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RUMORS SWIRL ABOUT BALLOONS, UFOs AS OFFICIALS STAY MUM

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AP PHOTO



Japan's economy grew at an annual pace of 0.6% in October-December, the government reported yesterday, managing to eke out growth after a contraction in the previous quarter. The world's third-largest economy has struggled amid restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic, a shortage of imported parts from China and rising prices worsened by inflationary pressures and the war in Ukraine. But the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, both abroad and in Japan, has helped a recovery in tourism and other economic activity.

AP PHOTO



Thailand-Sri Lanka Debt-stricken Sri Lanka is fast-tracking efforts to seal a stalled trade pact with Thailand in order to boost trade and tourism, and improve the foreign currency shortage that has led to its worst economic crisis. Sri Lanka began talks with Thailand on a free trade agreement in 2016, held two rounds of discussions in 2018, and the latest last month. But Colombo said there's been a "huge delay" and Sri Lanka is now determined to sign the agreement before the end of March.

AP PHOTO



India Officials from India's Income Tax Department searched the BBC's offices in New Delhi yesterday, weeks after the British broadcaster released a controversial documentary about Prime Minister Narendra Modi, three members of its staff said. The employees asked not to be identified because they were not authorized to speak publicly.



TAIWAN REOPENS BORDERS TO SARs

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**VISA SURVEY
MACAU RANKS ON TOP 10 TRAVEL DESTINATIONS FOR HK, MAINLAND TOURISTS**

XINHUA



ESPIONAGE

SPY BALLOON DRAMA ELEVATES PUBLIC ATTENTION, PRESSURE FOR THE US TO CONFRONT CHINA

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Seven days after a Chinese spy balloon began drifting across the United States, the U.S. military downed it with a single missile.

But the balloon, in a sense, continues its flight through diplomatic circles, complicating U.S.-China relations amid rising tensions.

One consequence is that the balloon may help shift how Americans view China.

We are political science scholars and U.S. foreign policy experts who recently published a book about U.S. overseas military deployments. In it, we discuss how U.S. military bases might change with a more powerful China expanding its influence.

The balloon incident is an example of mounting tensions and espionage between China and the U.S. – but it is different largely because it took place in public, occurred over U.S. territory and the subsequent diplomatic tiff received a lot of media coverage.

SPYING IS ROUTINE

China's balloon entered U.S. airspace over the Aleutian Islands in Alaska on Jan. 28, 2023, and then made its way to Montana. On Feb. 3, as Montana residents spotted and asked questions about this "weird thing" in the sky, U.S. officials publicly acknowledged the balloon. That same day, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken canceled an upcoming diplomatic trip to Beijing.

While the U.S. has said it has evidence that the balloon carried antennas and other equipment to gather intelligence, China has maintained that the vessel is used to track weather.

A United States Air Force F-22 Raptor shot down the balloon with a missile off the coast of South Carolina on Feb. 4.

Recently, senior U.S. defense



officials acknowledged that China had targeted several countries worldwide in a similar way over recent years.

While public awareness of specific cases might be new, spying between countries is not. The U.S. has been both the target and the agent of an increasing amount of espionage.

Countries routinely spy on one another to gather information. In fact, governments often rely on secret agents to collect and report information about both their rivals and allies. In other cases, they may monitor electronic communications. Wealthier countries may also use high-altitude surveillance aircraft, like the balloon China floated over the U.S., or orbiting satellites to collect photographic or other intelligence on various targets.

In some cases, governments may want information on enemy troop positions or movements. They may also want information on other aspects of their enemy's capabilities. For example, several U.S. officials expressed concern that one suspected target of the Chinese spy balloon was Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana, which houses nuclear missile silos.

ESPIONAGE CAN MAKE WAR LESS LIKELY

Countries care about gathering information on each other because it can give them an advantage over their rivals. But rivals having more information is not always a bad thing.

In political science, we often think of conflict as a bargain over how to divide something – be it territory and resources, or policy and political control.

War often happens when states cannot agree on dividing these types of things. The problem is that war can be an inefficient way of resolving disputes because it destroys resources – both wealth and often human lives.

Why, then, do countries fight wars?

One argument is that countries may have different information from their opponents. They may overestimate their capabilities or underestimate those of the opponent.

Because countries generally have an incentive to bluff or act stronger than they really are, they also have the incentive to gather private information from their rivals.

Espionage may then serve the purpose of making the probability of war less likely by preventing

miscalculations. It lets governments gain information about each other without pressure from hawkish groups to escalate confrontations.

We know also know from our research that the U.S. sometimes willingly shares information about its own capabilities with rival militaries as a way to deter them from initiating conflict.

UNDER PRESSURE

Before the balloon incident, much of the increasing tension between the U.S. and China had been relatively abstract or remote in most Americans' eyes. But a Chinese spy balloon drifting directly over U.S. is a material object people saw with their own eyes.

Suddenly, the United States' action – or inaction – over what to do with the balloon became a hotly debated topic. President Joe Biden's Republican opponents criticized his timing as late in shooting down the balloon. Former President Donald Trump claimed that no such balloon would fly over the U.S. under his administration – despite evidence indicating three such balloons flew undetected at the time.

While Americans have become increasingly suspicious of China's role in the world, the country

has been divided on how the U.S. should confront the risk.

More than three-quarters of U.S. adults have expressed an unfavorable opinion of China since 2020, according to a Pew Research Center survey in September 2022. This number has continued to rise since 2005.

And in 2021, 45% of Americans said that China is the greatest enemy of the U.S. – more than double the percentage who said so in 2020, according to a Gallup poll.

The balloon, whatever the intent of those who launched it, left the U.S. little choice but to down it – in order to both end the balloon's intelligence gathering and mollify domestic critics.

While China has asked for the balloon back intact, countries often pore over and examine captured spy and military equipment thoroughly before returning it to the country of origin. Some countries may even refuse to return seized equipment. The U.S. has said it will not return the balloon.

So while espionage can reduce the chances of conflict by providing more information on a rival's capabilities, getting caught can affect other parts of the bargaining process that make conflict more likely. Public outcry may force leaders to take a harder stand in future interactions with their spying rival. At present, the balloon incident has deflated political support for further cooperation with China and increases the likelihood of further confrontation.

THE LATEST INCIDENT BETWEEN US AND CHINA

The balloon incident may have surprised the U.S. population, but it fits the recent pattern of interactions between the U.S. and China.

The Trump administration engaged in a trade war with China, and though there were some steps toward better relations with a new trade agreement, the emergence of COVID-19 created new conflict between the countries. China was not fully transparent about what happened early during the pandemic. Trump claimed to have evidence that the virus originated in a Chinese lab (though most scientists believe it to have had natural origins).

