

Dead cats left in area prior to Kobe boy's death

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KOBE—Two dead kittens were left in front of Tomogaoka Middle School in Suma Ward, Kobe, a few days before the head of an 11-year-old boy was found there Tuesday, police said.

Police believe this may link the murder of the boy, Jun Hase, to separate assaults on two schoolgirls on March 16. A cat was badly injured just prior to the attacks by a man on the girls, one of whom later died.

The dead kittens were spotted just after 5 a.m. about three meters from a mailbox on the north side of the school's main gate by a newspaper deliveryman several days before the boy's head was found. One kitten was lying on its back, while the right paws of the other had been severed, apparently with a sharp knife.

The 49-year-old newspaper deliveryman did not see the decapitated head when he made his delivery at 5:05 a.m. on Tuesday. But an 83-year-old woman, out on a morning walk, said she saw the head at about 5:30 a.m. but did not report it to police at the time because she did not think it was real.

Police were notified at about 6:35 a.m. Tuesday by the caretaker of the school. The head was later identified as that of Hase, a sixth-year student of Tainohata Primary School in Kobe. His body was later discovered in nearby woods.

The attacks on the girls occurred about 750 meters northwest of Tomogaoka Middle School. A 10-year-old girl was struck, apparently with a metal pipe, and later died, while a 9-year-old girl was stabbed in the stomach, requiring two

weeks of hospitalization.

Days before these assaults, a 62-year-old woman in the area found her pet cat badly injured at a vacant plot about 1½ kilometers northeast of the middle school. The cat, which had been missing for several days, died the day after it was found.

The cruelty done to the cats may have been a "warning" of the assaults that followed, said police, who added the three cases may be related.

It was also learned Wednesday that a note left with Hase's head contained the phrases "to satisfy my grudge," "school kill" and "to all you police"—all apparently challenges to authority. On Tuesday, police revealed that "oni bara" (demon and rose) and "Watashi o tomeru koto ga dekiruka?" (Can you stop me?) had been

written in red ink on the paper.

Police suspect it was written by someone with a grudge against the middle school.

In addition, a bloodstain was found on top of a 1.8-meter-high concrete wall beside the gate, leading police to speculate that the killer had initially tried to place the head there.

The woman who reported seeing the head, said that another passerby had remarked: "There is something strange over there, but it can't be real." She added that it made them nervous and they quickly left the area.

"I can see the face in my mind. What a pity—such a beautiful child," she said after realizing from media reports that she had actually seen a decapitated head.

■ Expert analysis

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