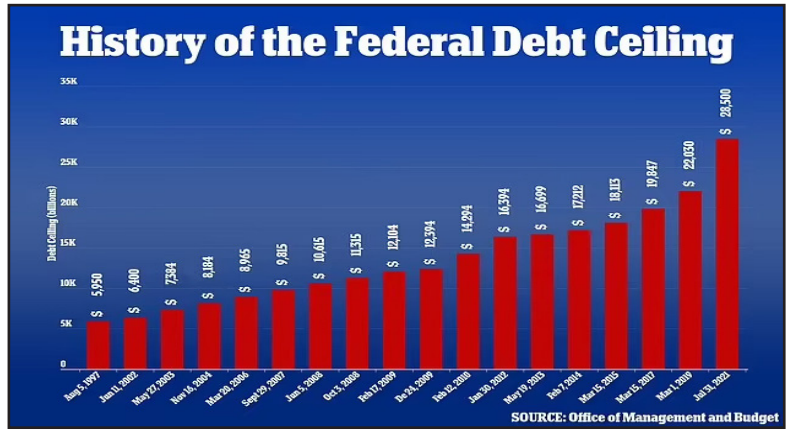


# China Fires Back at Yellen, Tells U.S. to ‘Cope’ With Its Own Debt



*A new report claims that a U.S. default on federal debt would be ‘catastrophic to the economy, as Republicans and Democrats in Congress try to reach a deal.*

BEIJING (Reuters) - After U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen called China a “barrier” to debt reform in Africa this week, Chinese officials in Zambia had a pointed response - get your own house in order.

The Chinese Embassy in Zambia said on its website “the biggest contribution that the U.S. can make to the debt issues outside the country is to act on responsible monetary policies, cope with its own debt problem, and stop sabotaging other sovereign countries’ active efforts to solve their debt

issues.”

Republicans in the House of Representatives are using a risky, unusual threat to refuse to vote in a new debt ceiling, a figure that reflects money already spent and now owed by the government, to pressure the Biden administration and Democrats to cut spending programs. So far, the Biden White House is refusing to negotiate, counting on hardline Republicans to step back under pressure from businesses, investors and moderates.

U.S. national debt is about

\$31 trillion, a figure that has skyrocketed since 2000’s \$5.6 trillion thanks in part to increased spending for an aging population, outlays for Iraq and Afghanistan wars, COVID-19 programs and tax cuts that trimmed revenues.

Yellen and International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva arrived separately in Zambia Sunday to highlight the need for debt reform in Africa.

Zambia defaulted on its debt in 2020 and has made little progress to restructure it with Chinese and private creditors to date, a situation that has helped pushed citizens into poverty.

The world’s poorest countries faced \$35 billion in debt-service payments to official and private-sector creditors in 2022, more than 40% of which was due to China, the World Bank said.

The U.S. Federal Reserve’s rate increases, designed to tame inflation at home, and the appreciating U.S. dollar have added to African countries’ debt service burden, the African Development Bank said last week.

## Peru Protesters Tear-Gassed After President Calls for Truce



Police fire tear gas at anti-government protesters in downtown Lima.

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Thousands of protesters took to the streets of Peru’s capital and were met with volleys of tear gas and pellets amid clashes with security forces just hours after President Dina Boluarte called for a “truce” in almost two months of protests.

The antigovernment protest Tuesday was the largest – and most violent — since last Thursday, when large groups of people, many from remote Andean regions, descended on the capital to demand Boluarte’s resignation, immediate elections and the dissolution of Congress.

Before last week, most of the large antigovernment protests that followed the ouster of President Pedro Castillo took place in remote regions of Peru,

largely in the country’s south, exposing deep division between residents of the capital and the long-neglected countryside.

The crisis that has sparked Peru’s worst political violence in more than two decades began when Castillo, Peru’s first leader from a rural Andean background, tried to short-circuit the third impeachment proceeding of his young administration by ordering Congress dissolved on Dec. 7. Lawmakers impeached him instead, the national police arrested him before he could find sanctuary and Boluarte, who was his vice president, was sworn in.