While the Biden administration has seemed less confrontational toward China than the previous administration, it maintained many of the Trump-era policies on trade – keeping tariffs against China in place. **MDT/AP**

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VISA

Macau ranks on Top 10 travel destinations for HK and mainland tourists

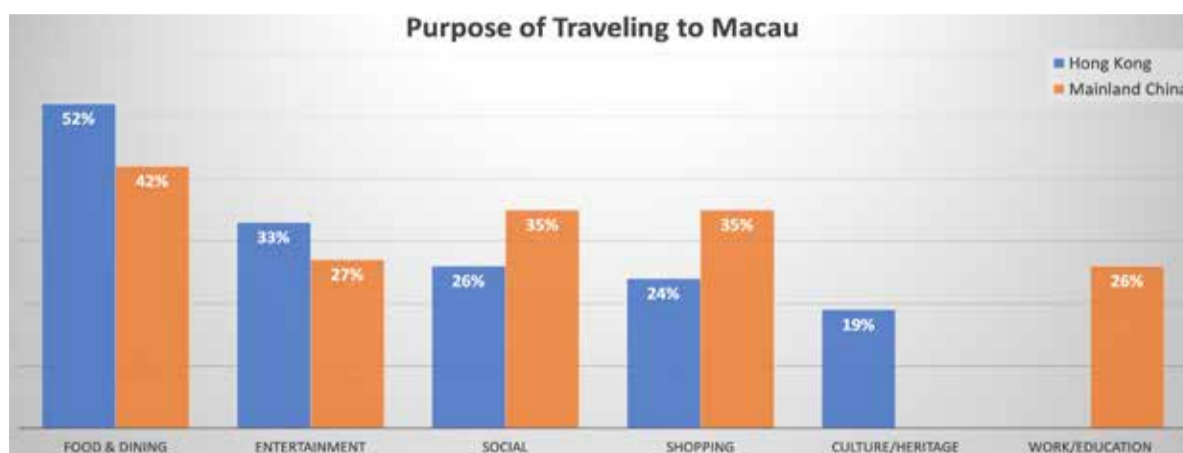
RENATO MARQUES

MACAU has revived its tourism attractiveness ranking within the Top 10 travel destinations for both Hong Kong and mainland tourists, a Study on Consumer Payment Attitudes organized by credit card and digital payment company Visa has found.

According to the report of the Consumer Payment Attitudes Study 4.0: Travel Consumption Insights – Macau Report, Macau has made a “rapid ascension back to the top of the bucket list of travelers from mainland China and Hong Kong” – the two major tourist sources to the city – with “food and dining” being the most preferred activity for both groups.

The study polled consumers in Greater China to provide insights into their travel intentions and purpose in traveling to Macau. It found that Macau placed eighth on the list of intended destinations for mainland tourists and seventh for those from Hong Kong.

The report also noted that while Hong Kong consumers expressed some interest in visiting Macau for entertainment, mainland Chinese visitors favored “activities with friends and families” as well as shopping when visiting the city.



Topping both rankings are France and Japan, for mainland and Hong Kong tourists, respectively. The mainland comes second on the list of intended places to travel for Hong Kong people. Concurrently, Hong Kong ranked third on the travel intentions of mainland travelers, immediately after Japan.

TRAVEL CONSUMPTION WITH AN OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK

The same study report also noted that Macau is “well positioned to capitalize on the opportunities that have arisen due to the revival of Greater Bay Area (GBA) tourism,” with an average of 70% of respondents across mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau expressing interest in a multi-destination trip in the GBA.

Among these, the consumers

from the mainland (77%) and Hong Kong (55%) expressed interest in a trip duration of six days or more.

Contributing to these results is reportedly the phenomenon of “revenge spending on travel,” which results from a long period of border restrictions, the study notes. The study added that 45% of mainland Chinese consumers and 33% from Hong Kong would be happy to set aside at least 20% or more of their household income for leisure travel.

INTEREST IN LUXURY AND REMOTE TRAVEL LOCATIONS DROPPING

The pandemic has also changed both the ways of travel as well as the expectations of travelers in chosen destinations

and purposes.

Throughout mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, 44% of

consumers placed more emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene during travel, while 39% pursued wellness experiences. Shopping locally gathered some 32% of the responses, while “once-in-a-lifetime experiences” reached some considerable momentum (30%).

Concurrently, traditional tourist activities such as luxury experiences (39%) and visiting remote locations (27%), although still attractive to tourists, have seen a significant decline when compared to pre-pandemic times, with respondents expecting to do even less of these activities in the future.

TOP 10 OUTBOUND TRAVEL DESTINATIONS BY MAINLAND AND HONG KONG CONSUMERS

Ranking	Mainland China	Hong Kong
1	France	Japan
2	Japan	Mainland China
3	Hong Kong	Taiwan
4	Canada	South Korea
5	Germany	Thailand
6	United States	United Kingdom
7	United Kingdom	Macau
8	Macau	France
9	South Korea	Canada
10	Brazil	Singapore

Taiwan opens door to Macau passport holders on Feb. 20

ANTHONY LAM

MACAU and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) passport holders will be re-admitted by Taiwan for individual travel from Feb. 20, the island’s authorities announced yesterday.

In a statement, the Mainland Affairs Council of Taiwan disclosed that from 9 a.m. on Feb. 20, online applications for temporary stay permits to Taiwan will resume for SAR passport holders.

The travel permit is in fact a form of prior registration for concerned travelers, which is comparative to the electronic travel authorization (eTA) in some countries.



Those ineligible for the permit should apply for another type of entry-exit document with the island’s immigration office.

With the new arrangements arriving, the Council concluded that all tra-

vel measures concerning Macau and Hong Kong SAR passport holders will return to pre-Covid standards, except for disease-related requirements.

The resumption does not include mainland re-

sidents for the time being. Liang Wen-chieh, deputy minister at the Council, blames a lack of transparency in Covid-19 disclosures in mainland China as the reason.

Liang remarked, “We

all hope cross-strait relations will bloom in the spring.”

“To reopen travel, we must be certain of our ability to control and assess the Covid situation,” Liang added.

Following the announcement, Taiwanese airlines EVA Air and China Airlines also publicized that flights between Taiwan as well as Macau and Hong Kong will be added from March, according to Taiwanese media outlet Formosa TV News.

EVA Air reportedly will add one more flight between Macau and Taiwan from March 26. China Airlines does not operate flights between Macau and Taiwan.

The suspension of regular interactions between Macau and Taiwan has been in place for over 1,000 days, Liang recapped. Such limitations were implemented to curb the spread of Covid-19.

Taiwan currently imposes no centralized quarantine requirements on entrants. However, entrants are required to take a Covid-19 rapid antigen test on the day of entry. They will have partial freedoms to explore during the first seven days if they test negative and wear a mask. From the eighth day onwards, without symptoms or positive test results, they will be completely free to roam around.

RENATO MARQUES

COURT DECLARES BANKRUPTCY OF THE 13 HOTEL

THE bankruptcy of the company behind The 13 hotel, located in the Seac Pai Van area in Coloane, has been declared by the Macau court.

The hyper-luxurious development envisioned by Hong Kong's entrepreneur Stephen Hung has finally been declared bankrupt after a long process and several years of complete closure.

The Court of First Instance officially declared the bankruptcy of the company responsible for the hotel, giving all creditors until the end of March to state all debts in arrears.

The bankruptcy declaration also takes effect over the operational license of the hotel, which is due to expire this month.

The court ruling was made late last month but the decision was only published on the government's official gazette late last week.

The bankruptcy announcement came shortly before the company behind "13 Administração Hoteleira Sociedade Unipessoal," which owns the hotel - South Shore Holdings - was delisted from the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

The company's shares had



been suspended from trading in July 2021 with a deadline in January this year to resume trading or be delisted.

It is not yet clear what the company's total accumulated debt amount is, but it is likely

to amount to several billions of patacas.

The original project, budgeted at MOP11.32 billion, started construction in 2013 but encountered several issues with financing that led to slow

progress in the construction, ending only five years later.

When it finally opened in August 2018, and notwithstanding its uniqueness, the hotel did not attract much attention. With one-night-stays priced at

a few dozen thousand patacas, located far from the city and even some distance away from Cotai, the hotel never managed to attract the expected clientele. In February 2020, with the first outbreak of Covid-19, the hotel finally suspended all operations. But even before that, the company tried to capitalize on the sale of some items, namely the signature fleet of specially customized Rolls-Royce vehicles.

Although several sources along the way have hinted that the hotel was intended to feature a casino operating in the venue, the notion was always denied by official authorities, who said that they had never received such a request.

A source that used to be part of the official construction and launch of the hotel told the Times that The 13 hotel does not have and never had any venue built with the purpose of hosting casino tables, denying that such an intention was ever held by the project's creators and investors.

