

The News Quiz

NUMBER CRUNCHER

_____ expired food items sold on
JR shinkansen bullet trains

_____ cases of multiple ER snubs last year

Oil hits \$ _____; gold at \$ _____

Toshiba HD DVD losses put at up to ¥ _____

_____ underground student websites found
in bullying study

PICTURE



NEWSMAKER

Who said she had

"forgotten about cash
kept in her home,"

MISSING WORDS

_____ restarts talks with Steel in latest takeover twist

_____ Web site hacked

Cop, girlfriend arrested in _____ fraud

OSAKA (Kyodo) A company executive and her sister were arrested Tuesday in Osaka on suspicion of evading about ¥2.86 billion in inheritance tax, the largest amount ever, prosecutors said. The Osaka District Public Prosecutor's Office and the Osaka Regional Taxation Bureau raided 10 locations, including the women's homes and the offices of group firms. The previous record — about ¥2.49 billion — involved the oldest son of a taxi company founder in the city of Moriguchi in Osaka in 2006. According to the investigation, Hatsue Ri, a 64-year-old company executive, and her sister, Yoshiko, 55, are suspected of hiding about ¥5.93 billion inherited from their father, who founded a group of eight firms, including real estate leasing and loan companies. Hatsue Ri has denied the allegation, claiming she had "forgotten about cash kept in her home," the prosecutors said. Yoshiko Ri has owned up to the wrongdoing, they said. More than ¥5 billion in cash was found in cardboard boxes in a garage at Hatsue Ri's home, the prosecutors said. The two women inherited about ¥8 billion when their father died in October 2004 but failed to declare about ¥5.93 billion, thereby evading about ¥2.86 billion in inheritance tax, the prosecutors said. Eight family members inherited money from the women's father, but the two women were responsible for filing the tax declaration, according to the investigation. According to people close to the family, the women's father had been ill for several years and Hatsue Ri and other family members repeatedly withdrew cash before he died.

Cop, girlfriend arrested in call fraud

NAGOYA (Kyodo) A senior police officer and his girlfriend were arrested Tuesday on suspicion of swindling a woman in Nagoya out of ¥500,000 under the guise of solving her personal troubles last year, Aichi Prefectural Police said. Osami Kojima, a 52-year-old assistant Anjo inspector, has owned up to the allegations, but companion Mie Murase, 38, has denied them. Kojima said he needed the money for leisure purposes. According to police, Kojima and Murase came up with a ruse whereby Kojima pretended to be the man the 40-year-old victim was having problems with and threatening her over the phone last August. The woman is an acquaintance of Murase who knew about her troubles. Kojima and Murase then told the victim they could solve her problems for a fee of ¥500,000, which she paid, police said.

Antivirus software Web site hacked

Trend Micro Inc., a Japanese maker of antivirus software, said part of its Web site was hacked into, allowing a virus to be downloaded onto computers of people viewing the page. The company issued an apology Wednesday on its Web site, saying it resolved the problem that day. The change to one of its virus information pages was made on March 9 around 9 p.m. and remained until around 11:30 a.m. Wednesday, the company said. Trend Micro hasn't confirmed the source of the hacking, spokesman Daisuke Uchida said. The virus works by downloading other viruses from the Internet, he said. Users who are concerned their computer may be infected can use the company's freely available online antivirus software to purge the program, Trend Micro said.

Sapporo restarts talks with Steel in latest takeover twist

Sapporo Breweries, the nation's third-largest beer maker, said Friday that it will restart talks with Steel Partners over the U.S. hedge fund's latest proposal to boost its stake in Sapporo. The decision by Sapporo's board of directors heralds a new phase in the two sides' one-year-old struggle over the brewer's management. In its latest proposal on March 10, Steel Partners Japan Strategic Fund (Offshore) L.P. said that it will raise its offer price for Sapporo shares to ¥875 per share to gain a 33.3 percent holding in the company. The latest offer was a revision of its initial proposal in February 2007 to launch a tender offer at ¥825 per share to acquire a 66.6 percent stake in Sapporo, providing the brewer's board of directors approved the move. It was thought that the two sides' discussions had ended as Sapporo's board of directors last month turned down the takeover proposal, citing its advisory panel's judgment that Steel's offer would be detrimental to the interests of Sapporo shareholders. "We've decided to hold necessary talks with SPJSF, as we need its detailed explanations, including confirmation of its proposal and data that have not yet been released," Sapporo said in a statement Friday.

