

FAMILY MART CANS SALES

Mag on foreigner crimes not racist: editor

By MASAMI ITO

Staff writer

"Now!! Bad foreigners are devouring Japan," screams the warning, surrounded by gruesome caricatures of foreigners who look like savages, with blood red eyes and evil faces.

This is the cover of Kyogaku no Gaijin Hanzai Ura Fairu (Shocking Foreigner Crime: the Underground File), a special-edition magazine published by Tokyo-based Eichi that has triggered public outrage and caused Family Mart to call it discriminatory and pull it off the shelves.

The 125-page single edition is about crimes committed by non-Japanese.

The pages are filled with crime stories and photographs of alleged crimes being committed, drug deals, stabbings, gang fights and arrests -- all of them involving people from a wide range of countries. Some of the nationalities named are Iranian, Chinese, South Korean, Brazilian and Nigerian.

A spokesman for Family Mart, the main distributor, said that



The subtitle along the bottom of special edition magazine Kyogaku no Gaijin Hanzai Ura Fairu (Shocking Foreigner Crime: the Underground File) asks, "Are we allowing foreigners to devastate Japan?" with a tiny qualifier "some" on the first kanji. YOSHIKI MIURA PHOTO

two days after the magazine was released at the end of January, it began receiving e-mail complaints.

According to a leaflet circulated by a group of protesters, the magazine "gives discriminatory statements and images about non-Japanese residents of Japan."

After receiving more than 10 complaints, Family Mart took a closer look at the magazine.

"When we read it, we found some expressions to be discriminatory and decided to stop selling the book," said the spokesman, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

On Feb. 5, the firm ordered all its 6,800 outlets nationwide to remove the magazine from the shelves and shipped them back to Eichi. It said that of the 15,000 copies in stock -- of the 20,000 to 30,000 that had been printed -- 1,000 were sold.

Shigeki Saka, editor of the magazine, claimed Eichi did not intend to discriminate against foreigners but wanted to provide an opportunity for "discussion" about the issue.

"This book was not originally published for foreign readers," Saka said. "It was to raise the issue (of crimes committed by foreigners) in Japanese society. . . . But I believe the foreigners have the fear that they will be viewed in the same way" as criminals.

Carlo La Porta, who holds British and Italian citizenship and has lived in Tokyo for 16 years, said he thought the magazine painted foreigners as criminals.

The magazine "brings a problem into focus without adding perspective to it, and as such implies that foreigners at large commit a lot of crimes," La Porta said.

Although the headline of a feature interview with a former Metropolitan Police Department investigator, on the magazine cover, says, "In 2007, anyone could be the target of foreigner crime!!" the number of crimes committed by non-Japanese has actually fallen recently.

According to a report on organized crime to the National Police Agency, 18,895 foreigners were arrested in 2006, a decline of 2,283 from 2005.

In 2005, the number of foreigners arrested for serious crimes --

murder, robbery, arson and rape -- fell to 396 from 421 arrests the previous year.

The 21,178 foreigners arrested in 2005 constituted only 5.5 percent of the 386,955 arrests that year.

Eichi's Saka said he published the book despite the recent decline in crimes, a point the magazine briefly mentions.

"The content (of the magazine) really is not intended to get rid of foreigners nor is it extreme in tone. It is based only on facts," Saka claimed.

"I wanted to talk about the economic situation and environment in Japan that has caused foreigners to commit crimes. But it does contain a little bit of extreme expressions, for commercial purposes."

The magazine contains several articles about the bad conditions many foreigners work under, linking that to criminal activity.

One feature article says poor working conditions in Japan "have caused (foreigners) to build resentment toward Japanese society and, one after another, more people are getting involved in crimes because of the hardships in their lives."

On what are called "entertainment" pages, there are photographs of foreigners and Japanese women embracing on Tokyo streets. One photo of a black man and a Japanese woman has the caption, "Hey nigger!! Don't touch that Japanese woman's ass!!"

Saka said that while he knew the term "nigger" is racist, he reckoned it would have a different nuance written in Japanese. "We used it as street slang, writing it in katakana. But if we had known that we would get such a huge reaction from foreigners, we might have refrained from using it," he figured.

Saka said that although the book had been pulled from Family Mart, it is still available at some bookstores and on the Internet.

Hideki Morihara, secretary general of International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, said the magazine is only part of a wider problem for which the government is partially responsible.

He said the government frequently links foreigners with the growing threat of crimes in Japan and is creating the image

that all foreigners are potential criminals.

He cited how in 2003, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, along with the Immigration Bureau and the NPA, launched a campaign to cut the number of illegal foreign residents in Japan by half within five years.

A joint statement released at the start of the campaign says "immediate action must be taken to resolve the issue of illegal overstayers for the safety of our country" because "the existence of some illegal overstayers (is the source) of foreign organized crime that occurs frequently."

Morihara also said that last year's legislation to revise the immigration law to enable photographing and fingerprinting of every foreigner entering Japan gives the impression that foreigners are potential terrorists.

"It is a big mistake to think that by categorizing foreigners as dangerous, Japan will be protected," Morihara said.

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