Since then, 56 people have died amid the unrest involving Castillo’s supporters, 45 of whom died in direct clashes

with security forces, according to Peru’s ombudsman. None of the deaths have been in Lima.

On Tuesday, police fired round after round of tear gas as they blocked the passage of protesters, who seemed more organized than before. The smell of tear gas permeated the air and could be felt even a block away as people leaving work suddenly had to cover their faces to try to diminish the sting.

“Murderers,” yelled the protesters, some of whom threw rocks at the police.

Even after most of the protesters had left, police continued firing tear gas to disperse small groups of people in a plaza in front of the country’s Supreme Court.

Boluarte had earlier called for a truce and blamed protesters for the political violence that has engulfed the country, claiming in a news conference that illegal miners, drug traffickers and smugglers formed a “paramilitary force” to seek chaos for political gain. She said numerous road blockades across the country and damage to infrastructure have cost the country more than \$1 billion in lost production.

Human rights advocates say they are dismayed by the lack of international outcry from the regional and global community and are calling for condemnation of the state violence unleashed since Castillo’s impeachment.

## North Korea Locks Down Capital City Over ‘Respiratory Illness’

SEOUL (Reuters) - Authorities in the North Korean capital Pyongyang have ordered a five-day lockdown due to rising cases of an unspecified respiratory illness, Seoul-based NK News reported on Wednesday, citing a government notice.

The notice did not mention COVID-19, but said that residents in the city are required to stay in their homes through the end of Sunday and must submit to temperature checks multiple times each day, according to NK News, which monitors North Korea.

On Tuesday, the website reported that Pyongyang

residents were appeared to be stocking up on goods in anticipation of stricter measures. It is unclear if other areas of the country have imposed new lockdowns.

North Korea acknowledged its first COVID-19 outbreak last year, but by August had declared victory over the virus.

On Tuesday, state news agency KCNA said the city of Kaesong, near the border with South Korea, had intensified public communication campaigns “so that all the working people observe anti-epidemic regulations voluntarily in their work and life.”

## UK Says 200 Asylum-Seeking Children Missing, Some Aged Under 16



Half of all asylum seekers that arrive in the UK are women and children according to Together with Refugees.

LONDON (Reuters) - Two hundred asylum-seeking children, including some aged under 16, are missing from temporary hotel accommodation in Britain, the government said, raising new questions over ministers’ handling of migrant arrivals.

Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick told lawmakers that more than 200 children and teenagers under 18 were missing from government-approved accommodation. He said most were teenage boys from Albania.

Labour Party lawmaker Peter Kyle said 76 children had vanished from a hotel in the south coast seaside town of Brighton, one of several around the country where unaccompanied children are housed temporarily.

The Observer newspaper this week cited child protection sources and an unidentified whistleblower working for a government contractor as saying dozens of youngsters had been abducted off the street outside a Brighton hotel and bundled into cars.

“The uncomfortable truth for us is if one child who was related to one of us in this room went missing, the world would stop,” Kyle said in the House of Commons. “But in the community I represent a child has gone missing, then five went missing, then a dozen went missing, then 50 went missing and currently today 76 are missing and nothing is happening.”

Labour’s immigration spokeswoman, Yvette Cooper, accused the government of “a total dereliction of duty that is putting children at risk.”

Rachel de Souza, the children’s commissioner for England, said the reports of children disappearing from hotels “have highlighted, once again, the vulnerability of these children, who are in limbo, with a concerted group of people determined to exploit them.”

“I am concerned for the safety of this group of children whose vulnerability is exacerbated by not speaking English, many of whom have no support network and are not aware of their rights,” she said in a letter to the Home Office.

Jenrick said security guards, nurses and social workers were all based at hotels to ensure children were safe.

But he acknowledged that “we’ve no power to detain unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in these settings and we know some do go missing.”

“Many of those who have gone missing are subsequently traced and located,” he said.

Jenrick said he had not seen evidence of children being abducted off the street but promised to investigate further.

“I’m not going to let the matter drop,” he said.

The government has pledged to stop the risky journeys, so far without success.

## Heavy Snow Causes Havoc in Japan as Cold Snap Sweeps Through Asia



Vehicles are stuck due to heavy snowfall and snowplow cars are seen on a highway in Koga, Shiga prefecture, Japan in this photo taken by Kyodo on January 25, 2023.

