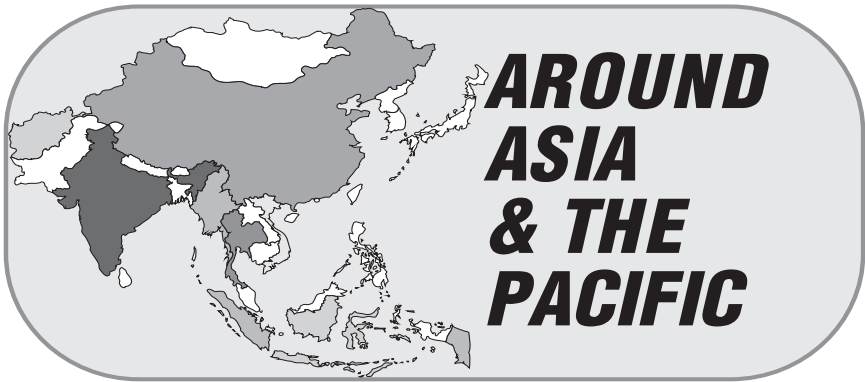




Chess player sues to reclaim title lost for hotel incident

BEIJING (AP) — A competitor in Chinese chess says he sued the national association in China for mental distress after he was stripped of a title for drinking alcohol and defecating in the bathtub of his hotel room at a recent competition. Yan Chenglong doesn’t deny what happened but wrote in a civil complaint that he drank a moderate amount of beer to celebrate his win with other players and that some food had caused stomach problems and he couldn’t make it to the toilet in time. The complaint came a week after a social media post by the Chinese Xiangqi Association that described the drinking and defecation. It said an investigation found that Yan damaged hotel property, violated public order and good behavior, and had a negative impact on the tournament. Chinese chess, called xiangqi in Chinese, is a traditional board game that remains popular, particularly among older people. Neighborhood residents play in parks and along sidewalks, often with small crowds gathered around to watch. Yan’s complaint — which demands that the association apologize, restore his reputation in the media, and pay him 100,000 yuan (\$14,000) in damages — was mailed to a court in central China’s Henan province, according to a post on Yan’s social media account. The post includes photos of the six pages of the complaint and an envelope with an express mail sticker addressed to a court in central China’s Henan province. Calls to the Chinese Xiangqi Association weren’t answered. The chess association said in its post that it had also looked into reports that Yan had cheated during the tournament but was unable to confirm them.

Seoul records heaviest single-day December snowfall

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The South Korean capital, Seoul, received the biggest single-day snowfall recorded in late December for more than 40 years. The country’s weather agency said 4.8 inches of snow fell on Seoul, the heaviest since 1981. The Korea Meteorological Administration said a heavy snow advisory was issued for Seoul’s entire area before it was lifted later in the day. It said other parts of South Korea also received snow or rain. South Korea’s safety agency said the snow in Seoul and other areas caused traffic congestion, but no snowfall-related deaths or injuries had been reported.

Chinese exports rose 2.3%, consumer prices edged lower

HONG KONG (AP) — China’s exports grew slightly for a second consecutive month in December even as deflationary pressures persisted, according to official data released in January that underscored the uneven nature of the country’s economic recovery from the pandemic. Demand for Chinese exports has been weak since the Federal Reserve and central banks in Europe and Asia began raising interest rates last year to cool inflation that was at multi-decade highs. Exports rose 2.3% year-on-year in December to \$303.6 billion. The improvement is a sign that demand may be picking up after months of decline earlier in the year. Imports also rose, by 0.2% to \$228.2 billion. China’s total trade surplus for December was \$75.3 billion, up 10% from \$68.3 billion in November. Falling prices remain a sign of weakness. Consumer prices fell 0.3% in December, the third consecutive month of declines. China’s producer price index for December — which measures prices that factories charge wholesalers — fell 2.7% in the 15th straight month that it has fallen. Trade with Japan, Southeast Asian countries, the European Union, and the U.S. has declined this year. China’s property sector remains another drag on the economy, with sales slumping and developers struggling to repay massive amounts of debt. Exports of automobiles, however, remain a bright spot for China’s economy. China’s auto exports surged 63.7% in 2023 while domestic sales grew 4.2% boosted by year-end incentives, the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers reported.

