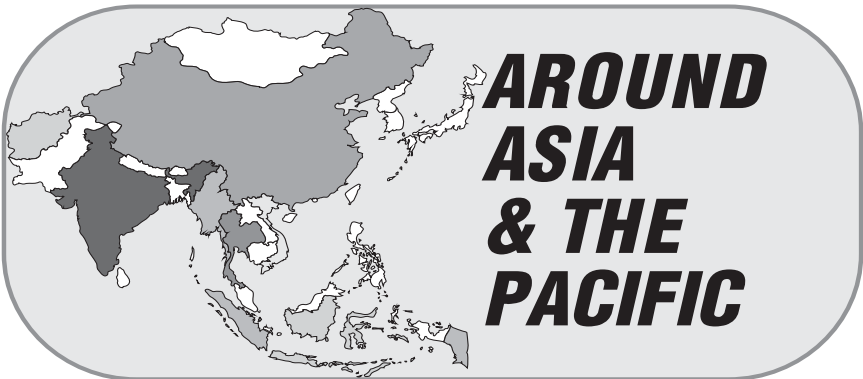




Digital minister aims to wrest Japan out of analog doldrums

TOKYO (AP) — The politician tapped to help Japan keep pace with the digital age has his work cut out for him. After all, the nation known for Nintendo games, Lexus sportscars, and other gadgetry galore also loves the fax machine and the traditional “hanko” seals that work as analog signatures. But digital minister Taro Kono has a reputation for no-nonsense action and for defying vested interests in high places. “I have no intention of playing coordinator,” he told reporters in a small briefing that was, aptly, conducted online. “If people don’t listen, I am going to beat them up,” he added with a laugh. Kono, a former foreign minister and defense minister, has flaunted his digital savvy for years.

Factory churned out British flags after queen’s death

SHAOXING, China (AP) — Ninety minutes after Queen Elizabeth II died, orders for thousands of British flags started to flood into a factory south of Shanghai. More than 100 employees at Shaoxing Chuangdong Tour Articles Co. set aside other work and put in 14-hour days starting at 7:30am making nothing but British-themed flags. They churned out at least 500,000 the first week, according to general manager Fan Aiping. Some were British flags to be carried by mourners or hung outside homes. Others showed Elizabeth’s portrait and the years of her birth and death. They ranged from 8” to 59” wide and wholesaled for about 7 yuan (\$1) each. The first customer sent an order at 3:00am Chinese time for tens of thousands, according to Fan. She said the 20,000 the factory had in stock were sent out that morning. “The customer came to our factory directly to grab the products,” Fan said. “Many of the flags weren’t even packaged. They were put in a box and shipped away.” The factory had been making flags for the football World Cup before Elizabeth’s death in September. Chuangdong has been in the industry since 2005 and produces flags for the World Cup and other sports events or national day celebrations. It also makes sports-themed scarves and banners. Employees pay attention to news for events that might bring in orders. “There is a business opportunity behind every news event,” Fan said. Ni Guozhen, an employee since 2005, said she has learned about the world through her work. “I’ve learned a lot about current events,” said Ni, who was sewing flags with the queen’s portrait. “My knowledge has grown. Therefore I’m proud and happy that I’m making flags.” Ni remembers filling orders for British-themed flags for a royal wedding. “There is a story behind each flag,” Fan said. “This time it’s about the queen in the United Kingdom. They are buying these flags to mourn the queen deeply.”

New Thai rules allow abortions up to 20th week

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand will allow abortions up to the 20th week of pregnancy under new regulations issued by the Public Health Ministry, a government spokesperson has announced. The regulations, published in the *Royal Gazette*, take effect October 26 and liberalize the terms of a law in place since February last year that allowed the termination of pregnancies during the first 12 weeks. Thailand’s Constitutional Court in February 2020 struck down statutes in the Criminal Code banning abortions, declaring they violated equal rights for men and women and the rights to life and liberty. Under the new regulations, women seeking abortions between the 12th and 20th weeks must first consult with and receive approval from an authorized medical practitioner. Up until the 12th week, women can make arrangements on their own to have the procedure carried out at a medical facility. After the 20th week, the fetus must be carried to term. Performing an abortion during the first 12 weeks became legal in Thailand in February 2021 under amendments to the Criminal Code. Previously they had been illegal, with significant numbers of exceptions made for cases in which the mother’s physical or mental health was threatened, the woman was under 15 years of age, or became pregnant as the result of rape or incest, or the fetus had serious disabilities or deformities. Deputy government spokesperson Traisulee Traisoranakul said the new regulations call for the consultations in the second trimester to be based on openness and kindness in dealing with pregnancy issues, to be non-judgemental of women’s behavior and decisions, and to allow decisions on whether or not to have abortions to be made “without bias, force, and with respect for privacy.”