TOKYO (Reuters) - Heavy snow blanketed wide swathes of Japan on Wednesday, snarling traffic, forcing hundreds of flight cancellations, disrupting train travel and leaving at least one person dead.

An unusually cold weather front and extreme low pressure systems set snow falling and strong winds blowing across Japan from Tuesday after causing havoc in other Asia countries earlier this week.

At least 157 people died in freezing temperatures in Afghanistan earlier this week, according to media reports, while the temperature in Mohe, China’s northernmost city, dropped to a record -53 degrees Celsius (-63.4 degrees Fahrenheit) on Sunday.

In South Korea, the country’s resort island Jeju cancelled nearly 500 flights in and out of its airport on Tuesday amid harsh winter weather.

Japan reported that snow was particularly heavy on the side of the country facing South Korea, with the city of Maniwa hit with a record 93 cm (36 inches) in just 24 hours.

One person died as a result of the

storm and two other deaths were being investigated as related to the storm as of Wednesday morning, chief cabinet secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told a news conference. No further details were immediately available.

Domestic airlines including ANA and Japan Airlines cancelled 450 flights, while 490 highway areas were blocked and 57 railway services including a high-speed rail service were suspended nationwide, the transport ministry said.

Toyota Motor Corp said it was suspending the second shift at all 14 factories in Japan on Wednesday due to disruption from the heavy snowfall around the country.

Some 3,000 people were stranded at two train stations in the western city of Kyoto after snow and high winds forced service to be suspended on Tuesday. Some passengers were forced to sleep on the floor at Kyoto’s main station. Others were stuck on at least 15 trains between stations, in some cases from late on Tuesday to the early hours of Wednesday.

The bitter weather is expected to continue through Thursday.

## News in Brief

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Documents marked as classified were discovered at former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence’s Indiana home last week, and he has turned those classified records over to the FBI, his attorney said in letters seen by Reuters.

The attorney, Greg Jacob, sent a letter to the National Archives on Jan. 18 notifying them of the documents and in a separate letter on Jan. 22 notified the Archives that the FBI came to the former vice president’s home to collect them. The discovery puts Pence in the company of his former boss, former president Donald Trump, and President Joe Biden after documents with classified markings were found at their residences.

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JOHANNESBURG (Al-Jazeera) - Hundreds of people have taken to the streets of Johannesburg to protest a prolonged energy crisis that has caused record power cuts in South Africa. The demonstrators gathered on Wednesday in the centre of the financial capital of Africa’s most industrialized nation to march on the headquarters of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party. Most were dressed in blue, the color of the main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, which organized the rally. Scheduled blackouts, known as load shedding, have burdened South Africa for years as the state-owned energy firm Eskom has failed to keep pace with demand and maintain its ageing coal power infrastructure.

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SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Ships searching in wind-whipped waters between South Korea and Japan have picked up at least 14 of the 22 crew members from a cargo vessel that sank early Wednesday, killing at least two, officials said. South Korean officials said nine of those rescued remain unconscious, but they did not immediately confirm any deaths. Ten crew members were later airlifted to Nagasaki in southern Japan for treatment, but two of them were confirmed dead on arrival, Japanese officials said.

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WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Chris Hipkins was sworn in Wednesday as New Zealand’s 41st prime minister, following the unexpected resignation last week of Jacinda Ardern. Hipkins, 44, has promised a back-to-basics approach focusing on the economy and what he described as the “pandemic of inflation.” He will have less than nine months before contesting a tough general election, with opinion polls indicating his Labour Party is trailing its conservative opposition.

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MUMBAI (Reuters) - India has invited Pakistan’s foreign minister to a meeting of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO) that it is hosting in May, Indian media reported on Wednesday, signaling a possible thaw in relations between the nuclear-armed rivals. The invitation came days after Pakistani Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif called for talks with India over all outstanding issues, including the disputed Kashmir region. Just a month ago, there were street protests in India over comments Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari made about Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of United Nations Security Council meeting. India called Zardari’s comments “uncivilized.”