CRIME

Man arrested for repeatedly beating cohabiting partner

ANTHONY LAM

A local man has been apprehended on allegations of domestic violence against a cohabiting female partner, the Judiciary Police (PJ) disclosed on the afternoon of Valentine's Day.

The suspect, surnamed Lou, is 31 years old and reportedly works as a croupier.

The case was referred by the Public Security Police Force (PSP), the PJ added.

The case was reported to the police Monday morning. The female victim, who is in her 20s, has lived with the suspect for eight years. They have two young children - a son and a daughter - and live with a domestic helper.

According to the victim, she went home after going out with her friends Sunday evening. Shortly after midnight, the suspect returned home and demanded to inspect the victim's phone, discovering that she had spent time with friends earlier. The victim was reportedly verbally assaulted



during the process.

At 7 a.m. that same day, when the victim wanted to go out, the suspect allegedly grabbed her hair from behind, pulled her from the bedroom to the living room and repeatedly hit her head against hard objects.

She was then reportedly expelled from the apartment wearing only underwear. Several minutes later, she was let back in by her daughter, who had witnessed the entire incident.

The PJ stated that the report was made to the po-

lice by the domestic helper.

The victim had previously instructed the helper to call the police if such violent conduct occurred again.

It came to the knowledge of the police that the first fight occurred in January 2022. Since then, four fights, including the latest one, have reportedly taken place.

Due to the relatively low severity of the resultant injuries and it being a first-time occurrence, no criminal proceedings were brought against

the suspect for the first incident, but the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) was notified. Subsequent violence was not reported to the police due to "family concerns," but evidence has been kept in the form of photographs.

The suspect only admitted to grabbing the back of the victim's neck and pulling her out of the apartment. He declined to cooperate with other parts of the investigation.

Pursuant to Article 4 - Clause 2 of the Domestic

Violence Prevention and Control Law, people cohabiting in a form comparative to a spousal relationship, as well as people cohabiting to care for and protect minors are considered to be de-facto or in an equivalent relationship of kin.

SHAM MARRIAGE LASTING ALMOST 20 YEARS UNVEILED VIA AN ANONYMOUS TIP-OFF

A case involving a fake marriage between a local woman and a resident from the mainland has been unveiled after the Public Security Police Force (PSP) received an anonymous tip-off, a PSP spokesperson reported Monday during the regular press conference of the local police forces.

The case dates back to 2004 when the local woman, now 60 years of age, met the man (52) during a dinner gathering with friends.

In April 2005, they decided to get married on the mainland. In 2009, the man, who is said to be a business owner, requested the status of Macau residency, claiming to seek a family reunion.

Trusting the declarations made and the documentary proof of the marriage,

the residency status was approved and the man was granted a Macau resident identification card.

Unknown to the authorities, the same couple had been divorced in the mainland less than one year after the man obtained his ID card, a fact that they managed to hide from the local authorities until now.

Both the suspects live in Macau currently in the northern district, but in separate homes. They admitted to the police that their marriage was staged just to obtain the man's permanent residency in Macau, which he has been enjoying for more than a decade.

The woman also admitted to having received some HKD50,000 when she agreed to marry the man. **RM**

MACAO WATER

Piping repair plan for low-rise buildings to reach 5,000 households

RENATO MARQUES

THE Macao Water Supply Company (Macao Water) expects that the Subsidy Program for Repairing Service Connections of Low-rise Buildings will reach a total of 5,000 households by the end of the plan (slated for next year), the company's Executive Director, Nacky Kuan, told the media on the sidelines of Macao Water's Spring Luncheon event.

"Now the plan is already reaching 3,000 [households] but we expect it to reach a total of about 5,000," Kuan said, adding, "The plan will come to an end next year and then we will evaluate its results to understand if it's meaningful to continue to promote it or not."

The Subsidy Program for Repairing Service Connections of Low-rise Buildings has a fund of MOP10 million, supported by Macao Water shareholders. The program aims to replace old and damaged water supply piping to low-rise buildings,



namely in the old districts to improve the quality of the water supply to the housing units and prevent waste resulting

from damaged pipes.

Kuan also said to the media that Macao Water has been "planning ahead" and will

not be affected by the staffing shortages that are currently affecting some industries in Macau.

"We do not have any manpower shortages and we are fully operational as we have made plans ahead of time and hired and trained staff according to our current and perceived needs in the near future," the executive director noted.

Water consumption is expected to rise this year, following the increase in visitor arrivals after the easing of the pandemic restrictions.

"Macao's economy is recovering in an orderly manner and local water supply needs are therefore expected to rise this year," she said. This trend is in contrast to the last three years, during which water consumption in Macau dropped continuously as a result of the pandemic.

In her opening speech, Kuan also noted that the past three years of low visitation numbers and a slow economy have been used by Macao Water to

carry out a range of key tasks, including the opening of the Seac Pai Van Water Treatment Plant, inaugurated in late 2021 as well as the replacement of piping in many locations of the city.

ONLINE SERVICES TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY

Macao Water has also been improving its online services on several fronts, allowing customers to apply for services more conveniently via their mobile phones and pay water bills with ease via several electronic platforms.

According to Kuan, the company has also established the program "Two Exclusive Offers for Domestic Customers" over the past two years, aiming to encourage customers to change their habits regarding the payment and receipt of water bills via postal mail.

Kuan said that the idea is that more consumers will opt for e-bills instead of physical bills to save resources and improve the environment.

ECONOMIC HOUSING

Gov't to optimize seniors' residence project based on public concerns

STAFF REPORTER

THE SAR government has launched a pilot plan for developing senior housing units and will continue to "optimize access conditions, unit design, building supporting facilities" in response to feedback from the community.

This is in response to the opinions gathered on the design of the economic housing for senior citizens.

The government set up an exhibition area and demonstration units for the apartments on the third floor of the second phase of the Mong-Ha public housing in mid-2021. There were 13,565 visits between July 13 and February 13, 2023.

At present, planning applicants must be permanent residents of the SAR aged 65 years or older and who are able to take care of themselves at home.

Factors such as the applicant's family structure and living conditions are considered as part of a comprehensive admission process.

Criteria for admission and allocation of units will be established through administrative regulations, which are expected to be completed this year.

In terms of unit design, the authorities have also considered opinions and revised the design accordingly. Adjustments made include changes to the

types of equipment in the unit, focusing on items that contribute to the safety and personal support of older residents. Showers have also been added, catering to differing levels of need with a barrier-free design.

Meanwhile, construction of apartment foundations at the Avenida do Nordeste has been completed, and the tower is now being built. It is estimated the overall construction of the building will be completed by the end of 2023. It will be put into service in 2024.

There are a total of 1,815 residential units in the apartment block, and each residential unit is equipped with basic household equipment.

CE PRAISES ARBITRATION WHILST MEETING NEW AAM LEADERSHIP

ARBITRATION and mediation are effective extra-judicial means of dispute resolution, Chief Executive (CE) Ho Iat Seng has told a group of lawyers.

Ho recently met the new management of the Macau Lawyers' Association (AAM), whose incumbent leader is indirectly elected lawmaker Vong Hin Fai.

Ho added that in the future, Macau will be able to provide legal arbitration services catering to the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and international trades, making particular mention of China-Lusophone trades.

In addition, the head of the government pledged that his team would strive to push forward the integration of Macau's legal sector in the national development masterplan. As such, he reminded the



sector to continue its professional progress.

In response, Vong said the arbitration and mediation centers have their own structure and members and pledged that the lists of arbitrators and mediators would be announced as soon as possible. The AAM will make better progress in the two areas that will cope with social development, Vong added.

