



Chinese navy ships are first to dock at new pier at Cambodian naval base linked to Beijing

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Chinese naval vessels were the first ships to dock at a new pier at a Cambodian naval base that the United States and some international security analysts say is destined to serve as a strategic outpost for Beijing’s navy. The docking of the two ships, which received little publicity, coincided with an official visit to Cambodia in December by China’s top defense official, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission He Weidong. News of at least two Chinese ships docking at the Ream Naval Base on the Gulf of Thailand came out indirectly, through a Facebook post by Cambodian defense minister Tea Seiha. It said he visited the base to see preparations for Cambodian navy training and to inspect progress on infrastructure construction, but did not mention China by name. He also posted photos showing Cambodian officials with Chinese ambassador Wang Wentian, and reviewing Chinese sailors. At least two warships could be seen in the photos, one whose gangway identified it as the Chinese navy corvette Wenshan. Satellite photos taken by Planet Labs PBC analyzed by The Associated Press showed what appeared to be two Chinese warships docked at the base. They correspond to the images shared online by Tea Seiha. The AP analysis, comparing the ship’s measurements and the images released by the minister, suggest they were Type 56 Chinese corvettes. Controversy over Ream Naval Base initially arose in 2019 when *The Wall Street Journal* reported that an early draft of a reputed agreement seen by U.S. officials would allow China 30-year use of the base, where it would be able to post military personnel, store weapons, and berth warships. Cambodia’s then-Prime Minister Hun Sen denied there was such an agreement. He pointed out that Cambodia’s constitution does not allow foreign military bases to be established on its soil, but said visiting ships from all nations are welcome.

Beijing sees most December sub-freezing temps since 1951

BEIJING (AP) — Beijing recorded the most hours of sub-freezing temperatures in December in more than seven decades as a cold wave enveloped northern and central swathes of China, bringing snowstorms and record-breaking temperatures. A weather observatory in the Chinese capital as of December 24 had recorded more than 300 hours of sub-freezing temperatures since December 11 — the most since records began in 1951, according to the official newspaper *Beijing Daily*. The city saw nine consecutive days with temperatures below minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit), the paper added. Parts of northern and central China shivered under frigid cold snaps last month, with authorities closing schools and highways several times due to snowstorms. Temperatures at 78 weather stations across the country hit record lows for the month of December, while average temperatures in northern and some central parts of China hit record lows set in 1961, according to the National Meteorological Centre.

Eddie Jones hired for second stint as Japan rugby coach

TOKYO (AP) — Eddie Jones has been hired for a second stint as Japan’s coach in a deal taking him through to the 2027 Rugby World Cup. The 63-year-old Jones quit as the Australia coach on October 29 after his native country’s woeful World Cup campaign in France, during which he denied holding talks with the Japanese Rugby Football Union. Jones, whose mother is Japanese, will start his new role January 1st on a four-year deal, returning to a position he had from 2012 to 2015 and that culminated in him leading the Brave Blossoms to one of the biggest upsets in rugby — and any sport — when they beat South Africa at the 2015 World Cup. After leaving that job following the World Cup, he coached England for seven years — leading the team to the 2019 final — before spending less than a year in a second spell with the Wallabies. Jamie Joseph departed as Japan’s coach after the recent World Cup, where the team was eliminated in the pool stage.

Tesla to build energy-storage battery factory in China

BEIJING (AP) — American electric automaker Tesla’s plans to produce energy-storage batteries in China has moved forward with a signing ceremony for the land acquisition in Shanghai, according to China’s state media. The factory won’t build batteries for cars, but for electric utilities and other companies to store power. Such storage units have become increasingly important with the growth in solar and wind energy, which only generate electricity when weather conditions are favorable and need to store it for when residential and commercial users need it. The new factory will initially produce 10,000 of Tesla’s Megapack units annually for sale worldwide, Xinhua said. The Tesla project is a rare piece of good news for the Chinese economy, which saw a sharp drop in foreign investment in 2023. The Commerce Ministry said foreign investment in the first 11 months of 2023 was down 10% compared with the same period last year. Foreign companies are worried about the Chinese government’s increasing control over business on national security and other grounds, as well as growing U.S. restrictions on technology trade with China. China is a major market and manufacturing center for Tesla, and the company’s CEO, Elon Musk, has built close ties with Chinese officials even as U.S.-China relations soured. In May, he met the commerce minister and the then-foreign minister in Beijing. Tesla built an electric vehicle plant in Shanghai in 2019 that assembles cars for China, Europe, and other overseas markets. China is also by far the world leader in installing wind and solar capacity, making it a major market for energy storage.



