Christine Lagarde named IMF new chief

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) officially selected France’s Christine Lagarde as its new chief, after former managing director Dominique Strauss-Kahn stepped down in the midst of a sex scandal. She started a five-year term on July 5.

Mexico’s central bank chief Agustín Carstens challenged Lagarde for the position. Yet, the IMF’s executive board used its consensus approach to settle on the former French finance minister. Lagarde is the first female to be named IMF chief since the institution’s inception in 1944.

After her appointment, Lagarde said she was “deeply honored” to have been chosen for the position. French President Nicolas Sarkozy called the news “a victory for France.” Carstens congratulated Lagarde on her win, saying “I hope that under Ms. Lagarde’s direction, the IMF will make meaningful progress in strengthening the governance of the institution, so as to assure its legitimacy, cohesiveness, and ultimately, its effectiveness.”

One of the challenges Lagarde immediately faces will be to head off a Greek default that could perpetuate an international crisis. She pressed Greece to move quickly to push through austerity measures that the IMF and the European Union (EU) say are a prerequisite for further aid.
Hiraizumi and Ogasawara Islands listed as World Heritage sites

In June, the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated Iwate Prefecture’s Hiraizumi and Tokyo’s Ogasawara Islands as World Heritage sites. As of July 25, 16 properties in Japan are on the UNESCO World Heritage List. These 16 properties include both cultural and natural listings.

Hiraizumi—Temples, Gardens and Archaeological Sites Representing the Buddhist Pure Land—comprises five sites, created by the Oshu Fujiwara clan in the latter part of the Heian Period (794-1185). The sites include Chuson-ji temple known for its golden hall covered with gold leaf both inside and out, Mount Kinkeisan and others.

The registration of Hiraizumi is expected to boost tourism in the Tohoku region, which was devastated by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. “From the era of wars and upheaval, Hiraizumi has historically been at the center of revival in Tohoku, and it will become a symbol of rebirth from the latest disaster,” Iwate Governor Takuya Tasso said.

A habitat of rare animals and plants, the Ogasawara Islands is a chain of more than 30 islands about 1,000 kilometers south of Tokyo. Often dubbed the “Galapagos of the Orient,” it is rich in natural assets, which include a critically endangered bat called a Bonin Flying Fox.
Astronaut Furukawa makes his childhood dream come true

For Japanese astronaut Satoshi Furukawa, flying into space like TV superhero Ultra Seven was a childhood dream. After waiting 12 years, his dream came true when the Soyuz spacecraft carrying him and two others lifted off from Kazakhstan in June, bound for the International Space Station.

Born in Yokohama in 1964, Furukawa trained as a medical doctor in Tokyo and worked in hospitals until 1999 when he began training to become an astronaut. As the shuttle program had fallen far behind schedule for reasons including the Challenger and Columbia incidents, he had to wait 12 years until the launch on June 8 for his first trip into space.

Together with Sergei Volkov from Russia and Michael Fossum from the United States, Furukawa is scheduled to stay at the International Space Station for about half a year. So far, space travel has made him dizzy. Furukawa tweeted, “Especially when I move my head suddenly, I really feel sick. My head feels heavy. Help!”

On the International Space Station, Furukawa plans to harvest cucumbers. It is part of an experiment to assess how gravity affects food cultivation. “We wish we were able to eat the cucumbers, but we have not been allowed,” he said.
Haruki Murakami slams Japan’s nuclear policy

Japanese popular novelist Haruki Murakami criticized his country’s nuclear policy in his acceptance speech at the 2011 International Catalunya Prize ceremony in Barcelona, Spain. He described the ongoing situation at the Fukushima Daichi Nuclear Power Station as “a mistake committed by our very own hands.”

Known for his best-sellers, such as *Norwegian Wood* and *1Q84*, Murakami received the International Catalunya Prize in June. Established in 1989, the prize is given annually by the Autonomous Government of Catalonia to individuals whose creative work has made a significant contribution to the development of cultural, scientific and human values. The list of former recipients includes Myanmar’s pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss.

Murakami reportedly said that the situation in Fukushima is the second major nuclear detriment in Japan’s history after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Japanese people should have said “no” to nuclear power after having learnt through the sacrifice of atomic bomb victims just how badly radiation leaves scars on the world and human wellbeing, he added.

The novelist also hinted at donating the 80,000 euro prize money to support the victims of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami as well as those affected by the nuclear crisis.
Actor Peter Falk remembered for portrayal of Columbo

Best known for his role as Lieutenant Columbo, American actor Peter Falk died in Beverly Hills on June 23. He was 83. He reportedly suffered from Alzheimer’s disease.

Born on September 16, 1927 in New York City, Falk achieved a distinguished career as a stage and screen actor. He won a Tony Award for his Broadway performance in Neil Simon’s *The Prisoner of Second Avenue* in 1972. Also, he received Oscar nominations for the gangster film *Murder, Inc.* in 1960 and Frank Capra’s comedy *Pocketful of Miracles* in 1961.

Yet, for most of his fans, Falk remains cigar-chomping Columbo on the long-running TV series. He made his debut as Columbo in 1968 in the television movie *Prescription: Murder*. The actor continued to play the detective over 13 seasons of television movies and won four Emmys for his role.

Columbo’s famous catchphrase “Oh, just one more thing,” which often preceded him cornering a criminal with an inescapable line of questioning, is known to millions worldwide.

“He looks like a flood victim,” Falk once said of his character with a crumpled trench coat. “You feel sorry for him. He appears to be seeing nothing, but he’s seeing everything.”

*All information is subject to change without notice.*