

## Priority placed on jobs, services

The Asahi Shimbun

Job-creation and deregulation in medical care, social welfare and day-care services are part of a draft package of priority programs worked out by the Council on Economic and Fiscal Reform.

The "list of priority reform programs" include plans to have the government hire workers in such vocations as teaching and forest protection, and pushing for deregulation steps to promote newly emerging industries, according to documents obtained by The Asahi Shimbun on Tuesday.

The draft calls for a supplementary budget this fiscal year to finance some of the proposed measures.

The programs were compiled at the request of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who chairs the council.

Koizumi is expected to specify which elements should be included in the supplementary budget at Friday's Cabinet meeting after discussions with coalition members and ministry officials, according to government sources.

The prime minister intends to finalize details of the package in a council meeting Oct. 19.

The council is currently working out an overall schedule for Koizumi's ongoing reform drive. The "priority reform programs" are those the council considers suited for immediate implementation through such measures as revising governmental and ministerial ordinances.

The council also puts priority on areas that can be reformed by revising laws or preparing allocations in a supplementary budget.

To counter the increasing number of people losing their jobs in the wave of corporate restructuring, the package calls for the government itself to offer temporary positions.

For example, the council suggests the government could hire temporary assistant teachers at public schools and forest protection workers.

The package also intends to foster newly growing industries, including medical and welfare services and human resources, and create jobs by easing regulations.

The package calls for swift deregulation in the areas of medical care, social welfare, day-care services and temporary labor to promote high-quality services at lower prices.

The package also suggests deregulation measures in areas where local governments can take advantage of so-called private finance initiatives. Under this system, the government uses private-sector funds to build social infrastructure.

The council says local governments can rent out underused properties at drastically low prices to businesses offering care services for the elderly and children.

Local governments would build the facilities and let private providers operate the services.

In addition, the council urges reforms of stock market systems, including the taxation on securities transactions.

To counter the deflationary pressure, the package calls on the Bank of Japan to further ease credit.



Typhoon No. 15 leaves a clear view of Yokohama and Mount Fuji in its wake Tuesday.

## Typhoon rips Tokyo; death toll climbs to 6

The Asahi Shimbun

Typhoon No. 15 became the first to directly lash metropolitan Tokyo in 12 years, bringing torrential rain and strong winds that had left six dead, three missing and 37 injured by late Tuesday.

Mudslides were reported in 86 locations and 405 homes were flooded throughout the country, the National Police Agency said. The storm landed at Kamakura in the morning and passed through central Tokyo shortly before noon. It was expected to approach Hokkaido by this morning, according to the Meteorological Agency.

The last storm to take such a route was 1989's Typhoon No. 13, which went straight through the nation's most populous area.

The body of an unidentified man was found in the Abukuma River in Fukushima Prefecture on Tuesday evening. Earlier in

the day in Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture, the bodies of an elderly couple, buried in a mudslide, were recovered.

A 50-year-old company employee in Takasaki, Gunma Prefecture, was killed when he fell from the roof of his home while attempting to repair a TV antenna. A landslide in Tomioka, Gunma Prefecture, killed two road maintenance workers Monday afternoon.

In the Tokyo metropolitan area, the Meteorological Agency issued a flood warning for the rain-swollen Tama River. Its banks exceeded the danger level of 7 meters deep in Tokyo's Ota Ward and in Kawasaki's Saiwai Ward around noon Tuesday.

About 20 homes were flooded in the Tode district of Saiwai Ward by Tuesday morning.

Residents of that area voluntarily took shelter at a junior high school.

In Tokyo's Sugunami Ward, a middle-aged man was reported missing after he was carried away by the current in Zempukui River in Ogikubo.

Police and firefighters, alerted by local residents at around 11:30 a.m., were searching for the man, who was seen wearing a navy blue jacket.