SPIRITED CHANGE. In this image taken from video, visitors look at the bottling process of a customized bottle of *The Chuan* whisky at the Chuan Malt Distillery in Emeishan, in southwestern China’s Sichuan province. The more than \$100 million distillery, owned by Pernod Ricard and based at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Mount Emei, has launched a pure-malt whisky, *The Chuan* is aiming to tap a growing taste among young Chinese for whisky in place of the traditional “baijiu” used to toast festive occasions. (AP Photo/Caroline Chen)

Whisky wooing young Chinese away from “baijiu” as top distillers target a growing market

BEIJING (AP) — A distillery in southwestern China is aiming to tap a growing taste among young Chinese for whisky in place of the traditional “baijiu” liquor used to toast festive occasions.

The more than \$100 million distillery owned by Pernod Ricard based at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Mount Emei has launched a pure-malt whisky, *The Chuan*.

The French wine and spirits group says it is produced using traditional whisky-making techniques combined with Chinese characteristics including locally grown barley and barrels made with oak from the Changbai mountains in northeastern China.

“Chinese terroir means an exceptional and unique environment for aging, including the water source here — top-notch mineral water. The source of water at Mount Emei is very famous,” says Yang Tao, master distiller at the distillery.

A centuries-old drink, whisky is relatively new to China, but there are already more than 30 whisky distilleries in the mainland, according to the whisky website Billion Bottle.

Whisky consumption in China, as measured by volume, rose at a 10% compound annual growth rate from 2017 to 2022, according to IWSR, a beverage market analysis firm. Sales volume is forecast to continue to grow at double digit rates through 2028, according to Harry Han, an analyst with market research provider Euromonitor International.

“We see huge potential for whisky here in China. It is a product which is developing very nicely, very strongly,” said Alexandre Ricard,

chairman and CEO of Pernod Ricard. “We do believe that the Chinese have developed a real taste, particularly for malt whisky.”

Raymond Lee, founder of the Single Malt Club China, a whisky trading and distribution company in Beijing, said whisky has become more popular as the economy has grown.

“As the economy develops and personal income increases, many people are pursuing individuality. In the past we all lived the same lives. When your economic conditions reach a certain level, you will start to seek your own individuality. Whisky caters just to the consumption mindset of these people. And its quality is very different from that of other alcoholic drinks,” he says.

On a recent Friday night at a bar in Beijing, 28-year-old Sylvia Sun, who works in the music industry, was enjoying a whisky on the rocks.

“The taste of it lingers in your mouth for a very long time. If I drink it, I will keep thinking about it the rest of tonight,” she said.

Lee, who has been in the industry for more than 35 years, said the whisky boom is largely driven by younger Chinese who are more open to western cultures and lifestyles than their parents’ generation was.

More than half of China’s whisky consumers are between 18 and 29 years old, according to an analysis based on data from the e-commerce channel of Billion Bottle, which has more than 2 million registered users.

“Now the country is more and more open, and there are increasing opportunities to go

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Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 12/29

Bangladesh Taka	109.75
Cambodian Riel	4091.2
China Renminbi	7.1132
Fijian Dollar	2.19
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8099
Indian Rupee	83.186
Indonesian Rupiah	15389
Iranian Rial	42018
Japanese Yen	141.03
Laos New Kip	20557
Malaysian Ringgit	4.595
Nepal Rupee	133.16
Pakistani Rupee	281.13
Papua N.G. Kina	3.73
Philippine Peso	55.398
Russian Ruble	90.157
Saudi Riyal	3.7501
Singapore Dollar	1.3196
South Korean Won	1294.5
Sri Lankan Rupee	323.92
Taiwan Dollar	30.7
Thai Baht	34.38
Vietnam Dong	24270