

BRIEFLY

BOJ TO PUMP GREENBACKS INTO MARKETS

The Bank of Japan said Thursday it will inject U.S. dollars into the nation's interbank markets to help global financial institutions procure the U.S. currency.

The unprecedented move is part of multinational efforts involving four other central banks to stabilize world financial markets by providing \$180 billion (about 18.72 trillion yen).

The BOJ has concluded a dollar-yen swap agreement with the U.S. Federal Reserve to acquire dollars that will be lent through Japan's short-term money markets. The arrangement, for a maximum of \$60 billion, will be effective through Jan. 30, 2009.

SIA 'SYSTEMATICALLY' ALTERED RECORDS

Health minister Yoichi Masuzoe said Thursday that records of the government-managed pension plan for corporate employees were apparently falsified systematically by officials at the Social Insurance Agency.

Masuzoe told a session of the Upper House Committee on Health, Welfare and Labor that 69,000 suspect records had been detected, adding he believes agency officials were responsible for the widespread fabrications.

The health ministry has acknowledged that an official at a local social insurance office faked corporate pension records at his own discretion.

MITSUBISHI BRINGS BACK TOPPO MINICAR

Mitsubishi Motors Corp. has released a revamped version of its Toppo minicar, which was taken off the market five years ago.



The new Toppo, introduced Wednesday, has an interior height of 1.43 meters, the highest of any minivehicle on the market. Prices range from 934,500 yen to 1,569,750 yen, including tax.

The automaker said it kept prices down by sharing 60 percent of its components with other vehicles.

TYPHOON NO. 13 DRENCHES KYUSHU

A powerful, slow-moving typhoon was churning its way up the Pacific Ocean after passing Tanegashima island, Kagoshima Prefecture, on Thursday evening, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

Typhoon No. 13 is expected to continue moving up the southern regions of the archipelago, and possibly reaching eastern Japan by Saturday.

Meteorological agency officials issued warnings of mudslides and flooding triggered by extremely heavy rainfall in Kyushu and Shikoku as well as high waves.

EDUCATION OFFICIAL HELD IN BRIBERY

OITA—Police arrested the No. 2 man of the Oita prefectural education board Wednesday in a bribery case related to a scandal that shattered trust in the screening process for public school teachers.



Police said Tetsuhiro Tomimatsu, 60, received gift certificates worth 200,000 yen from Tetsuro Yano, 52, in late March this year as a reward for helping Yano gain a promotion.

Tomimatsu admitted he received the gift certificates from Yano, but he denied offering favors to the former school principal now on trial in another bribery case.

"I received the gift certificates as a greeting. I did not think that they were a token of gratitude for his transfer (to the prefectural education board)," police quoted Tomimatsu as saying.

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Farm minister feels heat over rice

Panels want to know how tainted rice turned up in the food supply.

The Asahi Shimbun

At two specially called meetings Thursday, Diet members roundly criticized the farm ministry for sloppy oversight that led to contaminated rice being sold for human consumption.

Ruling coalition and opposition lawmakers together quizzed farm minister Seiichi Ota and officials from his ministry at the separate sessions of agriculture, forestry and fisheries committees of both houses of the Diet.

It is highly unusual for parliamentary panels to meet when the Diet is not in session.

The lawmakers wanted to know why farm ministry officials had failed to uncover the illicit practices at rice wholesaler Mikasa Foods Co. even though they had frequently inspected its factory.

Lawmakers also came down hard on vice farm minister Toshiro Shirasu, who has stated that he did not think the ministry was at fault in the scandal.

Farm ministry officials made 96 on-the-spot inspections of the Mikasa Foods factory in Fukuoka Prefecture during the past five years.

Last week, Shirasu told reporters: "Primary responsibility lies with the companies that diverted (tainted) rice for food use. At this stage, I do not think we are responsible."

That comment drew him an immediate warning from Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura. An



Farm minister Seiichi Ota responds to questions about tainted rice at a special Lower House committee meeting Thursday.

irate Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda also summoned Ota to his official residence to demand greater oversight.

On Thursday, Shirasu retracted his words and offered an apology to the public.

Meanwhile, farm ministry officials are scrambling to deal with a flood of complaints and inquiries about the tainted rice.