Chinese man trapped aloft in hydrogen balloon for 2 days

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese state media said a man was found safe after he spent two days aloft in a hydrogen balloon, travelling about 200 miles, after it became untethered and flew away while he was using it to harvest pine nuts from a tree. The man, identified only by his surname, Hu, and a partner were collecting pine nuts in a forest park in Heilongjiang province in northeastern China when they lost control and the balloon sailed off. The other person jumped to the ground, and a search was launched for the escaped balloon and Hu. State broadcaster CCTV said rescuers were able to contact the man by cellphone the following morning and instructed him to slowly deflate the balloon to land safely. It took another day before he reached the ground about 200 miles to the northeast in Fangzheng region, close to the border with Russia. Hu was in good health, apart from a pain in his lower back, possibly from standing the entire time he was in the air, CCTV said. An official who gave only his surname, Fu, at the publicity department of the Hailin Forestry Administration Co., confirmed the balloon incident and described Hu as being in his 40s. He said Hu was recovering in a hospital but declined to give further details. Pine nuts are found inside pine cones and are a frequent ingredient in dishes served in the northeast, formerly known as Manchuria.



ROBOTIC RESTOCKER. A TX SCARA robot works — stocking drinks in the refrigerated section of a FamilyMart convenience store — in Tokyo. The robot can restock shelves with up to 1,000 bottles and cans per day. (AP Photo/Yuri Kageyama)

Robot that stocks drinks is newest thing at the corner store

By Yuri Kageyama
The Associated Press

TOKYO — A small robot with a clip-like hand and enough smarts to know which drinks are popular is part of an effort to make convenience stores even more convenient.

On a day last month in Tokyo, the robot named TX SCARA slid back and forth behind the refrigerated shelves in the back of a FamilyMart store.

The hand on the end of its mechanical arm grasped a bottle or can from the stacks to the side, then the robot slithered to the right spot and placed the drink on the shelf — in a place chosen after its artificial intelligence (AI) and tiny cameras matched the kind of beverage to what’s running short.

TX SCARA is filling a needed role in Japan’s “conbini,” as the ubiquitous tiny stores selling snacks, drinks, and knick-knacks are called.

Most such stores are open 24/7, filled with 3,000 kinds of products, but have relatively few workers. The beverage shelves in the back are farthest from the cash register, keeping workers running back and forth. And the beverage space is refrigerated, uncomfortably cold for people to stay there too many hours.

TX SCARA, which goes at an undisclosed price, can restock up to 1,000 bottles and cans a day. Its artificial intelligence, called “GORDON,” knows when and where products need to be placed on shelves, according to Tokyo-based Telexistence, which created TX SCARA.

“We want to automate all the repetitive jobs and boring jobs done by humans. That is the direction we are going. And the best way to do that is to use the robots,” chief executive Jin Tomioka said.

Industrial robots are already common in factories, but Tomioka’s 50-employee company sees great potential at warehouses and home centers, he said. His robots are far more affordable than industrial robots, such as those at auto plants, but can prove just as crucial for social needs, designed to coexist and collaborate with people, helping out with routine and rudimentary tasks.

Tomioka’s robots are tailored for existing stores, which don’t have to change their layout or routine. Their hardware uses Nvidia GPU-accelerated AI technologies to allow for remote control over Azure, the cloud computing service operated by Microsoft.

A Telexistence operator wearing virtual reality glasses can see problems when they occur, such as a dropped beverage, and fix them from the company office.

TX SCARA is now at 300 of the 16,000 FamilyMart stores in Japan. There are 40,000 more conbini in Japan, and the U.S. has about 150,000 convenience stores.

With its aging population, Japan has a labor shortage that’s expected to only get more severe in coming years.

FamilyMart executive officer Tomohiro Kano referred to the Japanese expression “seeking even a cat’s paw for help” to describe how desperate a situation might get. “At FamilyMart, we are seeking a robot’s arm for help,” he said with a laugh.

While modern robots are taking on serious work like mapping disaster zones and helping doctors perform surgery, the humble TX SCARA tirelessly does the unglamorous work of stocking shelves with bottled tea and orange drinks.

IT worker Taisuke Miyaki watched the robot

Continued on page 14

Affordable Retirement Living

FOR SENIORS 62 YEARS & OLDER

ALBERTA SIMMONS PLAZA

6611 NE MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. BLVD.

PORTLAND, OREGON 97211

503-240-4198

• ONE-BEDROOM APARTMENTS WITH FULL SIZED KITCHENS AND LIVING AREAS

• AFFORDABLE RENT WITH FEDERAL RENT SUBSIDIES AVAILABLE

• PLANNED ACTIVITIES, LAUNDRY FACILITY, ELEVATOR, MEETING ROOM, AND LIBRARY

• CONVENIENTLY LOCATED TO SHOPPING, RESTAURANTS, PHARMACY, AND MEDICAL OFFICES



WWW.ALBERTASIMMONSPLAZA.COM

Asian Currency Exchange Rates	
Units per U.S. dollar as of 9/30	
Bangladesh Taka	101.1
Cambodian Riel	4114.6
China Renminbi	7.1125
Fijian Dollar	2.2614
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8498
Indian Rupee	81.489
Indonesian Rupiah	15210
Iranian Rial	42025
Japanese Yen	144.47
Laos New Kip	16458
Malaysian Ringgit	4.6355
Nepal Rupee	130.59
Pakistani Rupee	229.0
Papua N.G. Kina	3.52
Philippine Peso	58.54
Russian Ruble	56.0
Saudi Riyal	3.7582
Singapore Dollar	1.4327
South Korean Won	1430.0
Sri Lankan Rupee	364.2
Taiwan Dollar	31.772
Thai Baht	37.76
Vietnam Dong	23860