No. 1
National
“Tiger Mask” inspired goodwill movement spreads nationwide

Dubbed “the Tiger Mask Movement,” a chain reaction of anonymous gift-giving to child welfare facilities named after a 1960s manga and TV animation wrestling hero, has been spreading across the country.

The movement started on Christmas Day in 2010 in Maebashi, Gunma Prefecture, when someone secretly left 10 gift-wrapped schoolbags for children in front of a consultation facility. Along with the schoolbags was a note signed “Naoto Date.”

In the popular cartoon and animation series *Tiger Mask* created by Ikki Kajiwara and Naoki Tsuji, Naoto Date is an orphan, who becomes Tiger Mask, a star wrestler. He anonymously donates his prize money to an orphanage he grew up in.

Since the media first reported the incident, many people have followed suit, delivering cash, stationery and other items for children in need around the nation under the names of Naoto Date and other cartoon and animation characters.

Many welfare facilities and foster homes for children are deeply appreciative of the unexpected gifts they have received. Yet, the wave of goodwill has not been met with complete delight. If the donations are treated as lost and found items, they will be kept by the police for three months until somebody claims them.
No. 2
National

Japan’s lawmaker Ozawa indicted in fund-raising scandal

Ruling party heavyweight Ichiro Ozawa was served a mandatory indictment Jan. 31, 2011 over a political funding scandal that threatens to widen a rift in the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The opposition bloc has used the money-tainted image of politics sparked by the Ozawa scandal to attack the administration of Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

Ozawa was indicted based on decisions by a prosecution inquest committee made up of citizens. According to the indictment, Ozawa’s political funds management body Rikuzankai used a loan of 400 million yen from Ozawa to purchase land in Tokyo’s Setagaya Ward in October 2004. However, Ozawa conspired with his three former aides not to include the loan in Rikuzankai’s political fund report for 2004.

Ozawa has denied having committed any wrongdoing. “I have nothing to be ashamed of,” he told reporters, adding that he intends to clear his name in court. “My upcoming trial will clearly prove my innocence.”

However, executives of the DPJ on Feb. 15, 2011 decided to suspend the veteran politician’s membership in the party until his trial finishes. Prime Minister Kan had earlier asked Ozawa to voluntarily leave the party. When he refused, Kan moved to take disciplinary action against the party bigwig.

Prior to Ozawa’s trial, the hearing of his former aides—Tomohiro Ishikawa, Takanori Okubo, and Mitsutomo Ikeda—started Feb. 7. At the outset of the legal proceedings at the Tokyo District Court, the three pleaded not guilty. Its outcome is expected to reveal the truth regarding the “money-for-politics” scandal.
No. 3
World
Social media-driven revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt

From the ousting of Tunisia’s President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January to the resignation of Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and WikiLeaks have played major roles in the recent revolutions.

In Tunisia, the 23-year reign of President Ben Ali ended Jan. 15 when he fled to Saudi Arabia with his family. The downfall of the Tunisian government was accelerated as WikiLeaks revealed official documents about the organized and excessive corruption and theft committed by the Ben Ali’s government and his family.

In Egypt, where Mubarak stepped down from his nearly 30 years as President on Feb. 11, Facebook was used as one of the primary tools, despite Egypt's limited Internet penetration, to share reports about police abuse and then to build an online community that was mobilized to join the protests. Social media tools have provided a medium for Egyptian protestors to share common political ideas and plan concrete action.

The impact of Facebook and Twitter was crucial in Egypt, but whether we see the ripple effect of what some people call a “Facebook or Twitter revolution” roll through the Arab world from now on appears to be a matter of debate.
No. 4

World

IBM supercomputer tops human champs in quiz show

After a three-day competition on an American quiz show called Jeopardy!, IBM supercomputer known as Watson emerged victorious against human contestants on Feb. 16, 2011. The intelligent machine and two of Jeopardy’s greatest champions, Ken Jennings and Brad Rutter played out on TV in a two-game match.

Named after IBM’s founder, Thomas J. Watson, the supercomputer is cleverer than the Deep Blue machine that beat world chess champion Gary Kasparov in 1997. Watson out dominated Jennings and Rutter, finishing the two games with a total of $77,147, more than the two humans’ $24,000 (Jennings) and $21,600 (Rutter) combined.

Watson’s victory is the culmination of years of research and development for IBM. Researchers at IBM spent about four years building Watson. The machine is capable of processing about 80 trillion operations per second.

“I, for one, welcome our new computer overlords,” Jennings wrote next to his last answer on the video screen. For winning the three-day competition, Watson was awarded a $1 million prize, which will go to charity. IBM plans to use Watson’s linguistic and analytical abilities to develop products in areas such as medical diagnosis.
Samurai Blue defender Nagatomo joins Inter Milan

Inter Milan, one of Italy's prestigious football clubs, announced on Jan. 31, 2011 that it has signed Japan defender Yuto Nagatomo on loan from Serie A club, Cesena. Nagatomo, who joined Cesena in July 2010 from Japan's F.C. Tokyo, has been highly praised in Italy as source of offensive attacks.