The ministry announced late Tuesday the names of companies and facilities that handled tainted rice sold by Mikasa Foods.

It also set up consultation hotlines that had received 497 calls by 5 p.m. Wednesday, 208 of which were complaints and opinions, and 289 were inquiries, officials said.

For now, the ministry will assign 30 officials to deal exclusively with hotline questions.

Of the 497 calls, 398 came

from consumers. The other 99 were from food businesses such as confection makers, distributors and restaurant operators.

Many callers said the ministry should be held responsible for enabling Mikasa Foods and other companies to sell rice contaminated with pesticide or fungus to foodmakers.

In addition, many companies on the ministry's list, such as confectioneries and rice dealers, were angry because their names were released.

Most consumers wanted to know if eating tainted rice posed health risks and where the list of companies involved can be viewed.

The Japanese-language list is on the ministry website at <http://www.maff.go.jp/j/soushoku/0809_beikoku/index.html>.

Lower House election scheduled for Oct. 26

New Komeito agrees with the LDP's strategy of holding an early poll.

The Asahi Shimbun

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito set aside their differences and agreed to dissolve the Lower House on Oct. 3 and hold a general election Oct. 26, senior coalition officials said.

Election campaigning will start on Oct. 14.

The parties will finalize the schedule after the LDP presidential election Monday. LDP Secretary-General Taro Aso is the heavy favorite in that poll.

Because the LDP holds a majority in the Lower House, the party president will become prime minister through a vote when the extraordinary Diet session opens Wednesday.

The LDP originally had three Lower House election dates in mind: Oct. 26, Nov. 2, and Nov. 9.

New Komeito, which had initially expected the Lower House dissolution and subsequent election to take place around New Year holiday period, sought the latest date, Nov. 9, to give it more time

to prepare. But the party accepted the LDP's argument that an earlier election would be better for the ruling coalition.

The LDP wanted the earliest date to take advantage of the higher support rate that usually goes to a new prime minister.

In addition, public anxieties over the economy have spread since the collapse of major U.S. brokerage Lehman Brothers this week. Some LDP politicians said the Lower House dissolution should be postponed so that a bill on the fiscal 2008 supplementary budget, designed to bolster the economy, could pass the Diet sooner.

However, if a later election were held, the ruling coalition would be unable to take full advantage of the favorable atmosphere among voters following the start of a new administration.

"The economy will deteriorate sooner or later, so the earlier (a snap election), the better," said an executive of an LDP faction led by Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka

Machimura.

Makoto Koga, chairman of the LDP's Election Strategy Council, met officials of Soka Gakkai, a lay Buddhist organization that is New Komeito's support base, in Osaka on Tuesday, and gained their support for an Oct. 26 election.

New Komeito is expected to formally accept the schedule, and Soka Gakkai is due to soon inform its members of the election timetable.

Koga also explained the schedule to Aso on Wednesday, and confirmed plans to prepare for the Oct. 26 poll with leaders of his own faction.

During the extraordinary Diet session, the ruling coalition plans to ask the opposition parties to deliberate on important bills, including one on the supplementary budget.

However, since the coalition and the opposition are unlikely to agree on scheduling and other matters, the Lower House is expected to be dissolved Oct. 3, the last day of question-and-answer sessions among political party leaders.

The coalition plans to have the supplementary budget pass the Diet by the end of the year, after the Lower House election.

Ibaraki medical federation to back Minshuto candidates

The JMA's political arm reminds other chapters that its policy is to support the LDP.

The Asahi Shimbun

The political arm of a doctors' organization in Ibaraki Prefecture decided Wednesday to switch sides and support candidates of the opposition Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) in the next Lower House election.

The Ibaraki medical federation, the political arm of the Ibaraki Medical Association, decided to end its years of allegiance to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party mainly because of a new medical insurance system introduced this fiscal year for people 75 years old or older.

The association has criticized the LDP-initiated system because it will increase the financial burden on elderly people who receive medical services.

"Unless medical doctors announce concrete measures to prevent the collapse of medical services, it will be late," said Katsuyuki Haranaka, who serves as head of the federation and the association. "Now is the time to change. So we made the decision (to support Min-

shuto)."

