

**Japan's household spending up in March ahead of tax rise**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
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Japan's household spending jumped in March ahead of a sales tax rise while the jobless rate remained at its lowest level in more than six years, official data showed today.

Spending rose 7.2% year-on-year as consumers snapped up purchases before the April 1 tax rise to 8.0% from 5.0%, the internal affairs ministry said.

Japan's first sales tax rise in 17 years is seen as key to taming its huge national debt but there are fears it will hit consumer spending, denting the country's economic recovery.

Purchases of big-ticket items were markedly higher, with spending on refrigerators and vacuum cleaners more than quadrupling from a year earlier and air conditioners logging a five-fold jump.

Spending on beds was six times higher and purchases of computer more than doubled.

The ministry said in a separate survey that the nation's unemployment rate was 3.6% in March, matching the rate in February, which was the best reading since July 2007. – AFP, May 2, 2014.

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