At Tokyo International Airport in Haneda, meanwhile, 27 vehicles were swamped when seawater flooded a 700-meter-long tunnel just before 11 a.m. The Tokyo Fire Department said there were no injuries and no motorists were stranded in their cars.

"I was idling because of a traffic jam or something and water suddenly surged in from the front of the tunnel," said a truck driver who was forced to leave his vehicle in the tunnel.

PHOTOS ON PAGE 23

## Number of centenarians reaches all-time high

The Asahi Shimbun

The number of Japanese aged 100 or older will hit a record high of 15,475 by the end of this month, according to a health ministry survey released Tuesday.

The survey, conducted each Sept. 1 by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare ahead of Respect-for-the-Aged Day on Saturday, records the number of people aged 100 by the end of the month.

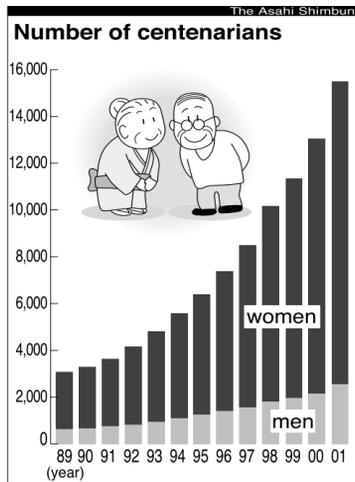
According to the survey, the number of centenarians skyrocketed during the 1990s, jumping from 3,625 in 1991 to 7,373 in 1996, then doubling to 15,475 this year—the highest since records began in 1963.

Women account for 83.6 percent of this year's centenarians, compared with 79.3 percent in 1991 and 81 percent in 1996.

In a breakdown by prefecture, Okinawa topped the list with the most centenarians per 100,000 people, followed by Shimane, Kochi, Kumamoto and Kagoshima prefectures.

Saitama Prefecture is home to the fewest centenarians per 100,000 people, followed by Aichi, Aomori, Ibaraki and Chiba prefectures.

Prefectures in western Japan, including the Kyushu, Shikoku and Chugoku regions, have a higher ratio of centenarians per 100,000 people than those in eastern Japan, according to the survey.



Kamoto Hongo of Kagoshima is Japan's oldest person. She will reach the ripe old age of 114 on Sunday. Yukichi Chuganji, of Ogori City in Fukuoka Prefecture, is the oldest man, at 112.

## Holstein raised in Hokkaido

Fears grow over the possible spread of mad cow disease. But the government says humans are in no immediate danger.

The Asahi Shimbun

The Holstein suspected of having contracted mad cow disease came from Hokkaido, home to nearly half the dairy cows in the nation, sources said Tuesday.

The operator of a dairy farm in Shiroy, Chiba Prefecture, where the cow was kept, said they bought the 5-year-old animal from Hokkaido three years ago.

Judging from the timing of the purchase and possible imports of tainted ingredients for livestock feed, the cow may have contracted bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) at the Hokkaido farm.

Such a scenario raises concerns about the spread of the brain-degenerative disease because Hokkaido farms contain hundreds of thousands of cows, and many are transported to various parts of Japan.

But Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Chikara Sakaguchi said humans are in no immediate danger.

"I believe that contaminated meat or any other products have not entered the market for human consumption," Sakaguchi said in a news conference.

But he added: "If one cow is found to have been infected, there is a possibility that there are more. And if a large number of animals have been affected, we must consider the effects on humans."

Health experts have suggested that consuming infected meat or organs could cause Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a similar brain-deteriorating ailment in humans, although the connection has not

been proved.

A government test showed the animal tested positive for mad cow disease, but officials said further tests are needed for confirmation. The cow showed symptoms of BSE, such as the inability to stand and tiny holes in the brain.

A government panel of experts said it would ask British researchers to conduct a final test. If the test shows the cow was infected with BSE, it would be the first case of the disease in Japan.

The central government Tuesday started an investigation into how the Holstein may have been infected, and the extent of the possible spread.

