



QATAR CURLERS. Hanan Al Boinin of Qatar, center, throws a stone during a round-robin curling match against Japan at the Asian Winter Games in Sapporo, on the northern island of Hokkaido. For the Qatar women's curling team, just about everything is a new experience. The fledgling curlers are doing their best to get up to speed in the sport, but it's a huge challenge when one lives in a desert. (AP Photo/Shuji Kajiyama)

Desert to ice: Qatar takes on curling at Asian Winter Games

By Jim Armstrong
AP Sports Writer

SAPPORO, Japan — For the Qatar women's curling team, just about everything is a new experience.

Curling, a sport that has links with medieval Scotland and is more suited to the Canadian prairies, has taken a small foothold in the Middle East.

Just how new are Qatar's players to curling? Some of them in Japan for the Asian Winter Games in Sapporo had never experienced snow before.

The fledgling curlers have done their best to get up to speed, but it's a huge challenge when one lives in a desert. The Qatari women can train only one day a week on ice that is not up to international standards.

It's a tough road ahead. Qatar lost 1-17 to Japan in a preliminary round game at Sapporo Curling Stadium.

"For now, we are training more to get experience and know more about the game and its strategies," said skip Maryam Binali, who has been throwing stones for just 11 months.

"We learned a lot from the Japanese team today because they are more experienced but hopefully we will do well."

University student Binali said she likes

the sense of teamwork.

Players in Qatar train on a public rink shared by figure skaters and ice hockey players. There are only two ice rinks in Doha so ice time comes at a premium.

Soccer is the most popular sport in Qatar but the country is looking to broaden its sporting horizons — even to winter sports.

The Qatari women's team is coached by Hungarian Lajos Belleli, who is a seven-time Hungarian champion.

"(Curling) is totally new and strange, a winter sport in one of the hottest countries in the world," Belleli said. "Curling is totally new there so I have to convince people that this will be good for them, which is not easy but a nice challenge."

So far there are just seven female players — and 15 male curlers — in Qatar, which is the only country in the Middle East that has joined the World Curling Federation.

Qatar could take inspiration from Japan, a country that has rapidly developed in the sport. Japan's women's team is ranked sixth and won a silver medal in the 2016 world championships.

"We can play the sport anywhere and want to make it a truly global sport," said Kate Caithness, president of the World Curling Federation.

Japan Crown Prince Naruhito vows to follow father's footsteps

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito marked his 57th birthday with a pledge to follow in his father's footsteps as a symbol of the nation if his father's wish to abdicate is realized.

Naruhito is first in line to Japan's Chrysanthemum throne and would succeed Emperor Akihito, now 83 years old.

Akihito expressed last August his apparent wish to abdicate, citing concerns his age and health may start limiting his ability to fulfill his duties. The government is currently discussing a special law to allow Akihito to step down.

"I would like to continue to pray for, always stand by, and share joys and sorrows with the people," Naruhito said in a birthday message.

Akihito would be the first to abdicate since Emperor Kokaku 200 years ago. Media reports have said officials are eyeing an abdication at the end of 2018, when Akihito turns 85 and his reign is in its 30th year.

A government panel looking into the abdication has avoided some of the more heated issues, such as whether women should be allowed in the current male-only succession amid concerns about a shortage of successors to the throne.



CHRYSANTHEMUM CONTINUITY. Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito, center, poses for a photo with Crown Princess Masako, left, and their daughter, Princess Aiko, at Togu Palace in Tokyo. Naruhito celebrated his 57th birthday last month. (Photo courtesy of the Imperial Household Agency of Japan via AP)

Naruhito said he is open to discussing ways to have the imperial succession fit the modern era.

"The role of the imperial family changes from one era to another, as a new era brings in a fresh breeze," he said.

Akihito has two sons, but only one of his four grandchildren is male.

Some experts say Akihito's possible abdication is a wakeup call to the larger issues of aging and a shortage of successors in Japan's 2,000-year-old monarchy — issues that reflect concerns about the country's aging and declining population.

Fans in Japan rush to buy Murakami book with esoteric title

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Fans of Haruki Murakami rushed to Japanese bookstores in late February to buy his latest work with an esoteric title.

Kishidancho Goroshi, or "Killing Commendatore," is a two-part story about a 36-year-old portrait painter and what happens after his wife divorces him and he moves into an old house on a mountainside west of Tokyo. Mysterious events occur, including meeting a neighbor and finding the painting that shares the book's title.

Murakami has described it as a very strange story.

Devoted fans of the internationally acclaimed and best-selling writer lined up outside stores on the eve of the book launch.

Shinchosha Publishing Co. said overseas availability is not yet known and no details are known about translations.

Murakami, 68, usually shies away from the limelight, although he has spoken out on issues such as world peace and nuclear energy.

He began writing while running a jazz bar in Tokyo after finishing college. His 1987 romantic novel *Norwegian Wood* was his first best-seller, establishing him as a young literary star.

The preceding novel, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, was released in Japan in 2013, and a collection of short stories, *Men Without Women*, was published in 2014. His million-seller *1Q84* in 2009 was one of his longest novels, with the Japanese edition coming out in three volumes.



KISHIDANCHO GOROSHI. People buy copies of the new book written by Haruki Murakami at a bookstore in Tokyo shortly after midnight on February 24, 2017. Murakami's new book, *Kishidancho Goroshi*, or "Killing Commendatore," is a two-part story about a 36-year-old portrait painter and what happens after his wife divorces him and he moves into an old house on a mountainside west of Tokyo. (Fumine Tsutabayashi/Kyodo News)

The book launch coincided with the "Premium Friday" government initiative to encourage office workers to leave early for a longer weekend.

Unfortunately, fans in Japan's northern main island of Hokkaido had to wait to buy their books because a freight train carrying the shipment was involved in an accident, Shinchosha said.

The publisher said 1.3 million copies were planned for first-edition prints, a huge number for Japanese literature that usually comes in the several thousands.

2016 Exemplary Community Volunteer Award Recipient: Salem Multicultural Institute & World Beat Festival



The Salem Multicultural Institute (SMI) was founded in 1997 by two moms with young daughters who wished to respond to growing concern about racial tensions in Salem, Oregon. The organization, which is assisted by 1,000 volunteers, seeks to collaborate with public and private organizations to promote harmony and understanding through innovative, educational cultural programs and activities. In 1998, SMI hosted its first World Beat Festival (WBF), an annual celebration of the many cultures that are found in Oregon, and in 2006, the organization opened the World Beat Gallery at the Reed Opera House, which hosts cultural exhibits. SMI's programs serve more than 25,000 people of all ethnic backgrounds. Past festivals have welcomed community members representing more than 65 cultures, and the gallery's educational exhibits highlight many cultures. In addition, the organization's volunteers have served the community in areas such as of cultural programming, referrals, and committee work. To learn more, visit <www.worldbeatfestival.org>.

The Asian Reporter Foundation is accepting nominations for its 2017 "Exemplary Community Volunteer" awards.

The recognition banquet will be held Thursday, April 20, 2017 at northeast Portland's TAO Event Center. Nomination forms and award guidelines are available for download at <www.ARFoundation.net>.

The nomination deadline is Wednesday, March 15, 2017 at 5:00pm.

The Asian Reporter Foundation's 19th Annual Scholarship & Awards Banquet features:

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| Most Honored Elder Awards | Cultural entertainment |
| Exemplary Community Volunteer Awards | Ethnic dinner |
| College Scholarship Awards | Silent auction |