The AAM will also help initiate the legislation for the lawyer partnership mechanism and maintain consistent and positive communications with other executive, legislative and judicial entities.

Some participating lawyers expressed their views on legal services, communications between the association and the judiciary, as well as youth development to the government. **AL**

SOUTH CHINA SEA

US RENEWS WARNING IT'LL DEFEND PHILIPPINES AFTER CHINA SPAT

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

THE United States renewed a warning that it would defend its treaty ally if Filipino forces come under attack in the disputed South China Sea, after a Chinese coast guard ship allegedly hit a Philippine patrol vessel with military-grade laser that briefly blinded some of its crew.

The Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila sent a strongly worded diplomatic protest to the Chinese Embassy yesterday that "condemned the shadowing, harassment, dangerous maneuvers, directing of military-grade laser, and illegal radio challenges" by the Chinese ship.

The incident took place Feb. 6, when the Chinese coast guard ship beamed high-grade lasers to block the Philippine patrol vessel BRP Malapascua from approaching Second Thomas Shoal on a resupply mission to Filipino forces there, according to Philippine officials.

China claims the South China Sea virtually in its entirety, putting it on a collision course with other claimants. Chinese naval forces have been accused of using military-grade lasers previously against Australian military aircraft on patrol in the South China Sea and other spots in the Pacific.

Despite friendly overtures to



Aircraft from the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz and the USS Makin Island fly in formation past Nimitz in the South China Sea, Sunday

Beijing by former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and his successor, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who met Chinese leader Xi Jinping in January in Beijing, tensions have persisted, drawing in closer military alliance between the Philippines and the U.S.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Monday that a Philippine coast guard vessel trespassed into Chinese waters without permission.

Chinese coast guard vessels responded "professionally and with restraint at the site in accordance with China's law and international law," he said, without elaborating or mentioning the use of laser.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price said China's "dangerous operational behavior directly threatens regional peace and stability, infringes upon freedom of navigation in the South China Sea as guaranteed under

international law and undermines the rules-based international order."

"The United States stands with our Philippine allies," Price said in a statement.

He said that an armed attack on Philippine armed forces, public vessels, or aircraft, including those of the coast guard in the South China Sea, would invoke U.S. mutual defense commitments under a 1951 treaty. The treaty obligates

the allies to help defend one another in case of an external attack.

Aside from China and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei also have overlapping claims in the resource-rich and busy waterway, where a bulk of the world's commerce and oil transits.

Washington lays no claims to the disputed sea but has deployed forces to patrol the waters to promote freedom of navigation and overflight — moves that have angered Beijing, which has warned Washington to stop meddling in what it says is a purely Asian dispute.

The contested waters have become a volatile front in the broader rivalry between the U.S. and China in Asia and beyond.

Price said the Chinese coast guard's "provocative and unsafe" conduct interfered with the Philippines' "lawful operations" in and around Second Thomas Shoal.

In July, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on China to comply with a 2016 arbitration ruling that invalidated Beijing's vast territorial claims in the South China Sea and warned that Washington was obligated to defend the Philippines under the Mutual Defense Treaty.

Yesterday [Macau time], Price reiterated that the "legally binding decision" underscored that China "has no lawful maritime claims to the Second Thomas Shoal." China has long rejected the ruling and continues to defy it.

The Philippines filed nearly 200 diplomatic protests against China's aggressive actions in the disputed waters in 2022 alone.

MDT/AP

HONG KONG

Beijing eases meeting rule for US top diplomat in city

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

THE United States consul general no longer needs to secure China's approval before meeting officials in the semi-autonomous Chinese city of Hong Kong, after a rule put in place during heightened tensions between Washington and Beijing was relaxed.

Under the new requirement, which started in November, Beijing must be given prior notice, replacing a previous arrangement that required the top diplomat to seek permission from China's foreign affairs office in the city before having such meetings, the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong



told The Associated Press yesterday.

The rule relaxation would make it easier for the consul general to

have direct exchanges with officials in Hong Kong as part of its normal diplomatic practice. The previous rule

was introduced in 2020 during heightened tensions between the U.S. and China.

"Per requirements es-

tablished by the People's Republic of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Consul General currently notifies the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hong Kong of meetings with local government officials and government educational institutions five days in advance," the consulate stated in an email.

Asked about the rule change, Hong Kong leader John Lee said the Hong Kong government would welcome any exchanges for improving business, cultural ties and works that can help promote the city.

"Hong Kong government officials, of course, will also be in contact

with different people, including officials from different consulates, so as to enhance exchanges," Lee said, and the government would act in accordance with the Vienna Convention.

Hong Kong returned to China's rule in 1997 under the promise that the former British colony could retain its own political, social and financial institutions for 50 years.

In recent years, it has become a talking point between the U.S. and China as critics say the promise is becoming increasingly threadbare, especially after Beijing imposed the 2020 National Security Law, which jailed or silenced many dissidents. MDT/AP



A boat cruises past a coal barge on Mahakam River in Samarinda, East Kalimantan

INDONESIA

Jakarta promises move to clean energy, but challenges loom

VICTORIA MILKO & SIBI ARASU, SAMARINDA

IN Indonesia's region of East Kalimantan, the country's dependence on coal is on full display.

Driving on the region's toll road, passersby can watch excavators digging coal from shallow pits as trucks filled with the carbon-rich rocks rush by. Under a bridge in Samarinda, the region's capital, hundreds of mammoth, jet-black mountains of coal sit in barges being pulled along the waterway, headed to plants across Indonesia or other countries.

They're sights that Indonesia has pledged to phase out — or at least drastically reduce — by agreeing to some five schemes with international stakeholders, including the largest-signed \$20 billion Just Energy Transition Partnership deal. While the deals aim to turn one of the largest coal-producing countries toward its vast greener energy sources, experts warn that financial, policy, infrastructure and other challenges need to be overcome.

Indonesia's energy transition is "very unique" because of high economic growth, geography, population centers and clean energy potential, said David Elzinga, a principal energy specialist at the Asian Development Bank.

Despite Indonesia's energy potential from solar, hydropower, geothermal, wind and other sources, only some 12% of them are tapped, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency. Nearly all energy demand is met by fossil fuels, with 60% coming from highly-polluting coal.

That means people like boat maker Jembong, 55, who like many Indonesians uses only one name, can rely on solar for a lightbulb or to watch television. But for the energy-intensive power tools he uses to handcraft boats from his home on Karampuang Island, he needs diesel.

"If I can't use the diesel engine, I can't work," he said.

It's impacted the environment: In 2021, Indonesia's energy sector emissions were around 600 million tons of carbon dioxide, the world's ninth highest, according to the International Energy Agency. And population and economic growth are expected to triple the country's energy consumption by 2050.

"It's a challenging environment to make change while you have such substantial growth," said Elzinga. "It is different than a developed country which is characterized by having significant financial resources and low economic growth." Many more-developed economies have stronger renewable ambitions, though researchers say no country is currently in line with global climate goals.

Indonesian officials have signaled they've started the shift: They've announced new regulations around solar, set a goal to raise the market share of electric vehicles in Indonesia to 25% of total vehicle sales by 2030 and have deployed charging stations. But experts warn Indonesia is lagging behind its Southeast Asian peers.

Indonesia has voiced it needs help from more-developed nations.

"We don't want to be limited in terms of our ability to grow

economically," said Deputy Coordinating Maritime Affairs and Investment Minister Rachmat Kaimuddin. "Industrialized nations can support us."

With the new JETP deal, Indonesia will aim to reach net zero emissions from the power sector by 2050, bringing forward its target by a decade, and reach a peak in those emissions by 2030. It's increasing its target for renewable energy to make up over a third of all power generation by 2030, which would mean doubling the pace of current deployment.