The decision has raised concerns among LDP organizations in the prefecture. Some members of the federation want to continue to back the LDP.

Among all 47 prefectural medical federations in Japan, the Ibaraki organization is the first to express its support for Minshuto in the next Lower House election, according to the Japan Medical Association (JMA).

The JMA's federation said Thursday it had sent a reminder to local chapters of the organization's basic policy to back "candidates from the ruling coalition parties, particularly the LDP."

While the message was meant to discourage the act of dissent by the Ibaraki chapter, Takashi Hanyuda, a senior JMA official, noted that there are no punitive provisions in the organization's bylaws for such moves.

"We cannot condone such action, but at the same time, we cannot prevent it either," Hanyuda said.

The Ibaraki medical feder-

ation sent questionnaires to 16 people who plan to run in the Lower House election from seven districts in the prefecture. The questionnaire asked about their views on the new medical insurance system for the elderly as well as measures to cover social security costs.

Three would-be candidates from the LDP, seven from Minshuto and one from the Japanese Communist Party responded.

Based on their replies, leaders of the Ibaraki medical federation unanimously decided to support the seven Minshuto candidates.

Federation members will put up campaign posters of the Minshuto candidates in their hospitals or clinics.

The Ibaraki medical federation has about 1,350 members, most of whom are LDP members.

The federation has supported such LDP lawmakers as former health minister Yuya Niwa of the Ibaraki No. 6 district, former agriculture minister Norihiko Akagi of the No. 1 district, and former Finance Minister Fukushiro Nukaga of the No. 2 district.

"In the same way as in previous elections, we have been asking (the Ibaraki medical federation) for support. So we are very surprised to hear its decision," a staff member at one of Niwa's offices said.

U.S. crisis, slowing economy push land prices downward

The Asahi Shimbun

Commercial land prices fell by 0.8 percent on the national average in the year to July, the government said Thursday.

The drop reversed the first increase in 16 years, recorded for the previous 12 months, according to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism.

While the price decline for residential areas had slowed for four consecutive years to 0.7 percent last year, the latest report showed an accel-

eration in decline to 1.2 percent for the year to July 1. It marked the 17th consecutive annual drop.

These figures indicate that the real estate market in Japan has entered another adjustment phase. Aside from the slowing domestic economy, experts attribute falling land prices to a drop in funds flowing from overseas, caused by the U.S. subprime loan crisis.

In the country's three major metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, commercial land prices increased by 3.3 percent, but the

rate of increase shrank substantially from the previous year's 10.4 percent.

Residential land prices rose by 1.4 percent, down from 4.0 percent the previous year.

In regions outside the three biggest metropolitan areas, commercial and residential land prices in the year to July fell by 2.5 and 2.1 percent, respectively.

Price rises for commercial land in regional centers, such as Sapporo, Sendai and Fukuoka, also slowed to around 5 percent, from more than 10 percent the previous year.

A FIRST UNDER COPYRIGHT LAW

Man held over file-sharing of 'Wanted'

The Asahi Shimbun

KYOTO—Police on Thursday arrested a 33-year-old man on suspicion of distributing the Hollywood thriller "Wanted" over the Internet ahead of its release in Japan.

Kazushi Hirata, of Sendai, is suspected of violating the Copyright Law. He is the first person arrested in Japan over alleged file-sharing of a movie before its release here. According to the Kyoto prefec-

tural police's high-tech crime squad, Hirata made the movie, starring Angelina Jolie, available through the Winny file-sharing software program with Japanese subtitles.

"Wanted" opened in the United States on June 27 and is scheduled to be shown in Japan starting Saturday.

Kyoto police had been investigating the case since receiving a complaint from Universal Pictures, the movie's U.S. distributor, which

had not given Hirata permission to distribute "Wanted." Kyoto police said they did not know how Hirata obtained a copy of the movie.

According to the Tokyo-based Japan and International Motion Picture Copyright Association, file-sharers often take advantage of the time difference between a movie's release in Japan and other countries. Many of these movies are secretly recorded with videocameras at theaters overseas.



Posters of "Wanted" are displayed this week at a theater in Kyoto. The Hollywood thriller opens Saturday in Japan, but a copy of the film with Japanese subtitles has already been circulating on the Internet.

WEATHER