"It is extremely unfortunate. I am greatly concerned about why this happened," said Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Tsutomu Takebe. He said his ministry would work with the Chiba prefectural government to identify the cause of the cow's ailment.

Some officials suspect the Holstein was fed imported contaminated livestock feed—produced from ground carcasses of BSE-infected cows—in Hokkaido.

It is not known how much of the feed was used in Japan. Japan banned the use of ground bone and meat in livestock feed after April 1996, when the spread of BSE in Europe became rampant, according to the agriculture ministry.

Japan's 83 domestic livestock feed producers undergo government inspections twice a year to ensure the ban has been implemented.



Takemi Nagamura of the agriculture ministry opens a meeting on mad cow disease Tuesday in Tokyo.

An official at the Chiba farm told The Asahi Shimbun that the farm purchased feed from a Chiba cooperative.

An official at the cooperative said it supplied the dairy farm with feed consisting entirely of vegetable material from around 1998.

Agriculture ministry officials estimate that about 200,000 tons of ground ruminant bones and meat was imported annually before the 1996 ban, but imports from Europe accounted for a small portion, a maximum 100 tons a year.

However, ground bones and meat are also used in pet food and other products. Officials said it is impossible to confirm how much had been used for cattle feed.

It was also not immediately known what type of feed was used at the Hokkaido farm that raised the Holstein.

According to an official at the Hokkaido government's livestock industry department, many calves are raised in the northern prefecture and sold to

farms in other parts of Japan. "It is possible that many cows have been shipped to Chiba Prefecture," the official said.

According to government surveys, about 867,000 dairy cows were being raised in Hokkaido as of December 2000, representing 49 percent of the nation's total.

The government of Chiba Prefecture, the third-largest producer of milk in Japan, set up a countermeasures liaison committee with chiefs of government departments, and called for proper information disclosure to prevent panic among the public.

"It is important to collect accurate information and disclose it to the citizens," said Takeshi Fuse, director of the prefecture agriculture department.

The committee will post information about mad cow disease and food safety on the prefecture's Web site at <</www.pref.chiba.jp/>.

RELATED STORY ON PAGE 22

## Industry rushes to calm BSE fears

The Asahi Shimbun

Retailers and livestock farmers are scrambling to calm the fears of consumers following reports that Japan may be facing its first-ever outbreak of mad cow disease.

Officials of Shiroy, Chiba Prefecture, were busy gathering information and fielding calls from anxious consumers Tuesday about the agriculture ministry's confirmation that the suspected case had occurred at a livestock farm in the area.

Asked by callers to name the farm where the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) had reportedly struck, city officials stressed there was still only a suspicion of contamination. They also told callers humans could not be infected with the disease through dairy milk.

Tokyo-area supermarkets, meanwhile, placed signs in their meat sections informing customers their beef did not come from Chiba Prefecture. Other supermarket chains and retailers were checking the origin of the meat on their shelves.

A Daiei Inc. official said the supermarket chain's domestic beef comes from farms in Kagoshima and Iwate prefectures, but the company would be checking its inventory to make sure.

Other supermarket chains, including Ito-Yokado Co. and Maruetsu Inc., were seeking to confirm the source of the beef on their shelves.

A spokesman for Consumer Co-operative Kobe, the nation's largest consumer cooperative, said the domestic beef carried at its branches was produced in other prefectures. The cooperative was still debating whether to put up signs informing customers

of the beef's origin. Five years ago, during an outbreak of mad cow disease in Britain, the cooperative carried signs saying it did not carry any beef from that country.

Processed meat and dairy producers were also checking the source of the cattle from which their products were made.

A spokesman for Meiji Milk Products Co. said the company had confirmed its milk was safe, in line with a similar statement by the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry.

Restaurants using a lot of beef, such as hamburger chains, *gyudon* (beef bowl) outlets and *yakiniku* (Korean barbecue) restaurants, also tried to soothe the concerns of consumers.