Carmaker that faked safety tests sees long wait to reopen

TOKYO (AP) — A Japanese automaker that cheated on safety tests for decades has said it doesn’t expect to resume shipping cars any time soon. The Japanese government ordered a subsidiary of Toyota to halt production of its entire lineup after reports of faked safety test results emerged last year. The Daihatsu Motor Co. skipped mandatory safety tests by copying data from testing on one side of cars to the other, and used timers to ensure airbags went off in tests, a review found. No major accidents have been reported in connection with the cheating, but the news has raised serious questions about oversight at Daihatsu, as well as its corporate parent Toyota. Japanese regulators approved five of the company’s models in January after more testing, but Daihatsu executives said its factories will remain shuttered as it waits on suppliers. “We face a very tough road ahead in winning back customer trust about safety and security,” corporate manager Keita Ide said, stressing that customers felt betrayed. He said the company is working on a plan to prevent cheating in the future. Daihatsu is known for kei cars, or light automobiles, including the popular Daihatsu Tanto “kei,” or small, car. It also produces the Toyota Raize hybrid sport-utility vehicle, also sold as the Daihatsu Rocky. An investigation including third-party experts found 174 cases of faked tests affecting dozens of models, including cars sold under the Toyota Motor Corp. nameplate. The review found that cheating went back 30 years. The scandal began after a whistleblower came forward in April last year. Daihatsu has apologized and promised sweeping reforms of its corporate culture. The Toyota group has been rocked by similar scandals before, ensnaring truckmaker Hino and Toyota Industries Corp., which makes engines, machinery, and vehicles. That’s prompted some questions about the leadership of chairman Akio Toyoda, the former chief executive and grandson of Toyota’s founder.



REACTOR RESEARCH. Pictured in Naraha town is a demonstration of a drone designed to probe the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant demonstrated the mini drones at a nearby research facility ahead of their first flight for an investigation inside of one of the damaged reactors, as they seek to gather more data about hundreds of tons of melted fuel that remain inside of them. (Daisuke Kojima/Kyodo News via AP)

Drone the size of a bread slice may allow Japan closer look inside damaged Fukushima nuclear plant

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

NARAH, Japan — A drone almost the size of a slice of bread is Japan’s newest hope to get clearer footage of one of the reactors inside the tsunami-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant where hundreds of tons of damaged fuel remain almost 13 years after the disaster.

A magnitude 9.0 quake and tsunami in March 2011 destroyed the plant’s power supply and cooling systems, causing three reactors to melt down. Massive amounts of fatally radioactive melted nuclear fuel remain inside to this day.

The plant’s operating company, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings (TEPCO), last month unveiled small drones they want to use to gather more data from parts of one of the reactors previously inaccessible.

TEPCO has tried sending robots inside each of the three reactors but got hindered by debris, high radiation, and an inability to navigate them through the rubble, though they were able to gather some data in recent years.

During January’s demonstration at the Japan Atomic Energy Agency’s mockup facility in Naraha, a drone weighing only 185 grams (6.5 ounces) circled around, showcasing its maneuvering ability, carefully avoiding obstacles and mock-up remains that included an abandoned robot from a 2015 internal probe. It also continuously sent a black-and-white live feed using its installed camera to an operation room.

Shoichi Shinzawa, the probe project manager, said the demonstration was the result of the training that started in July. He also said four drones were ready to be sent inside the No. 1 reactor for five-minute intervals, partly due to short battery life.

He said utility officials hope to use the new data to develop technology and robots for future probes as well as for the plan to remove the melted fuel from the reactor. He added that the data will be used in the investigation of how exactly the 2011 meltdown occurred.

The company intends to send the drones inside the primary containment vessel of the No. 1 reactor at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant this month. Two drones will first inspect the area around the exterior of the main structural support in the vessel, called the pedestal, before deciding if they can dispatch the other two inside, the area previous probes could not reach.

The pedestal is directly under the reactor’s core. Officials are hopeful to be able to check out and film the core’s bottom to find out how overheated fuel dripped there in 2011.

About 900 tons of highly radioactive melted nuclear fuel remain inside the three damaged reactors. Critics say the 30- to 40-year cleanup target set by the government and TEPCO for Fukushima Daiichi is overly optimistic. The damage in each reactor is different and plans need to be formed to accommodate their conditions.

TEPCO said it will do a test trial to remove a small amount of melted debris in the No. 2

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Asian Currency Exchange Rates	
Units per U.S. dollar as of 2/02	
Bangladesh Taka	109.76
Cambodian Riel	4082.9
China Renminbi	7.192
Fijian Dollar	2.25
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8219
Indian Rupee	82.998
Indonesian Rupiah	15731
Iranian Rial	42031
Japanese Yen	148.38
Laos New Kip	20732
Malaysian Ringgit	4.7175
Nepal Rupee	132.86
Pakistani Rupee	279.55
Papua N.G. Kina	3.74
Philippine Peso	55.93
Russian Ruble	90.967
Saudi Riyal	3.7502
Singapore Dollar	1.3427
South Korean Won	1338.7
Sri Lankan Rupee	312.08
Taiwan Dollar	31.39
Thai Baht	35.61
Vietnam Dong	24350