24,089 cases of multiple ER snubs last year

Emergency patients were rejected by medical facilities more than three times before being hospitalized in 24,089 cases nationwide last year, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency said Tuesday. Of these, 8,618 cases involved patients younger than 15, and 1,084 cases involved pregnant women, according to the agency's first-ever such survey. Rejections of seriously ill patients accounted for 14,387 cases, the agency said. According to the survey, children were rejected mostly because no pediatricians worked at the facilities, while treatment difficulties were cited in the rejection of pregnant women and other patients in serious condition. As for patients under 15, 220 emergency transfer cases were rejected more than 10 times in 15 prefectures, including Tokyo, Osaka and Saitama, with one patient in Tokyo rejected 34 times. In 16 child transfer cases, patients had to wait more than two hours before finally being hospitalized, according to the agency. In five of the cases, the patients had to wait more than 2 1/2 hours. In 53 emergency transfer cases involving pregnant women, the patients were rejected more than 10 times, with one patient in Chiba Prefecture rejected 42 times, the agency said. Other patients in serious condition were rejected more than 10 times in 1,074 cases, it said. The rejections were seen mainly in large metropolitan areas, including Tokyo and Osaka. "Medical facility staff probably think other facilities will accept the emergency patients as there are many institutions there," one agency official said. However, experts also point out the falling number of doctors and emergency hospitals as a reason behind such a high number of rejections. According to the health ministry, hospitals capable of accepting emergency patients numbered 3,153 at the end of last March, down 118 from 2003.

15 million expired food items sold on JR shinkansen bullet trains

TOKYO — A catering subsidiary of Central Japan Railway Co said Tuesday that it sold an estimated 15 million food items with expired dates for safe consumption on shinkansen bullet and other trains.

JR-Central Passenger Co has received no complaints of health problems stemming from the expired box lunches, sandwiches and other food items but company President Takeshi Tategami apologized for "undermining public trust," saying the false labeling "became habitual due to familiarization of the process." The company sold expired items accounted for 30 percent of what were sold between April 2005, when the company shortened its period for safe consumption of the products, and February this year, when the false labeling came to light, it said.

Oil hits \$110; gold at \$1,000

NEW YORK (AP) Oil prices Thursday surged to new trading highs above \$110 a barrel, driven by the further weakening of the U.S. Dollar. Light, sweet crude for April delivery rose 78 cents to reach \$110.70 in early afternoon European electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. On Wednesday, it set a record trading high of \$110.20 a barrel. Many analysts believe that the dollar's decline is the reason crude futures have surged to new records in 11 of the past 12 sessions, despite the fact that crude supplies have risen 10.2 percent since early January. Crude futures offer a hedge against a falling dollar, and oil futures bought and sold in dollars are more attractive to foreign investors when the dollar is weak. Meanwhile, gold futures hit \$1,000 an ounce for the first time Thursday morning as the dollar continues to decline and crude oil prices rise. Gold has been pushing up against the \$1,000 an ounce mark for weeks mainly due to the weaker dollar. Interest rate cuts — and the prospect of more on the way — have weakened the dollar so much that foreign investors can buy dollar-based commodities such as gold more cheaply.

Toshiba HD DVD losses put at up to ¥100 billion

Toshiba Corp. is still evaluating how its decision to pull out of the HD DVD business will affect its earnings, the company said Thursday. "When we have determined if a revision to our earnings forecast for the fiscal year ending in March is necessary we will release it as soon as possible," the Japanese electronics maker said in a statement. The major business daily Nihon Keizai Shimbun reported Thursday that Toshiba expects to rack up a loss of ¥50 billion in discontinuing its next-generation DVD business. Total HD DVD losses could reach as high as ¥100 billion for the business year ending March 31, the daily said in an unsourced story. The report prompted traders to sell the company's shares amid a broad drop on the Tokyo Stock Exchange. Toshiba's stock was down 3.81 percent at ¥706 in late Thursday afternoon trading. Toshiba announced in February that it will no longer develop, make or market HD DVD players and recorders, handing a victory to Sony Corp.'s rival Blu-ray disc technology in the format battle for next-generation video. Despite being a possible blow to Toshiba's pride, analysts have said they expect the exit to lessen the potential damage in losses from HD DVD operations. Goldman Sachs has said pulling out would improve Toshiba's profitability between ¥40 billion and ¥50 billion a year. HD DVD supporters included Microsoft Corp., Intel Corp. and Japanese electronics maker NEC Corp.

38,000 underground student websites found in bullying study

TOKYO — Research on school bullying conducted by the education ministry has found at least 38,000 unofficial secondary school websites set up by students and others, and the ministry is concerned that they could be used to insult classmates or divulge private information, the ministry said Friday. The research covered websites related to junior and senior high schools in 39 of the country's 47 prefectures, suggesting that there could be even more. The ministry is concerned at the increasing number of hurtful messages being posted on impromptu websites, which students read but bullies can write anonymously. Efforts to clamp down on the sites have proved difficult as they can be shut down and re-established quickly. The education ministry conducted the first survey of its kind in an attempt to fully grasp the extent of the sites, which are based around individual schools but not run by them. "The so-called 'unofficial' homepage issue has received tremendous public attention and interest, but no one really knew the exact nature of those websites' styles, content, and number," a ministry official said. "In our interim report, we found at least 38,000 unofficial websites about schools," he said, adding that the ministry will look at the content as it drafts a full report on the issue. Nearly all young Japanese are Internet users. And a recent survey showed that 96% of high school students have mobile telephones, which can usually access the Internet.