A spokesman for McDonald's Co. (Japan) said the restaurant's beef is imported from Australia, where all cattle is inspected by government-designated veterinarians. That reassurance did not stop the company's share prices on the over-the-counter market from closing Tuesday at 3,490 yen—one of its lowest prices since listing on the OTC market in July.

A Lotteria Co. spokesman said the beef used in that chain's hamburgers comes from Australia and the United States. The spokesman added, however, that the industry as a whole may have to take measures to reassure consumers should a mass exodus from its outlets occur. A food poisoning scare caused by the O-157 strain of E. coli bacteria had a similar effect on the industry.

Officials of Denny's Japan Co. also said their restaurant used only imported beef. They



The Consumer Co-operative Kobe Sumiyoshi store in Kobe's Higashi-Nada Ward tries to dispel concerns about mad cow disease Tuesday with a sign at its meat section that reads, "We do not purchase beef or milk from Chiba Prefecture."

said the chain suffered no sharp decreases in sales during the O-157 scare, since most customers simply turned to chicken and pork rather than beef.

Yoshinoya D&C Co., the nation's largest chain of *gyudon* restaurants, also uses only U.S. beef at its restaurants, according to a Yoshinoya spokesman.

The news of the suspected case of mad cow disease in Japan came as a surprise to livestock farmers in other regions of the country.

A spokesman for a group of farmers based in Matsuzaka, Mie Prefecture—a region known for its marbled beef—said the spread of the disease should be stopped as soon as possible.

An official of the Yamagata prefectural government said cattle in that jurisdiction would be inspected in accord-

ance with central government standards. The prefecture is known for its Yonezawa beef.

Consumers groups, meanwhile, were calling on the central government to conduct a thorough investigation of the cause of the suspected mad cow case and to disclose where milk from the cow in question went.

Kazuya Yamanouchi, a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo who specializes in viruses, said that although the appearance of the disease was not a total surprise, since Japanese farmers had imported feed from Britain until 1996, there was no need to panic.

"While the prion, the self-replicating protein believed to cause mad cow disease, is found in the brains and bone marrow of infected cattle, it is not found in the milk or parts eaten as beef, so consumers need not worry," he said.

## Slush funds kept by 30 divisions at the Foreign Ministry

The Asahi Shimbun

About half of all divisions in the Foreign Ministry have operated slush funds similar to the one set up by an official who packed hotel bills to fund after-work activities for colleagues and girlfriends, sources said.

The ministry is conducting an in-house investigation into the extent of the practice, but officials say they are making slow progress because police confiscated records involving a top Tokyo hotel that colluded with an official who was arrested last week on suspicion of fraud.

The ministry has been rocked by a series of scandals involving misuse of public funds since the beginning of this year. The ministry intends to publicize its findings later this month.

It also plans to punish more than 10 officials in connection with slush funds similar to the one operated by Akio Asakawa, the former assistant director at the First West Europe Division now in custody.

In all, about 30 divisions have kept slush funds, the sources said. Pooling money and managing it as a slush fund, to be used later for purposes other than for which the money was originally

intended, has long been widely practiced, the sources said.

They cited the First West Europe Division as an example, but said other divisions dealing with various parts of the world were also involved.

Some divisions have not touched the money that was pooled, the sources added.

Asakawa was arrested last Thursday along with two Hotel

New Otani sales officials. Police said they bilked the government of millions of yen by padding bills for hotel rooms that were used for official occasions. The slush fund was managed by hotel staff.

Many divisions pooled excess funds from budgets, such as for accommodating foreign dignitaries at hotels, and never returned the cash to government coffers, the sources said.

Officials started the custom so that extra money could be carried over to the next fiscal year.

Officials explained the slush funds were used for welcoming and going-away parties for division members, year-end parties and for meals for when officials worked overtime.

Most of the slush funds were kept by the Hotel New Otani, the sources said.

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