotel near Heathrow airport in which the talks were taking a place, a number of protesters gathered, waving banners criticising the Japanese whalers. The talks are aimed at breaking the deadlock between pro- and anti-whaling groups after a number of high-profile sabotage attempts by the US-based militant conservationist group, Sea Shepherd. Martin Wyness, 50, a Sea Shepherd activist arrested for criminal trespass at the Japanese embassy yesterday, said: "I think an awful lot of people in Britain are not happy that the Japanese can proudly fly their flag at the top of the mast while they continue this illegal whaling sham. So I've lowered it to half mast in tribute to the whales they have killed." Mr Wyness, who staged a similar stunt at the embassy in January, added: "I want to put the focus on the IWC, and encourage them to stand firm against Japan, Iceland and Norway. Norway and Iceland admit they kill whales for their meat, but Japan still pretend they do it for research. We want the IWC to encourage Japan to start behaving like a responsible nation." Relations between activists and Japanese whalers reached a low on Monday when acid was thrown on crew members of a ship participating in Japan's annual whale hunt in the Southern Ocean. Japan's Foreign Minister, Masahiko Komura, said it was "not permissible to use violence to try to force through one's opinion." The Southern Ocean was the scene of a stand-off in January when activists boarded a Japanese whaling ship and were kept there until the Australian government intervened.

Blair to visit Japan from Friday

TOKYO — Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair will make a four-day visit to Japan from Friday to give a keynote speech at a climate change meeting of the world's 20 biggest greenhouse gas emitters, and meet Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, the Foreign Ministry announced Monday. In addition to taking part in the fourth ministerial meeting of Group of Eight Gleneagles Dialogue on climate change, clean energy and sustainable development, Blair is also expected to exchange views with Japanese experts on environmental issues during his stay.