



International News

Coming out

Chelsea Clinton blooms on the political stage



Your Money

Why the smart money is betting on a big rise in the yuan's value

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Harried into hiding

J. K. Rowling's translator glad to leave the limelight



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Rich club vows to keep ship steady

G7 expects global growth slowdown

Agence France-Presse in Tokyo

Finance ministers of the leading industrial economies yesterday warned that the global economy is under growing threat from a credit crunch and the housing market slump in the United States, and pledged remedial action if needed.

The Group of Seven ministers vowed to work together closely to try to ensure the stability of their economies and markets in light of the global problems caused by a plunge in the value of assets backed by subprime mortgages issued to US homebuyers. However, they said each nation would decide its own policies. They announced no concrete new steps.

In a statement after a one-day meeting in Tokyo, the club of wealthy nations warned that "risks have become more skewed to the downside" in the United States. They pointed to a further deterioration of the US housing market, tighter credit, high oil and commodity prices and growing inflationary pressures.

"In all our economies, to varying degrees, growth is expected to slow somewhat in the short term," it said. But US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson was confident the US would avoid a recession. "I believe that we are going to keep growing," he said.

The G7 comprises Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States. Finance

A long way to fall
Souring US home loans have cost banks more than US\$100 billion

The German finance minister estimates global losses, in US dollars, could hit

\$400b

ministers from China, Indonesia, South Korea and Russia were invited to join an "outreach" dinner to discuss the impact of the US economic slowdown on emerging economies.

During those discussions, Finance Minister Xie Xuren (谢旭人) said China would continue its efforts to boost domestic consumption and in this way contribute to the health of the regional and global economy.

Bilateral meetings involving the guest nations ran into the early hours.

The US housing slump, triggered by rising mortgage defaults by subprime, or high-risk, borrowers, has triggered a credit crunch that has wreaked havoc on world financial markets. Banks, particularly in the United States and Europe, have suffered heavy losses from their exposure to securities backed by sub-

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prime mortgages. The G7 ministers urged "prompt and full disclosure" of their losses.

Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the International Monetary Fund's director general, renewed his call for countries to consider fiscal measures to boost demand. "Some countries where you have fiscal soundness and current account surpluses have room to do something," he said.

The US government has prepared a US\$150 billion package to stimulate its flagging economy, while the Federal Reserve has slashed interest rates. But analysts say other G7 members have less room to stimulate demand, particularly Japan, the world's second-largest economy, which has huge national debts and interest rates of just 0.5 per cent.

The G7 nations renewed a call for China to allow a faster appreciation of the yuan - which they see as undervalued, thereby giving an unfair advantage to mainland exporters. But they gave Beijing a slight nod on its efforts to unshackle the yuan. Their statement said "we encourage" the need for greater appreciation of the yuan, a slight softening from the "we stress" used after the ministers' last gathering in October.

Additional reporting by Reuters



Heavy going. Villagers in Wuhu (芜湖), in the eastern province of Anhui (安徽), were not going to let the worst winter weather in five decades stop their

traditional Lunar New Year celebration yesterday. Villagers marched a dragon made of wood, bamboo and coloured paper up a mountain. Photo: Reuters

Forests decimated by storms

Staff Reporter

About one-tenth of the mainland's forests have been damaged by the recent winter storms, Xinhua reported yesterday. Nearly 90 per cent of forests in the hardest-hit regions were ruined, it said.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Information Industry said the storms had caused 1.1 billion yuan in damage to the telecommunications sector. Ten million mobile-phone and fixed-line subscribers were still suffering disruption to services on Friday as a result of the bad weather.

Power had still not been restored to 24,000 base stations for mobile-

phone services. Some 16,000km of cables carrying fixed-line services have been damaged and 150,000 telegraph poles have collapsed.

The State Forestry Administration said 17.3 million hectares of forest in 18 southern provinces had been lost. It did not assign any monetary value to the losses, but its earlier report said that by the end of last month the storms had caused about 16.2 billion yuan in damage to forests.

The mainland lacks forest cover. Trees take up only 18.2 per cent, or 175 million hectares, of the land, far short of the world's average of 30.8 per cent. However, the country tries to make up the deficit with foresta-

Tourism revenue hit
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tion campaigns. In an emergency circular issued on Friday night, the forestry administration urged unaffected regions to expand seedling supply so that spring forestation would not be affected.

The administration also ordered its local branches to supervise the cleanup of fallen trees for fear that people might take advantage of the mess by indiscriminately chopping down trees and thus make the losses worse, Xinhua said.

Forestry administration spokesman Cao Qingyao warned that fallen trees could also pose a big fire hazard

when the weather becomes warmer and the timber dries out.

