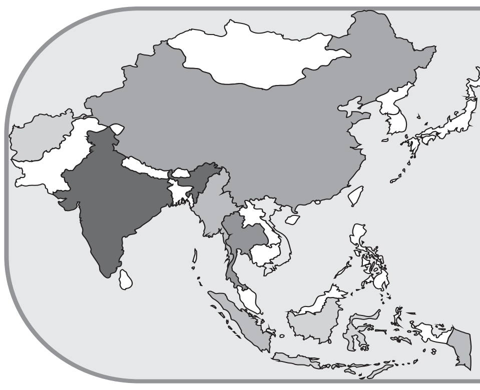

# AROUND ASIA & THE PACIFIC

## HK lawmakers pass bill to ban substandard tiny apartments

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong lawmakers have passed a bill mandating a minimum size, an exclusive bathroom, and other standards in subdivided apartments — a common living arrangement in one of the world's least affordable cities. About 220,000 people live in dwellings created by dividing regular apartments, including migrants, workers, students, and young professionals. Some of the spaces have a toilet bowl next to the cooking area, no bathroom sink, or a washroom shared among neighbors. Beijing, which sees the city's housing problems as a driver of the 2019 anti-government protests, wants it to phase out subdivided apartments by 2049. Housing secretary Winnie Ho said it was painful to see people living in substandard conditions and these sufferings should not occur in Hong Kong. Legislators passed the bill by a show of hands after hours of debate. About one-fourth of the city's 110,000 existing subdivided homes are less than 86 square feet, the new minimum size mandated. By comparison, the standard size of a parking space in the city is 110 square feet. The median monthly rent for a unit was 5,000 Hong Kong dollars ($640). An estimated 33,000 units, or 30% of the existing subdivided apartments, would need major renovations to meet the new requirements, and the others would need simpler improvements. Among other conditions, each living unit must have at least one openable window, exclusive fire detectors, and an enclosed toilet area with a door separating it from the rest of the apartment. Landlords will have a grace period to renovate substandard homes and eventually can only rent out those that are recognized as meeting the standards. Violations could lead to a fine of up to 300,000 Hong Kong dollars (about $38,500) and three years of imprisonment, along with a daily fine for ongoing offenses. The authorities plan to roll out a registration scheme next March.

## Iranians held on U.S. immigration charges to be deported

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — The United States will deport hundreds of Iranians back to Iran in the coming weeks, with the first 120 deportees being prepared for a flight, according to Iran. The deportation of Iranians, not yet publicly acknowledged by the U.S. government, comes as tensions remain high between the two countries following the American bombings of Iranian nuclear sites in June. Asked to confirm the flight plans, Abigail Jackson, White House spokeswoman, said, "The Trump Administration is committed to fulfilling President Trump's promise to carry out the largest mass deportation operation of illegal aliens in history, using all the tools at our disposal." Meanwhile, the United Nations reimposed sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program, putting new pressure on the Islamic Republic's ailing economy. The deportations also represent a collision of a top priority of President Donald Trump — targeting illegal immigration — against a decades-long practice by the U.S. of welcoming Iranian dissidents, exiles, and others since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. As many as 400 Iranians would be returning to Iran as part of the deal with the U.S., Iranian state television said, citing Hossein Noushabadi, director-general for parliamentary affairs at Iran's Foreign Ministry. He said the majority of those people had crossed into the U.S. from Mexico illegally, while some faced other immigration issues. The U.S. State Department referred questions to the Department of Homeland Security. *The New York Times* first reported the deportations. In the lead up to and after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, a large number of Iranians fled to the U.S. In the decades since, the U.S. had been sensitive in allowing those fleeing from Iran over religious, sexual, or political persecution to seek residency.

## China's factory activity contracts for a 6th straight month

HONG KONG (AP) — China's factory activity shrank for a sixth straight month in September, the longest slump since 2019, according to an official report. The official manufacturing purchasing managers index, or PMI, improved to 49.8 from 49.4 in August. But it remained below the 50-cutoff level between contraction and expansion on a scale of 0 to 100. A private sector PMI survey by the credit research and rating startup RatingDog was more upbeat, with September's overall PMI rising to 51.2 from 50.5 in August. The mixed manufacturing measures reflect persisting sluggish domestic demand and uncertainties over trade tensions with the United States. More detailed data measuring new orders and production saw month-on-month improvements. "The September PMI reads from China offered a picture that looked less like a coherent growth engine and more like a car with one cylinder firing while another misfires," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary. Companies are under pressure from price cutting amid rough competition, he said. "Factories are moving more goods, but they're being forced to do it at thinner margins, like street vendors selling more bowls of noodles at half price just to keep the crowd coming," Innes said. The latest data show China's economy is gaining momentum, with output accelerating slightly, said National Bureau of Statistics chief statistician Huo Lihui. China's official manufacturing PMIs first slipped back into contraction in April as trade friction with U.S. President Donald Trump's administration heated up after he took office. The two sides are still slowly working their way toward a broad trade agreement after exchanging threats of sky-high tariffs on each others' exports. A pause in steep U.S. tariff hikes on China has been extended until November, while a September 19 phone call between Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping offered glimmers of hope for improving relations. A truce hinges largely on a widely anticipated U.S. proposal for transferring ownership of TikTok to a U.S. company from its Chinese owner ByteDance. That would also require Beijing's approval.

