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FEATURE: Taipei County looks to rebuild site of UFO houses

By Jimmy Chuang / STAFF REPORTER   

Long a curiosity for people driving along the north coast between Tamsui and Keelung are known locally — a group of freakish looking, brightly colored, run-down buildings become a holiday village — made the headlines recently following the Taipei County demolish them.

Demolition work began on Dec. 29.

“We received an order to tear them down and we plan to finish the job within a month happen to the site afterwards,” said a site supervisor, who wished to remain anonymous.



The UFO houses in Taipei County’s Sanjhih Township are pictured shortly on Dec. 29.

PHOTO: JIMMY CHUANG, TAIPEI TIMES

The UFO houses are situated near the 17km marker of the Tamsui-Jinshan Road (P These odd, circular, frisbee-shaped houses remind many people of UFOs, hence the down, the site was often used as a location for photographers because of its unusual coastal setting.

Taipei County Public Works Bureau Director Lee Shu-chuan (李書煇) said that construction was never finished and the site has been abandoned for nearly 30 years. The government order its demolition as it was owned by the Hung Kuo Group. Hung Kuo’s financial problems site’s ownership fall into the hands of three different banks.

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"We eventually made a deal with the group and decided to tear it down. Hung Kuo and the Government will work together to rebuild the site, including the beach front, into a scenic resort for tourists," Lee said.

One of the designers behind the UFO houses spoke exclusively to the Taipei Times. His name, said that there were lots of rumors about the site, but most of them were false.

"First of all, the site is definitely not haunted," Lin said, in reference to oft-heard rumors of seen ghosts near the complex or the high number of unexplained traffic accidents on the road.

There were also rumors that more than 20,000 skeletons were discovered at the site when construction began and that it was the scene of several murders.

Lin said that construction of the UFOs began in 1978.

"It is traditional in the construction business to pay your respects to any spirits at the site when you start work. It had nothing to do with the ghost stories," Lin said.

Lin, now a freelance interior designer, was working as head of the design department for a subcontractor for Hung Kuo, back in 1989.

Lin said that the original idea for the UFOs came from Sanjhih Township (三芝) plastic entrepreneur Chou Wen-chou. The first construction license was issued in 1978 and the idea for the design came from an architect from Finland (www.arcspace.com/books/tomorrows_house/), but construction of the UFOs when Chou went bankrupt.

Lin said that Hung Kuo had just started running Taipei's Hilton Hotel in 1989 and was in a tight financial business. When Tsai Chin-hsien (蔡欽賢), the president of a local beer house in Tamsui, proposed continuing with the construction of the UFOs, Hung Kuo offered to back it with 10 million and became the manager of the project.

"They planned to make the compound into a large beer house and resort," Lin said. "Hung Kuo decided to hire King Interior Design Co as the subcontractor and that was when I began the project."

Lin said that after taking over the project, he found that each UFO consisted of a reinforced concrete structure covered by fiber reinforced plastic. Earthquakes could damage such a construction and there was no way to fix such problems.

"We just wanted to finish the construction as soon as possible so we did not redesign the half-completed houses," Lin said.

He said construction was halted at the end of 1989 because Hung Kuo and Haichungtien (海墘) failed to reach an agreement.

"Haichungtien was a local business, but Hung Kuo wanted to make the site into an industrial park. Unfortunately, the two ideas just did not fit together," Lin said.

In 1995, Hung Kuo used the land to get loans from three banks because of financial problems. The site was left in its present state.

But the site will not lay derelict for much longer, it seems.

The Taipei County Government, according to Tourism and Travel Bureau Director Chin, has clear plans for the reconstruction of the site.

“With help from the Sanjhih Township Administration Office, we are planning to turn the site into a major attraction by constructing hotels, beach facilities and more,” Chin said.

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University slammed over simplified Chinese

2025-01-03

National Kaohsiung University of Science and Technology (NKUST) yesterday promised it will increase oversight of use of Chinese in course materials, following a social media outcry over the use of simplified Chinese characters being used, including in a final exam. People on Threads wrote that simplified Chinese characters were used on a final exam and in a textbook for a translation course at the university, while the business card of a professor bore the words: “Taiwan Province, China.” Photographs of the exam, the textbook and the business card were posted with the comment. The professor said that other members of the faculty did not see

By Hsu Li-chuan, Ko Yu-hao and Lery Hiciano

Chinese ship cuts cable near Keelung Harbor

The Coast Guard Administration (CGA) and Chunghwa Telecom yesterday confirmed that a Chinese ship had cut an international undersea cable near Keelung Harbor. The ship, the Shunxin-39, a freighter registered in Cameroon. Chunghwa Telecom said the cable had its own backup equipment and the incident would not affect telecommunications within Taiwan. The CGA said it dispatched a patrol boat under its first fleet after receiving word of the incident and located the Shunxin-39 7 nautical miles (13km) north of Yehliu (野柳) at about 4:40pm on Friday. The CGA demanded that the Shunxin-39 return to seas closer to Keelung Harbor for investigation over the

By Fang Wei-li and Jake Chung

Taipei blames TVBS for new-year screen mishap

2025-01-02

The Taipei City Government yesterday said contractors organizing its New Year’s Eve celebration would be held responsible after a jumbo screen played a Beijing-ran television channel near the event’s end. An image showing China Central Television (CCTV) Channel 3 being displayed on the screen was posted on the social media platform Threads, sparking an outcry on the Internet over Beijing’s political infiltration of the municipal government. A Taipei Department of Information and Tourism spokesman said event workers had made a “grave mistake” and that the Television Broadcast Satellite (TVBS) group had the contract to operate the screens. The city would apply contractual penalties on TVBS

By Tsai Ssu-pei, Tsai Yun-jung and Jonathan Chin

Board game on Taiwan invasion goes on sale

2024-12-31


A new board game set against the backdrop of armed conflict around Taiwan is to be released this month, amid renewed threats from Beijing, inviting players to participate in an imaginary Chinese invasion 20 years from now. China has ramped up military activity close to Taiwan in the past few years, including massing naval forces around the nation. The game, titled 2045, tasks players with navigating the troubles of war using colorful action cards and role-playing as characters involved in military operations 10 days before a fictional Chinese invasion of Taiwan. That includes members of the Chinese military, forces, Chinese sleeper agents and pro-China politicians

By Fabian Hamacher and Angie Teo



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