But financing remains an obstacle, said Erika Hamdi, an Indonesia-based energy finance analyst at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis. By one estimate, Indonesia will need up to \$2.4 trillion in cumulative investment across the energy system by 2050 — a number far larger than the money currently pledged.

"We still have a long way to go to find out ... how we could gather up the financing to do this," said Hamdi.

How the money is provided — be it loans, grants or other funding schemes — is also a concern, said Grita Anindarini, a program director at the Indonesian Center for Environmental Law.

"We just want to make sure that these funds won't lead to a debt trap," said Anindarini.

Hamdi raised concerns over how money from transition schemes could be spent. In a recent

Indonesia will aim to reach net zero emissions from the power sector by 2050, bringing forward its target by a decade

report, she critiqued "a lack of disclosure on the selection criteria" for plants selected for early retirement buyouts by Indonesia's state-owned electric company, PLN, including some plants

that will be "beyond their economic useful life by 2055." JETP funding could be used to support the buyouts.

"PLN should retire them within the next couple of years and write them off," Hamdi wrote in the report.

Another concern raised by activists is that the JETP deal doesn't make clear what, if any, restrictions it will put in place regarding Indonesia building new coal plants, or whether Indonesia would be required to decrease coal exports. A 2022 presidential regulation provides an exemption to build previously planned coal plants or those attached to nationally strategic projects.

Coal is a valuable part of Indonesia's economy, with the country being the largest exporter by tonnage in the world. Customers include China, India and Japan. The war in Ukraine has caused a

spike in energy costs, with the increased price likely to remain for the next two or three years, said Hamdi.

"You can understand the rationale for them wanting to develop their industries and their natural resources," said Elzinga. "The responsibility of the development community and those who want to support Indonesia is very much to come up with solutions that allow them to do both."

In a written statement sent to The Associated Press, Darmawan Prasodjo, the CEO of PLN, wrote that the company has already cancelled some coal-fired plants in their near-term business plan and is "committed to lead the energy transition in Indonesia."

Muliawan Margadana, vice chairman of the Indonesia Mining Association, and experts raised concerns over the future of communities reliant on the coal industry, which makes up 35% of East Kalimantan's GDP and employs nearly 9% of its population.

"More than 250,000 people are directly employed by coal mining. If we calculate their families, about 1 million people are impacted," said Margadana.

But he said that reskilling workers is possible — something Hamdi agrees with.

"What's important, and will be considered as just, is how the transition funding will be allocated to help these impacted workers, whether through upskilling, reskilling, or community development," said Hamdi.

Domestic energy policy is also not up to speed with the transition — especially for solar energy, which is a key source on Indonesia's pathway to net zero — noted Daniel Kurniawan, a researcher who focuses on solar for the Institute for Essential Services Reform.

There is a lack of a solid policy-making environment and political commitment for Indonesia to "transition to clean energy amidst the overcapacity, driven by over-reliance on coal power," he said. "Although that is bound to change with JETP."

Geography presents another challenge. Indonesia is a large archipelago with significant differences in energy resources, distribution and populations centers, said Elzinga. For example Java, the country's administrative center, accounts for around 60% of the population and some 75% of electricity consumption, but only a small percent of renewable potential.

While the challenges are varied, they're not insurmountable, said Hamdi. Her organization and others are monitoring developments with Indonesia's energy transition.

"We have to watch as well how this energy transition will create a better impact and a better future for our communities," said Hamdi. "It has to be for the whole range of citizens." **MDT/AP**

BALLOONED

Rumors swirl about balloons, UFOs as officials stay mum

DAVID KLEPPER,
WASHINGTON

MAYBE they came from China. Maybe from somewhere farther away. A lot farther away.

The downing of four aerial devices by U.S. warplanes has touched off rampant misinformation about the objects, their origin and their purpose, showing how complicated world events and a lack of information can quickly create the perfect conditions for unchecked conjecture and misinformation.

The presence of mysterious objects high in the sky doesn't help.

"There will be an investigation and we will learn more, but until then this story has created a playground for people interested in speculating or stirring the pot for their own reasons," said Jim Ludes, a former national defense analyst who now leads the Pell Center for International Relations at Salve Regina University.

"In part," Ludes added, "because it feeds into so many narratives about government secrecy."

President Joe Biden and other top Washington officials have said little about the repeated shootdowns, which began with a suspected Chinese spy balloon earlier this month. Three more unidentified devices have been shot down, with the latest Sunday over Lake Huron. Pentagon officials said they posed no security threats but have not disclosed their origins or purpose.

Yesterday [Macau time], many social media sites in the U.S. lit up with theories that Biden had deployed the aerial devices as a way to distract Americans from other, more pressing issues. Those concerns included immigration, inflation, the war in Ukraine and Republican investigations into Hunter Biden, the president's son.

While the concentration of claims was highest on fringe sites popular with far-right Americans, the unfounded rumors and conspiracy theories popped up on bigger platforms like Twitter and Facebook, too.



In this image released by the U.S. Navy, sailors assigned to Assault Craft Unit 4 prepare material recovered off the coast of Myrtle Beach, S.C., in the Atlantic Ocean

One of the most popular theories suggested the White House and Pentagon are using the airborne devices to divert attention from a chemical spill earlier this month in Ohio.

That incident, caused by a train derailment, occurred several days before the most recent devices were shot down, and was covered extensively. Nonetheless, it remained the top subject searched on Google yesterday, showing continued public interest in the story.

Some commenters said Biden's decision to wait until the balloon had reached the East Coast before shooting it down showed he was in league with China. Others, meanwhile, chastised Biden for shooting down foreign aircraft that they imagined could be carrying bioweapons or nuclear weapons.

Misleading claims about the airborne devices have also prompted violent threats, according to an analysis by the SITE Intelligence Group, a firm that tracks extremist rhetoric online. After the White House said earlier surveillance flights went undetected during Donald Trump's presidency, an article circulated on far-right sites urging the execution of any Trump administration officials who may have withheld the information.

Trump administration officials have said they knew of no such surveillance craft.

Alongside the political conspiracy theories were suggestions that the aerial objects were extraterrestrial

in origin. Photos of alleged UFOs were shared online and web searches for the term "UFO" soared around the world Sunday, according to information from Google Trends.

"Don't worry, just some of my friends of mine stopping by," Elon Musk, the CEO of Twitter, Tesla and SpaceX, joked in a tweet Sunday.

Humor aside, while the details of the different claims vary, they have two things in common: a lack of evidence and a strong distrust of America's elected leaders.

"Maybe Joe built the balloon & had Hunter launch it to scare we the people!" wrote one Facebook user. "How do WE know??? We don't!"

The federal government must balance the public's desire to know the details with the need for secrecy regarding national security and defense, Ludes said. That's not likely to satisfy Biden's critics, Ludes said, or prevent misleading explanations from going viral.

High-profile news stories and events often precede a spike in false and misleading claims as people turn to the internet for explanations. Conspiracy theories about Buffalo Bills player Damar Hamlin spread quickly after his dramatic on-field collapse in January. Something similar happened last year when the Nord Stream pipelines in the North Sea were damaged.

In that instance, Russia spread conspiracy theories blaming the U.S. for the sa-

botage. The baseless theories were quickly amplified by far-right users in the U.S. It's not the first time America's authoritarian adversaries have seized on global events to portray the U.S. as belligerent.

China has claimed the balloon shot down Feb. 4 was engaged in meteorological research. On Monday, China's foreign ministry said 10 U.S. balloons had entered Chinese airspace without permission in the past year.

Beijing's response to this latest diplomatic row seeks to portray China as the responsible actor, while sidestepping surveillance allegations made by the U.S., according to Kenton Thibault, a China expert at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, a Washington-based nonprofit that tracks foreign disinformation and propaganda.