**REBUILDING RITE.** *Shinto officials in the priesthood pull a sacred timber on a wheeled platform into position before unloading and moving it under the roof at the end of Mihishirogi Hoeishiki, a ceremony of the Shikinen Sengu ritual to rebuild main structures of the Jingu shrine complex for Shinto deities, at Toyoukedaijingu, also known as Geku, or the outer sanctuary of Jingu, in Ise, central Japan, after the cypress timbers were transported from Nagano prefecture's Kiso region to the city. (AP Photo/Hiro Komae)*

# Japan's most sacred Shinto shrine has been rebuilt every 20 years for more than a millennium

***By Foster Klug and Ayaka McGill***
*The Associated Press*

ISE, Japan — Deep in the forests of the Japanese Alps, Shinto priests keep watch as woodsmen dressed in ceremonial white chop their axes into two ancient cypress trees, timing their swings so that they strike from three directions.

An hour later, the head woodcutter shouts, "A tree is falling!" as one of the 300-year-old trees crashes down, the forest echoing with a deep crack. A moment after, the other cypress topples over.

The ritualistic harvesting of this sacred timber is part of a remarkable process that has happened every two decades for the last 1,300 years at Ise Jingu, Japan's most revered Shinto shrine.

Each generation, the Ise complex is knocked down and rebuilt from scratch, a massive, $390 million demolition and construction job that takes about nine years. It requires the country's finest carpenters, woodcutters, builders, and artisans to pour their hearts into the smallest details of structures that are doomed from the moment the work begins.

The buildings at Ise will only stand for about a decade before the project starts all over again, but as the priests consecrate the construction, the workers shout: "A building for a thousand years! Ten thousand years! A million years and forever!"

Those close to the shrine often recognize a deep poignancy about the way the never-ending rebuilding intertwines with their lives.

"Twenty years from now, the older generation — our grandfathers — will likely no longer be here. And those of us who are still young now will then see our grandchildren involved in the next" version of Ise, said Yosuke Kawanishi, a Shinto priest whose family company crafts miniature replicas of the shrine. "After 20 years, the shrine we are building will have deteriorated quite a bit. But instead of thinking, 'It's a shame to tear down something we worked so hard to build,' we think, 'It's been 20 years, so we want the deity to move into a beautiful, fresh, new shrine.'"

*Journalists for The Associated Press are documenting the latest version of this ancient cyclical process, which publicly began this year.*

**Rebuilding the 125 shrine buildings is a 9-year process**

This is the 63rd cycle of reconstruction. The first was documented in 690, during Empress Jitō's reign, said Noboru Okada, professor emeritus at Kogakkan University and a specialist in Japanese history and archeology.

All 125 shrine buildings will be knocked down and identical structures — as well as more than 1,500 garments and other ritual objects used in the shrine — will be rebuilt using techniques that have been painstakingly passed down over generations. There are 33 accompanying festivals and ceremonies, cumulating in a 2033 ritual that sees the presiding deity transferred to the new shrine.

Ise's inner shrine is dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu who has been enshrined for two millennia among the mountains of Mie prefecture, on the banks of the Isuzu River.

Continued on page 12



## Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 10/03

| | |
|---|---|
| Bangladesh Taka | 121.7 |
| Cambodian Riel | 4010.3 |
| China Renminbi | 7.1195 |
| Fijian Dollar | 2.256 |
| Hong Kong Dollar | 7.7811 |
| Indian Rupee | 88.735 |
| Indonesian Rupiah | 16565 |
| Iranian Rial | 42066 |
| Japanese Yen | 147.45 |
| Laos New Kip | 21697 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 4.208 |
| Nepal Rupee | 142.0 |
| Pakistani Rupee | 282.31 |
| Papua N.G. Kina | 4.21 |
| Philippine Peso | 57.917 |
| Russian Ruble | 82.24 |
| Saudi Riyal | 3.7505 |
| Singapore Dollar | 1.2887 |
| South Korean Won | 1407.6 |
| Sri Lankan Rupee | 302.6 |
| Taiwan Dollar | 30.4 |
| Thai Baht | 32.33 |
| Vietnam Dong | 26381 |