“I’m very happy to have joined the world club champion. What’s happened today came out of the blue, but now I have to show everyone what I'm capable of,” Nagatomo was quoted as saying.

The first Japanese player to don the uniform of Nerazzurri (black and blue), Nagatomo made his debut at Milan's San Siro stadium in Inter Milan’s 5-3 win over AS Roma on Feb. 6. The 24-year-old defender showed off his attacking runs after coming on at left-back for Dutch midfielder Wesley Sneijder with about 15 minutes left.

“I was thinking I really want to be on the pitch from the first half. Going on the pitch was just mind-blowing,” Nagatomo said of his debut.

On March 6, Nagatomo scored his first ever Serie A goal with a quick snap of his left foot in Inter Milan's 5-2 triumph over Genoa.
No. 6
Sports
Match-rigging scandal rocks sumo wrestling

After a series of scandals over drug use, illegal gambling, and physical abuse, another scandal, this time about match-fixing allegations, came to light in the world of Japan's sumo wrestling. In the course of an investigation into gambling by sumo wrestlers on professional baseball, the Metropolitan Police Department found text messages suggesting rigging of sumo bouts on several wrestlers' mobile phones.

According to sources, the messages contained vivid exchanges, including movements in the dohyo sumo ring as well as figures believed to represent amounts of money that changed hands during the suspected match-fixing. The Japan Sumo Association (JSA) has formed a special committee to look into the problem.

JSA's chairperson Hanaregoma pledged on Feb. 2, 2011 to do his best in investigating the alleged match-fixing and promised to punish those involved, if the accusations are proven to be true. Also, on Feb. 5, the JSA decided to cancel the Spring Grand Sumo Tournament scheduled to start on March 13 at Osaka Prefectural Gymnasium. It is the first cancellation of a grand tournament in 65 years since the 1946 Summer Grand Sumo Tournament was cancelled due to a delay in the renovation of the former Ryogoku Kokugikan sumo stadium in Tokyo.

With this match-fixing looming over the sumo world, it may very well prove difficult to win back the hearts of its fans who have lost faith in the sport.
Japanese artists win big at Grammys

At the 53rd Grammy Awards held in Los Angeles on Feb. 13, 2011, four Japanese artists earned prestigious Grammy awards. Guitarist Takahiro “Tak” Matsumoto of the popular Japanese rock duo B’z won the Best Pop Instrumental Album award for “Take Your Pick,” a collaborative album with American jazz-fusion guitarist Larry Carlton.

Released in June 2010, “Take Your Pick,” is a collection of 12 original instrumentals. It was created after Carlton approached Matsumoto for joint performances. Matsumoto said, “I had never told anyone until now, but the Grammys was one of my dreams and a big goal.”

Japanese classical pianist Mitsuko Uchida was also awarded a Grammy, winning the Best Instrumental Soloist Performance with Orchestra for her recordings of Mozart’s piano concertos with the Cleveland Orchestra. The Best Contemporary Jazz Album award went to the Stanley Clarke Band, which includes Japanese jazz pianist Hiromi Uehara.

The Paul Winter Consort, joined by Japanese koto harp performer Yukiko Matsuyama, won the Best New Age Album award for “Miho: Journey to the Mountain.”

Also awarded at the ceremony was American rapper Eminem. The most nominated artist with 10 nods only took home two awards, the Best Rap Album for “Recovery” and the Best Rap Solo Performance for “Not Afraid.” Meanwhile, country-pop trio Lady Antebellum won five trophies, including the Record of the Year and the Song of the Year.
No. 8
Entertainment

Academy Awards favor King George VI over Facebook King

The King's Speech knocked The Social Network off at the 83rd Academy Awards this year. The British royal drama scooped four Oscars to the Facebook saga’s three at the prestigious event, which was held at the Kodak Theater in Los Angeles on Feb. 27, 2011.

Inspired by the story of stammering King George VI and his speech therapist, The King's Speech won four out of 12 awards it had been nominated for: best picture, best actor for Colin Firth, best director for Tom Hooper, and best original screenplay for David Seidler.

“I have a feeling my career has just peaked,” Firth joked. He then continued, “I'm experiencing stirrings somewhere in the upper abdominals which are threatening to form themselves into dance moves.”

As for The Social Network, a story directed by David Fincher on Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of the social networking Web site Facebook, it had been considered a strong contender to The King's Speech. Yet, it missed out on most of the big awards, going home with three Oscars for best film editing, best original score, and best adapted screenplay.

Both The King's Speech and The Social Network are about real-life figures. However, members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences felt that more credit should be given to a British monarch who overcame a speech impediment than to a young billionaire who launched an online empire.