"It is urgent to ensure water and power supply and telecommunications services in forest regions," the circular said.

The administration, and eight other cabinet-level agencies and ministries, published a joint pamphlet listing practical techniques to facilitate reconstruction.

Blizzards across central, southern and eastern provinces - the worst in five decades - cut power to 169 counties, killed scores of people and caused unprecedented havoc for tens of millions of people travelling ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday.

'World's biggest' UFO convention descending on HK

Barclay Crawford

Non-believers, you have been warned. The world's biggest UFO conference is set to be held in the city next year.

Hong Kong alienophiles and their global brethren who believe we are not alone will come together at a yet-to-be confirmed venue on November 9, 2009 for the summit and exhibition.

Organiser Neil Gould - who claims to have first been contacted by aliens as a nine-year-old, said there was no cosmic significance to the date. However, he said Hong Kong had always been a popular place for extraterrestrial visitors, and expects the conference to attract thousands

of experts and curious citizens from across planet Earth.

The Hong Kong Observatory has been logging reports of UFO sightings since 1984 and receives as many as 40 such reports a year. One of the most famous alleged alien encounters in the city occurred in 1987, when callers flooded the Observatory with reports of a spaceship the size of six football pitches hovering over the Wah Fu Estate in Aberdeen.

Mr Gould said the study of UFOs and extraterrestrial life is a serious academic pursuit these days, known as exopolitics. The conference would present the latest research from academics as well as photographs, video footage and other evidence of the existence of aliens.



A still from an infrared Mexican air force video of seven bright objects flying over eastern Mexico in 2004.

"This planet is being engaged by extraterrestrials, there is no doubt about it, and we want to show the evidence to Hong Kong and the people of the world," he said.

"One of the focuses of the confer-

ence will be to demand the US intelligence services open up their UFO files. There is a vast conspiracy by the industrial-military complex to hide some of what they have learned, such as vacuum energy and an anti-gravity flying device. Imagine how this could help Hong Kong and the world.

"There is qualitative and quantitative validation and verification of the fact aliens and UFOs exist."

Mr Gould runs a website promoting "exopolitics awareness" in Hong Kong and intends to release a book on the conspiracy-laced topic this year.

The conference next year will be hosted by the Hong Kong UFO Club, which claims to have 500 members, many of whom claim to have seen an

alien spacecraft or to have had experiences with aliens.

The club's co-founder and chairwoman, Moon Fong Chung-moon, said negotiations were still in the early stages but they expected next year's event to attract top experts from around the world. The event would be the biggest of its kind ever held, Ms Fong and Mr Gould claimed.

Ms Fong said club members recorded sightings of UFOs in and around Hong Kong every month.

"We have been talking about having a conference like this in Hong Kong for a decade," she said.

They hoped to attract "government whistle-blowers" from the mainland to reveal what is known about UFOs across the border.

InsideNews

National

Picture scandal touches tycoon

More pictures have surfaced in the obscene photo scandal, among them shots purported to be of Emperor Group tycoon Albert Yeung Sau-shing's niece Vincy Yeung Wing-ching, Ms Yeung - the girlfriend of singer-actor Edison Chen Koon-hei - claimed on Friday that she was not the young woman photographed in the shower in the latest batch of more than 100 pictures to be uploaded to the Web. Full report Page 2

National

Bar bosses plan Wan Chai cleanup

Worried bar and restaurant owners in Wan Chai have begun moves to clean up the area's reputation amid fears that a cutthroat alcohol price war and bad publicity from high-profile drug-related deaths are threatening its future. They are also concerned that financial inducements are being offered to prostitutes to drink in bars to lure customers. Others say a trend of rowdy, and sometimes violent, behaviour can only be tackled by a more visible police presence. Full report Page 4

International

Botox alert after children die

America's Food and Drug Administration issues a warning against the popular wrinkle treatment Botox and its competitor Myobloc after children given the drugs for muscle spasms died. The treatment uses botulinum toxin in minute doses to paralyse targeted muscles. The FDA said people receiving the treatment should seek medical help if they experience any side effects, as the toxin can affect muscles used for breathing and swallowing. Full report Page 6

Sport

Platini red card for league plan

Uefa president Michel Platini says the English Premier League's plan to consider staging league matches overseas is nonsense. The former France playmaker described the proposal as a joke, saying he had laughed because it would never be accepted by Fifa, the fans or the national associations. Full report Sport Page 1

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To our readers

Post Magazine is taking a holiday but will be back next Sunday. For the week's TV listings, see our special liftout.

Looking to invest in real estate? Our property hot spots magazine, Ultimate Homes, is free online.

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