"It's about projecting an image of responsibility and rationality, of being the adult in the room," Thibault said of China's response. "It's a clear signal to nations in the developing world that the U.S. is selfish, untrustworthy and hypocritical."

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre officials did refute one viral claim to have emerged from the balloon saga.

"I know there have been questions and concerns about this, but there is no — again no indication — of aliens or extraterrestrial activity with these recent take-downs," Jean-Pierre told reporters. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1989 SOVIET TROOPS PULL OUT OF AFGHANISTAN

Soviet troops are withdrawing from Afghanistan, nine years after they swept into the country.

A convoy of Soviet armoured vehicles travelled the 260-mile (418km) journey to the USSR border while other soldiers left aboard an Ilyushin 76 transport aircraft.

Earlier, the Soviet government had announced the departure of the last troops although snow had delayed a five-day airlift from the Afghan capital Kabul.

The journey is especially dangerous on the Salang Pass through the Hindu Kush Mountains, where more than 10,000 mujahideen operate.

The mujahideen - Afghan Islamic fighters - have been involved in heavy battles to try to force a Soviet retreat.

Huge snow drifts are blocking the southern approaches to the pass, while the descent on the northern side is a wall of ice.

Russian forces are not alone in leaving Afghanistan. Families of Afghan refugees have been crossing the border into Pakistan.

Border guards have reported that a dozen families have crossed through the Khyber Pass in the last few hours.

Over the past two months, up to 20,000 have fled heavy fighting between the mujahideen and Soviet troops.

A handful of foreign correspondents have been allowed to join the Soviet convoy leaving Kabul, but only for the relatively safe last stretch of the journey, which has been secured by soldiers.

President Sayid Mohammed Najibullah's Soviet-backed Afghan government has acknowledged the complete withdrawal of soldiers with a brief statement. [...]

At Kabul's airport, most international and domestic flights are arriving and departing as usual.

According to latest BBC reports, Kabul is surrounded by a mujahideen force of around 30,000, with the city under artillery and rocket "bombardment".

Machine-gun and artillery fire could be heard during the night and this morning while a sign at the British Embassy reads "closing down temporarily". The American embassy has put up a sign which says "extended holidays for all staff - date of return not fixed".

A diplomat has reported that President Najibullah, although tired, is still defiant and is determined to play a role in the future of Afghanistan.

The Soviet daily newspaper Trud has revealed that some garrisons have been looted.

The return of the Red Army coincides with the decision by Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev to cut the Soviet armed forces by up to 500,000, with the Kremlin emphasising the heroism of those who fought in the war.

On the streets of Kabul there is a heavier presence of armed police and queues for bread are as long as ever.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

On 24 December, 1979, President Leonid Brezhnev sent in troops to support the struggling communist government.

Thousands of Soviet troops intervened to prop up the pro-communist regime, leading to a major confrontation that drew in the US and Afghanistan's neighbours.

During the Soviet occupation about a million Afghans lost their lives as the Red Army tried to impose control and millions more fled abroad as refugees. Soviet deaths were estimated to be around 15,000.

The Soviet authorities hailed the withdrawal from Afghanistan as a victory although many people felt the exit marked a major humiliation of the Red Army's military power.

The civil war continued following the Soviet withdrawal, as the mujahideen pushed to overthrow President Najibullah, who was toppled in 1992.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Don't let others bully you into agreeing with them. You may need the space, but you need the extra cash more. Your reputation may be at stake if you partake in gossip.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20

You should teach children some of your unique creative talents. You can learn a great deal more if you listen rather than rant and rave.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21

Romance is likely if you can bring yourself to go out with friends. Losses are likely if you have left your financial affairs in other people's hands.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Try to deal with it quickly; don't dwell on past regrets. Don't be afraid to make a move if you aren't happy with your emotional situation.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Confusion is apparent and you'll need some sound advice if you want to do the right thing. You can continue to forge ahead if you make a few long distance calls pertinent to closing pending deals.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Anger might lead to carelessness and minor injuries. You will easily blow situations out of proportion. Try to be a bit more understanding or you may end up spending the evening alone.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Do your job and don't ask for favors. Opportunities to make financial gains through investments look promising. Enjoy some socializing today.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21

The advice you get today may be based on false information. Travel or short trips will probably be your best outlet. Channel your energy into passionate interludes with your lover.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You may find that you're being used. Avoid boredom by being creative in your endeavors. It's hard to stay mad if the object of the anger refuses to react.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Don't blame everything on your mate. You should visit a friend or relative who hasn't been feeling up to par. Be willing to listen, but don't be fooled.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Sudden changes regarding work and colleagues are apparent. Do yourself a favor and leave your plastic at home. Work at home if at all possible.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You will enjoy socializing and unusual forms of entertainment. Deal with the needs of children and get into groups that deal with self awareness.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY					EASY+				
	7	1		8 4 2		8	6		
2		5		7	2	6 8		5	
4 9				5 1		3	4 2	7 8	
	2	5		9 8	3 8	5	1		7
	4	2	6	3					
7 5		3	2		7		3 9	1 4	
	7 3			2 6		3 1 2 5	4		
	2		7	1		2		6 1	5
9 8 4		1 3					1	3	

MEDIUM					HARD				
8		5 6		3	7		5		9
	3 2 9	8		6			3 9	5	
		7			5 3	8		1	
		7 6 4 9				9	2	7	
	8 6 4	9			4				
		2			1		9	4 6	
9		8	3 7 1		6	4 7			
2			7 5	8	8	6		7	

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	3	cloudy
Changchun	-17	-6	fine
Chengdu	6	9	overcast
Chongqing	7	13	cloudy
Fuzhou	8	14	cloudy
Guangzhou	9	20	cloudy
Guiyang	0	7	overcast
Haikou	15	17	cloudy
Hangzhou	0	9	fine
Harbin	-24	-9	fine
Hefei	-3	8	fine
Nanjing	-2	8	cloudy
Shanghai	2	8	fine
Taipei	10	12	overcast
Wuhan	-3	10	cloudy
Hong Kong	14	19	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	-8	-2	cloudy
Frankfurt	-1	8	fog
Paris	4	13	cloudy
London	7	14	overcast
New York	11	18	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Off-Broadway theater award; 5- French cleric; 9- ___ Tafari (Haile Selassie); 12- Author Jaffe; 13- Atari founder Bushnell; 15- Outstanding; 16- "Johnny Mnemonic" actor; 17- Born yesterday, so to speak; 18- Encourage in wrongdoing; 19- Summerhouse; 21- Unnecessary; 23- Entre ___; 25- Minn. neighbor; 26- Noise made by a sheep; 29- Glitch; 31- Stain; 35- Canyon edge; 36- Sash; 38- China's Zhou ___; 39- Apple product; 41- Movie critic Roger; 43- Mil. leaders; 44- Man of morals; 46- Prophets; 48- Feel unwell; 49- Outcome; 51- Ship stabilizer; 52- Dundee denial; 53- Chamber; 55- Paint unskillfully; 57- SE Asian country; 61- General tendencies; 65- Jutting rock; 66- Island in the Bay of Naples; 68- Jump; 69- Yorkshire river; 70- Had dinner at home; 71- Able was ___; 72- NFL 6-pointers; 73- Highly excited; 74- Sea-going eagle;

