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# USA OUTLOOK

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## Atmospheric rivers boosts California's hydropower supplies

A pair of atmospheric rivers that drenched California in recent weeks will bolster the state's hydropower systems by filling reservoirs and building up snowpack levels after a prolong drought cut supply, the state's Department of Water Resources (DWR) data showed.

As of Saturday, the state's reservoir storage was at 118% of its historical average, according to the DWR. In northern California, Lake Oroville, its largest reservoir, was at 78% capacity.

Statewide, snowpack, which melts and fills up water reservoirs during the spring, climbed to 76% of historical average as a result of the storms akin to rivers in the sky that dump massive amounts of rain, opens new tab, which occurred between Feb. 4 and Feb. 7. That represented a hike of more than 20% from Jan. 30.

Reservoir and snowpack and levels are good indicators of future hydroelectricity supplies, however, other water uses such as agriculture, wildlife and industrial operations are usually prioritized over electricity generation.

► Source:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/atmospheric-rivers-boosts-californias-hydropower-supplies-2024-02-12/>

## Rising rents push US inflation higher; rate cuts still expected in 2024

U.S. consumer prices rose more than expected in January amid a surge in the cost of rental housing, but the pick-up in inflation did not change expectations the Federal Reserve will start cutting interest rates in the first half of this year.

The increase in prices reported by the Labor Department on Tuesday was the largest in four months and occurred against the backdrop of labor market strength and economic resilience. But January is typically a strong month for inflation readings as businesses push through prices increases at the start of the year, which some economists believed were not completely addressed by the model used by the government to strip out seasonal fluctuations from the data.

They also pointed out that not all the drivers of inflation last month would go into the calculation of the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price indexes, the measures tracked by the U.S. central bank to gauge progress toward its 2% inflation target.



► Source:

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/us/us-consumer-prices-rise-more-than-expected-january-2024-02-13/>



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## US is '18 months or so' away from finding bird flu vaccine, says agriculture secretary

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is "18 months or so" away from identifying a vaccine for the current strain of bird flu and is developing a process to distribute it, said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on Wednesday.

USDA has found bird flu in 8 commercial flocks and 14 backyard flocks so far this year, affecting 530,000 poultry, according to agency data.

More than 81 million U.S. poultry and aquatic birds have been killed by avian flu across 47 states since January 2022, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We are probably 18 months or so away from being able to identify a vaccine that would be effective for this particular (avian flu) that we're dealing with now," Vilsack said at a Congressional hearing.

Source:

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-is-18-months-or-so-away-finding-bird-flu-vaccine-says-agriculture-secretary-2024-02-14/>

## Private US moon lander launched half century after last Apollo lunar mission

A moon lander built by Houston-based aerospace company Intuitive Machines was launched from Florida early on Thursday on a mission to conduct the first U.S. lunar touchdown in more than a half century and the first by a privately owned spacecraft.

The company's Nova-C lander, dubbed Odysseus, lifted off shortly after 1 a.m. EST (0600 GMT) atop a two-stage Falcon 9 rocket flown by Elon Musk's SpaceX from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral.

A live NASA-SpaceX online video feed showed the two-stage, 25-story rocket roaring off the launch pad and streaking into the dark sky over Florida's Atlantic coast, trailed by a fiery yellowish plume of exhaust.



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Source:

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/space/private-us-moon-lander-launched-half-century-after-last-apollo-lunar-mission-2024-02-15/>



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## US agency lacked background checks for some sponsors of migrant children, watchdog says

A U.S. agency responsible for the care of unaccompanied migrant children did not have proof it fully vetted U.S. sponsors for some minors during a period of high illegal crossings from Mexico in 2021, a government report released on Thursday said.

The report, opens new tab, issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services inspector general, found 16% of child case files in March and April 2021 lacked documentation of sponsor background checks by the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement. In 19% of cases where children were released to sponsors pending FBI or state checks, the case files were never updated with results, the watchdog found.

The watchdog report raises questions about the government's ability to vet sponsors but investigators did not find that children were subjected to harm.

"We don't have evidence that these gaps resulted in unsafe placements for the children in our sample, but they do create vulnerabilities which could increase children's risk of being released to unsafe sponsors in the future," said Haley Lubeck, the lead analyst for the report.

Source:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-agency-lacked-background-checks-some-sponsors-migrant-children-watchdog-says-2024-02-15/>