127TH YEAR | NO. 44,176 www.japantimes.co.jp

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE IN ASIA times

The New York Times



WORLD: IN DEMAND, **MOSTLY**

Mongolians are global circus stars, except at home | PAGE 7



WORLD: A STEP UP FOR UKRAINE

How F-16s could reshape the aerial battlefield | PAGE 8

IN TODAY'S NYT: IN WEST BANK, **ISRAELI RAIDS** TRAUMATIZE A **NEIGHBORHOOD** PAGE 4



水 WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2023

Some coaxed into sex work to make repayments

How host clubs trap women in spiral of debt

KARIN KANEKO STAFF WRITER

Riri was just 19 years old when she first started going to Tokyo's Kabukicho district to visit host clubs, where women pay to be entertained by men, in the hopes of meeting Roland, a celebrity host who regularly appears on TV.

The young woman, who goes by a pseudonym because she is avoiding debt collectors, reveled in the glamorous world of host clubs. And she found it eased a sense of loneliness in her — since she was a baby, she has been separated from her parents and lived in orphanages. It was in the sleepless town of Kabukicho

that she met a host she fell for, hard. Her situation is not unlike many others in the murky underbelly of Kabukicho, a

renowned red-light district in the heart of Tokyo that boasts over 320 host clubs establishments where attractive men known as hosts entertain female patrons, engaging them in flirtatious conversations over drinks and food at sky-high prices.

It is common knowledge that host clubs serve drinks that are heavily marked up in price. For instance, one club charges ¥6,000 (\$42) for a bottle of Perrier sparkling mineral water, which usually costs less than ¥500 at supermarkets and online stores.

In the span of two months, Riri racked up a debt of ¥1.6 million through a pay-later system at the host club she frequented.

Similar to hostess clubs, host clubs allow female clients to enjoy themselves without any cash or credit card on hand. The system involves the host first settling the bill for his clients, ostensibly as a goodwill gesture.

But in reality, it is an open secret that many hosts take advantage of the women attracted to them, taking on their debt only to pressure them for repayments — in the process often coercing them into prostitution or providing

"I was willing to do anything for the person I loved, whether it be prostitution or work in a sex establishment," said Riri, who

She earned up to ¥500,000 a month engag-



A group of 19 host club owners in Kabukicho who own most of the host clubs in the area have pledged to ban the pay-later system by April and prohibit entry to those under 20 years old from January. AFP-JIJI

ing in sex work but was homeless, sleeping at internet cafes.

"I didn't buy food or clothes. All that money went to the host," she said.

When women such as Riri return to host clubs to settle their debts, hosts will often coax them into having drinks again. This results in an endless cycle of debt.

The lowering of the legal age of adulthood to 18 in April 2022 inadvertently widened the net for host clubs' pay-later schemes. banned from patronizing host clubs, and Protect Youth, a group of concerned par-

even if they did, their parents would have been able to legally cancel whatever debt they incurred.

The debt trap issue began garnering attention earlier this year when media reports emerged about how young women — some as young as 18 years old and students without a stable income — were increasingly being lured to host clubs after discovering hosts on TikTok, Instagram or TV, eventually falling victim to the pay-later schemes.

ents formed in July under a nonprofit organization that offers consultations to young women addicted to host clubs or their parents, said that they had received around 200 inquiries nationwide.

The quantity of debt varied, with the highest amount being some ¥90 million, and more than half of the consultations involved

girls who were age 18. Group founder Hidemori Gen said that consultations regarding host clubs had increased over the past 10 years. That was

Continued on page $2 \rightarrow$

Tokyo urged to hold on to oversized trash following fire

YUKANA INOUE STAFF WRITER

Waste disposal operators in Tokyo are asking residents to hold onto their oversized garbage after a fire occurred at a disposal site in Koto Ward last month.

The blaze is believed to have been caused by the improper disposal of lithium-ion batteries. Operations at the site have since been suspended, with a resumption expected around March.

The fire damaged the machines that are used to sort metal from other garbage, as well as the conveyor belt. Restoring the facility is expected to cost around ¥400 million. Since then, a waste disposal facility next door that has no incinerator has been used to store oversized garbage.

Last week, the waste disposal association released an emergency statement alerting residents of Tokyo's 23 wards that the alternative facility handling the extra waste was nearing capacity.

"If the (alternative) facility experiences any fire or trouble in the future, the storage facility will become full in around five days and we will no longer be able to accept oversized waste and noncombustible waste." said the statement updated on Friday. "We ask our residents to wait to dispose of their oversized garbage, aside from items for which they have already made applications."

The association has called on residents to make sure they remove batteries when disposing of waste, in line with regulations, although trash disposal operators are also double-checking as well. Products that use lithium-ion batteries include robot vacuum cleaners, cordless vacuums and mobile phones.

Fires caused by batteries are common at such waste disposal facilities, although most tend to be small. Ninety-five fires were reported at the oversized garbage disposal facility in Koto Ward in fiscal 2022 through March, with one case severe enough to be reported to the fire department. From the start of fiscal 2023 through November, there were 59 fires at the disposal site.