DOWN 1- Not a dup.; 2- ___ Raton; 3- Don Juan's mother; 4- Devoured; 5- Proclaim; 6- Fur scarf; 7- Russian pancake; 8- Roof overhangs; 9- Choir attire; 10- Gorillas, chimpanzees and orangutans; 11- Fast fliers; 14- Food and water; 15- Speaking; 20- Manager; 22- Go out with; 24- Swedish imports; 26- Wild rose; 27- Actress Anouk; 28- Gather together; 30- Ancient tongue; 32- Derive; 33- Craze; 34- Grocery lane; 37- Let go; 40- Bravery; 42- Applying a remedy; 45- Ruse; 47- Insult; 50- Scarpa's killer; 54- Mazda model; 56- Contradict; 57- Future doc's exam; 58- Dry and waterless; 59- Metallica drummer Ulrich; 60- Take down ___; 62- ___-do-well; 63- Fix hose; 64- Graf ___; 67- ___ Grande;

Yesterday's solution

L	I	B	E	T	E	D	E	M	A	S	T	O	P	
M	O	D	E	L	E	A	R	N	L	A	R	A		
A	L	A	E	I	N	S	E	T	E	R	I	C		
C	O	M	M	I	T	T	E	D		S	I	N	G	
I	R	E	R	E	G									
S	P	A	N	I	S	H	I	C	H	E	S	T		
S	P	A	N	I	S	H	I	C	H	E	S	T		
A	P	R		C	L	O	S	E		N	I	P		
R	E	I	N	E	V	A	N	H	O	S	N	I		
T	R	E	A	G	L	E	T	E	M	P	T	E	D	
P	R	O	U	D		S	A	L	E	S		R	O	O
H	O	U	R		A	N	T	I	C		A	B	L	E
J	N	C	A		P	I	L	O	T		T	O	E	R
S	A	H	L		O	P	E	N	S		T	E	S	A

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
S. J. Hospital 28 313 731	
Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333	
Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300	
IAM 28 387 333	
Tourism 28 333 000	
Airport 59 888 88	

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ECONOMY & FINANCE

SCHOLAR NOMINATED TO FOLLOW KURODA AS BANK OF JAPAN CHIEF

YURI KAGEYAMA, TOKYO

AN economist was nominated yesterday to head Japan's central bank and take on the daunting task of guiding the world's third-largest economy to stronger, stable growth.

The government's choice of Kazuo Ueda, who earlier served on the central bank's policy board, to succeed Haruhiko Kuroda came as a surprise to many when it was leaked to Japanese media last week. Most Bank of Japan governors have hailed from the Finance Ministry or the bank itself.

Kuroda will be stepping down on April 8 after serving two five-year terms, during which he pushed an unprecedented ultra-easy credit strategy meant to vanquish deflation, or chronically falling prices. While other major central banks have aggressively raised interest rates to cool decades-high inflation, the BOJ has stuck to monetary easing. Its key interest rate remains at minus 0.1%.



Kazuo Ueda, an economist and former member of the Bank of Japan policy board

Some observers see choosing Ueda, 71, as a way for Kishida to differentiate his policies from the "Abenomics" strategy of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, mainly centered around near-zero interest rates and massive asset purchases by the central bank meant to combat stagnation.

Much of the burden for trying to jolt Japan out of its doldrums has fallen to the central bank. The Abenomics strategy also invol-

ved heavy government spending, but it made limited headway in enacting sweeping reforms to help Japan raise productivity and streamline bottlenecks in the economy.

The economy continued to meander between spells of modest growth and recession and then the pandemic and slowdowns in other major economies hobbled growth. The government reported yesterday that the eco-

nommy grew at an annual pace of 0.6% in October-December, after contracting 0.3% in previous quarter.

Disruptions from the pandemic, a shortage of imported parts from China and rising prices — especially for energy — have weighed on Japan's recovery even after Tokyo loosened precautions meant to keep COVID-19 outbreaks under control, allowing foreign tourists to enter after more than two years of stringent controls.

The economy grew at a 1.1% pace for full-year 2022.

The government of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, whose support ratings have sagged, presented Ueda and other nominees for top BOJ posts to parliament yesterday. Ueda will face questioning by lawmakers, but approval of his nomination is likely given that both houses of parliament are controlled by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

"I plan to do my best to properly answer all the questioning in Parliament," Ueda said on na-

tionally televised news.

Ueda is a graduate of the prestigious University of Tokyo and holds a doctorate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has taught at Japanese and foreign universities and has connections in international academic circles. Ueda was on the BOJ's board of governors from 1998-2005.

Opposition parties raised objections, saying Ueda will likely stick to the Abenomics approach.

"What needs to be confronted instead is that Abenomics was a big mistake," opposition lawmaker Akira Nagatsuma said on public broadcaster NHK TV.

Kuroda has described the policies he championed as a "big bazooka" of monetary easing that was meant to force Japan out of a cycle of falling prices and stagnant growth. The BOJ now has gigantic holdings of Japanese government bonds and scant room to maneuver while moving toward a more neutral monetary stance.

The next BOJ chief will be grappling with inflationary pressures and potential slowdowns in other major economies where central banks are still raising rates to try to tame rising prices. Japan's consumer inflation rate is about 4% now, though much of that is due to soaring prices for imports of oil and other goods. **MDT/AP**

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FOOTBALL

UEFA blamed for near-disaster at Champions League final

UEF-A-APPOINTED investigators have held European soccer's ruling body mostly responsible for chaotic security failures at the 2022 Champions League final in Paris that put the lives of Liverpool and Real Madrid fans at risk.

"It is remarkable that no one lost their life," the investigation panel wrote in a 220-page document published yesterday [Macau time] into a near "mass fatality catastrophe" at the biggest club game in world soccer.

"The panel has concluded that UEFA, as event owner, bears primary responsibility for failures which almost led to disaster," the report said.

A failed security operation saw tens of thousands of fans held in increasingly crushed queues for hours before the May 28 game at the 75,000-capacity Stade de France, which is a key venue for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

AP PHOTO



Police officers guard the Stade de France prior the Champions League final soccer match between Liverpool and Real Madrid, in Saint Denis near Paris, on May 28, 2022

Many fans were fired on with tear gas by police before the game, which was delayed by nearly 40 minutes. After Madrid's 1-0 win, dozens were robbed leaving the stadium by local residents in the impoverished Saint-Denis neighborhood.

UEFA statements during the chaos and after the game blamed Liverpool fans for arriving at the stadium late and using fake tickets to try to gain entry—

wrongly blamed on both counts, the report said.

An apology to Liverpool supporters for "the experiences of many of them" and the unjust blaming was made yesterday by UEFA general secretary Theodore Theodoridis.

The panel, appointed seven months ago by UEFA, aimed blame at leadership of both the soccer body and its commercial subsidiary UEFA Events, and

French public authorities.

"UEFA's lack of oversight upon delegation of private safety and security matters, deference of all such matters in the public space to policing authorities, and simply not following its own safety, security and service requirements, was a recipe for the failures which occurred," the report said.

"Senior officials at the top of UEFA allowed this to happen,

even though the shortcomings of its model were widely known at senior management level."

The long-time CEO of UEFA Events, Martin Kallen, is named often in the report, including as a representative at security planning meetings, and is broadly criticized by the panel.

UEFA's Head of Safety & Security Operations, Zeljko Pavlica, who was at the game, is not identified by name in the 220 pages.

"On the evidence, the panel has concluded that the senior management of UEFA Events marginalized the UEFA S&S Unit," the report said.

French police were blamed in the report for wrongly assuming that Liverpool fans posed a threat to public order, and for using "weaponry" like tear gas and pepper spray.

The head of the Paris police operation at the game, Didier Lallement, retired about six weeks later.

The report team was chaired by a former sports minister of Portugal, Tiago Brandão Rodrigues, and included match security experts who formerly worked for UEFA and fan groups.