To prepare for the new year, many Japanese households often go on a cleaning spree in December, sometimes forgoing waste disposal regulations.

Prosecutors question former LDP policy chief over funds scandal

KANAKO TAKAHARA STAFF WRITER

Koichi Hagiuda, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's former policy chief, became the latest veteran lawmaker to be questioned on a voluntary basis over a political funds scandal, following four others.

Tokyo prosecutors are investigating allegations that the party's largest faction — known as the Abe faction, having been led by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe — systematically underreported about ¥500 million in ticket sales for fundraising events in the five years through 2022.

The underreported funds were allegedly returned to lawmakers who sold more tickets than their allotted quota. While receiving kickbacks from fundraising events is legal, failing to report them properly is a violation of the political funds law.

Earlier this month, former Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno; former LDP Diet affairs chief Tsuyoshi Takagi; Hiroshige Seko, former secretary-general of LDP's Upper House, all stepped down from party and Cabinet posts after being questioned by prosecutors. Veteran lawmaker Ryu Shionoya, who effectively heads the Abe faction, was also questioned.

Last week, prosecutors raided the offices of the Abe faction and the faction led by former LDP Secretary-General Toshihiro Nikai over the underreported political funds. The Nikai faction is suspected of underreporting about ¥100 million in ticket sales.

Amid growing calls for reform, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters Monday that he plans to create a body in the LDP early next year to work on measures aimed at regaining public trust.

"I need to do everything necessary to

regain trust for the party," said Kishida. The party body is expected to discuss

revising the political funds law, cashless payments for fundraising party ticket sales and how party management can check up on faction-hosted fundraising events.

There are also some within the party who have called for an update to the 1989 political reform guideline that was compiled by the LDP, which states the need to dissolve the factions and refrain from holding fundraising parties.

The guidelines were drafted more than three decades ago following a bribery case involving former Prime Minister Kakuei

Tanaka and what was then the U.S. aircraftmaker Lockheed.

But on Tuesday, Jun Azumi, who serves as Diet affairs chief of the opposition's Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, said that, as party president, Kishida should be more transparent.

"As LDP president, he has the power to disclose what he can to the public," said Azumi. "He is depending on investigators to find out what happened" rather than taking the matter into his own hands.

Information from Jiji added

INSIDE TODAY

NATIONAL 2	THE YEAR AHEAD	10
BUSINESS 3	WEATHER	10
ASIA 4	OPINION	11
GI: MOZAMBIQUE 5, 6	2023: IMAGES OF	
WORLD 7,8	THE YEAR	12
SPORTS 9	:	



A major step forward

Japan's SLIM precision moon lander enters lunar orbit, JAXA says | NATIONAL, PAGE 2

ISSN 0289-1956 © THE JAPAN TIMES, LTD., 2023

Consumption tax included (本体価格¥273) ¥300

Daihatsu suspends all production in Japan

KYODO, BLOOMBERG

Daihatsu Motor suspended all domestic production on Tuesday, with the schedule for restarting operations at the plants unclear amid a safety testing scandal that affects most of its models.

The automaker halted operations at its factory in Osaka Prefecture, where the Copen minivehicle is assembled, on Tuesday. Of the company's four factories in Japan, it was the last to be halted.

The suspension will last at least through the end of January, Daihatsu said Monday, dealing a blow to its more than 8,000 suppliers as well as its parent company, Toyota

The small-car unit of Toyota normally makes 4,000 cars per day in Japan. The automaker, which had about 9,000 employees at its domestic factories as of April, produced about 870,000 units in the last fiscal year.

Daihatsu said it promised to compensate all 423 of the companies it directly supplies. Japan's transport ministry raided Dai-



hatsu's headquarters in Osaka last week following revelations that the carmaker manipulated the results of safety tests dating as far back as 1989. A third-party investigation requested by Daihatsu in April — when suspected wrongdoing first emerged found that 174 issues had been identified across 64 models, including in some sold under the Toyota brand.

Daihatsu Motor's factory in the city of Ikeda. in Osaka Prefecture. The

company has sus-

pended production

ries in Japan. KYODO

at all its four facto-

The investigation centers around air bag control units, after it was found that those used during crash tests were different from the devices used in cars that were sold to the public. While those other test units were later found to meet industry standards, sidecollision test results of the Daihatsu Cast and Toyota Pixis models "may not comply with the law," Toyota has said.

Toyota said it's not aware of any accidents or incidents related to the issue.

Daihatsu is popular for its lineup of kei minicars and other lightweight vehicles popular across Japan and Southeast Asia. It's been a wholly owned subsidiary of Toyota since 2016, and accounts for roughly 4% of Toyota group's global vehicle sales.

The halting of production has been a concern to Daihatsu employees, but the company said Monday it has agreed on a compensation package with its labor union to pay part of its employees' wages during the production stoppage.

A 36-year-old male worker at the Osaka plant said, "There has been no explanation about whether the company will be able to resume production. I'm worried."