They criticized French public officials for an ongoing "misconception about what actually happened and a complacency regarding what needs to change." MDT/AP


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Multipolar World

Jorge Costa Oliveira



CHINA'S ECONOMY AND DOMESTIC DEMAND IN 2023

Notwithstanding the Chinese CDC's prediction that by the end of the first quarter of 2023, China will be coming out of three successive waves of Covid-19 infections and with economic activity returning to normal, we have already seen that investment is not likely to contribute to China's GDP growth in 2023 as it did in the pre-pandemic years. Are there reasons for optimistic forecasts regarding the evolution of the Chinese economy when other variables are taken into consideration? In this article, we will analyze the matter in terms of consumption and domestic demand.

Domestic demand stemming from household spending was severely constricted in 2022 due to blockades and travel restrictions. There are expectations of a recovery in consumption in 2023, a corollary to an increase in post-zero-covid demand. However, there are several reasons to be wary of an increase in consumer demand in 2023.

Household savings are at record levels, with a lot of money being placed in term deposits with maturities of 3 to 5 years, the early withdrawal of which is costly. Unemployment rates among workers aged 16 to 24, which hit 20% at the beginning of 2022, remained at 17% at the end of the year.

The slowdown in the global economy is likely to affect employment in China's export sector. In China's real estate sector, stagnation stemming from the ongoing readjustment is likely to continue, damaging employment prospects in construction and related sectors and affecting disposable income. Secondary market prices for residential properties continue to fall in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. Plummeting home values weigh significantly on consumers' propensity to spend because a substantial portion of household wealth is invested in real estate.

An increase in consumer spending in 2023 would probably require some sort of consumer stimulus package, but Beijing has few instruments at its disposal to do this. Individual income taxes are already very low, around 1% of GDP.

Tax breaks for cars and subsidies for some purchases of durable goods are already in place. New consumer voucher programs are possible, with more widespread deployment, taking advantage of ubiquitous digital payment platforms such as WeChat. While growth in household consumption to pre-pandemic levels means an approximately +2% contribution to GDP growth in 2023, the most likely outcome is a range between pre-pandemic and 2022 levels, with a contribution of only around +1%.

China's public spending is constrained by the same factors that are undermining investment in infrastructure: weak provincial government revenues from taxes, fees, and land sales. While a return to a pre-pandemic "normal" would mean a public expenditure contribution of around +1% to GDP growth in 2023, the more likely outcome is a continued limited growth in public expenditure observed in 2022, resulting in a contribution of approximately +0.5% at best.

In other words, China's economic growth prospects for 2023 do not look very promising either as concerns domestic demand.

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FORD TO CUT 3,800 JOBS IN EUROPE, MOSTLY IN GERMANY, UK

Ford said yesterday that it will cut 3,800 jobs in Europe over the next three years in an effort to streamline its operations as it contends with economic headwinds and increasing competition on electric cars.

The automaker said that 2,300 jobs will go in Germany, 1,300 in the U.K. and 200 elsewhere on the continent. It said that its strategy to offer an all-electric fleet in Europe by 2035 is unchanged and that production of its first European-built electric car is due to start later this year.

The company said it is looking for "a leaner, more competitive

cost structure for Ford in Europe." It said that it will embark on consultations "with the intent to achieve the reductions through voluntary separation programs."

Ford aims to cut 2,800 of the jobs in engineering by 2025, a result of the transition to electric cars that are less complex, though it plans to keep around 3,400 engineering jobs in Europe.

The remaining 1,000 jobs will be cut on the administrative side.

"These are difficult decisions, not taken lightly," Martin Sander, the general manager of Ford Model e in Europe, said.



AP PHOTO

FIRST, WE TOOK MACAU...

DEALERS GET SUPPORT FOR ATLANTIC CITY CASINO SMOKING BAN

WAYNE PARRY, TRENTON (N.J.)

ATLANTIC City casino dealers pushing for a smoking ban received support from several state lawmakers yesterday [Macau time] at a long-awaited hearing on a bill that would end smoking inside the nine casinos.

Dealers, cocktail servers and other casino workers — some of them with breathing ailments and other health problems they suspect are related to secondhand smoke from casino patrons — testified before a state Senate panel in favor of a law that would close a loophole in the state's 2006 indoor smoking law. That measure was written specifically to exempt casinos from bans on smoking indoors. Currently, smoking is permitted on 25% of a casino floor in Atlantic City.

Although no action was taken on the bill, numerous lawmakers supported a ban, calling it long overdue.

Whether to ban smoking is one of the most controversial issues not only in Atlantic City casinos, but in other states where workers have expressed concern about secondhand smoke. They are waging similar campaigns in Rhode Island, Pennsyl-

vania and Virginia.

"It's immoral for the owners of casinos to think their employees are expendable," said Sen. Joseph Vitale, the committee's chairperson. "If you smell it, it's in your lungs."

Democratic Senator Richard Codey was acting governor in 2006 when the indoor smoking law was adopted.

"Unfortunately, to get that passed I had to agree that casinos could still have smoking," he said, adding that "it's time" for the state to implement a casino smoking ban.

Atlantic City's main casino workers' union drove four van loads of workers to the hearing as well, taking 60 of them to the state Capitol as a counterpoint to those calling for a smoking ban. These workers back the industry's position that a smoking ban would place Atlantic City at a competitive disadvantage with casinos in neighboring states.

The issue is among the most divisive in Atlantic City, where even though casino revenue matched its all time high of \$5.2 billion last year, only half that amount was won from in-person gamblers. The other half was won online and must be shared with third parties including tech platforms and sports

books.

Just three of the nine casinos — Borgata, Ocean and Resorts — surpassed their pre-pandemic revenue levels in terms of money won from in-person gamblers last year.

"I am responsible for hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of chips," said Borgata dealer Pete Naccarelli, one of the leaders of the anti-smoking movement in Atlantic City. "When a player 12 inches away blows a cloud of smoke at me, I can't move, and I'm prohibited from waving the smoke away, a gesture that would be considered rude. We all have people that love us. We don't think it's fair that we should have to choose between a paycheck and our health."

Lamont White, another Borgata dealer, has been working in the casinos for 38 years.

"Now I'm 60. I realize that people dying in their 40s and 50s is not normal," he said. "As dealers, we cannot walk away; our job is to take it, no matter how many cigarettes or cigars are lit."

Bob McDevitt, president of Local 54 of the Unite Here casino workers union, opposes a smoking ban, saying he wants to preserve the jobs of his members. MDT/AP



AP PHOTO

Syria's president agreed to open two new crossing points from Turkey to the country's rebel-held northwest to deliver desperately needed aid and equipment to help millions of earthquake victims, the United Nations announced. Currently, the U.N. has only been allowed to deliver aid to the northwest Idlib area through a single crossing at Bab Al-Hawa, at Syrian ally Russia's insistence.



AP PHOTO

Turkey Rescuers yesterday were working to reach people under the rubble in three provinces hit hard by the devastating quakes that hit Turkey and Syria last week. The death toll from the magnitude 7.8 and 7.5 quakes passed 35,000, and was certain to increase as search teams find more bodies.



AP PHOTO

USA House Republicans kicked off an investigation yesterday into the origins of COVID-19 by issuing a series of letters to current and former Biden administration officials for documents and testimony. The Republican chairmen of the House Oversight Committee and the subcommittee on the coronavirus pandemic requested information from several people, including Dr. Anthony Fauci (pictured), surrounding the hypothesis that the coronavirus leaked accidentally from a Chinese lab.



AP PHOTO

Valentine's She is from Ukraine and he is from Russia. Their love blossomed online, but with their nations at war, the odds of carrying on their relationship were stacked against them. Even so, it didn't take long for the young couple to beat the odds. Mariia Vyhivska and Iurii Kurochkin, now both 23, fell in love while playing an online video game. But Russia's invasion of its neighbor threatened to scuttle their relationship before it even got off the ground. More on macaudailytimes.com.mo