



South Korean boy band BIGBANG rocks in Japan

TOKYO (AP) — South Korean pop group BIGBANG has ended its massively successful tour of Japan, cementing its status as one of the most popular boy bands in Asia. The five-member band closed out the tour, which included stops at all six of Japan's domed stadiums, with three shows in Osaka. The band is popular because, unlike some manufactured Korean pop music, its members often write and produce their own music — a mix of electronic sound, hip-hop, and rap. That combination also means fans follow the band for other trends as well. "The fact that people look at what we created, whether it is fashion, music, or dance moves, and are willing to follow them, makes us feel good because we feel like we provided great inspiration to them," BIGBANG member Taeyang said during the band's stop in Tokyo. The 16-show tour drew about 770,000 fans. Band leader G-Dragon, one of the top-earning artists in South Korea, said band members were nervous at the start of the tour, but relaxed as the shows progressed and "were able to have fun with each performance." The other members of the band are T.O.P, Daesung, and Seungri.

China expects 3.6 billion trips during Lunar New Year

BEIJING (AP) — Authorities expect Chinese to make 3.6 billion trips during the 40-day Chinese New Year travel period that began January 16. The trips include intercity flights as well as train and local bus rides to villages during China's most important holiday, which is also known as Spring Festival. Each year, it represents the world's largest seasonal migration of people as families reunite. The Year of the Horse starts January 31. The Spring Festival transportation period lasts 40 days from January 16. Lian Weiliang, vice chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic planning agency, said they expect 200 million more journeys than in 2013. He also told a news conference that snow and bad weather could hamper the mass migration.

Indonesia's law on ore exports takes effect

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — An Indonesian law banning the export of unprocessed minerals has taken effect. Coordinating economic minister Hatta Rajasa said the ban is intended to add value to mineral exports by having them processed in Indonesia and create more jobs. The announcement followed several days of intense negotiations involving government officials, entrepreneurs, and experts to explore ways to minimize the impact of the ban. Rajasa did not mention any exemptions, but said the decision reflected concerns about preventing mass layoffs, promoting regional economic development, and enabling local mining companies to continue working. The ban was mandated by a Mining Law passed by parliament in 2009 that included a provision that mineral ores must be processed at smelters in Indonesia beginning January 12, 2014.

Philippines to use fewer checks in antigraff drive

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — The Philippines has launched anti-corruption reforms including cashless and checkless government transactions that President Benigno Aquino III says will cut risks of the money falling into the wrong hands and improve budget management. Aquino says the goal is "to institutionalize reforms that make it very difficult for unscrupulous individuals to steal from the people regardless of who sits in office." Budget secretary Florencio Abad said the changes spell big savings for the government, which spends 8 pesos (18 cents) on each of the millions of checks it issues each year. Aquino, son of revered pro-democracy champions, was elected president in 2010 on promises to fight corruption and poverty.

Probe finds Chinese official traded influence for jade

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese businessman wanted a senior provincial official on his side and took a hint on how to do that when a deputy governor commented on the carved jade hanging from his belt, investigators allege. They said Ji Lichang began acquiring jade for former Anhui deputy governor Ni Fake in return for mining rights and land for his metal business. In a recent report, China's top corruption watchdog said Ni accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes, much of it in carved jade. The case illustrates how corrupt officials and businessmen are increasingly concealing bribery by using gifts of artwork and precious stones rather than money. Ni came under scrutiny last June and was expelled from the ruling Communist Party and removed from office in September.

Police probe animal deaths at Indonesian zoo

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — An African lion was found hanged on a steel cable inside its cage in the latest animal deaths at Indonesia's largest and problem-plagued zoo, according to a spokesman. Days earlier, a five-year-old wildebeest died of a suspected stomach problem due to hot weather and humidity, said Agus Supangkat, spokesman for the zoo in Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city. He denied any negligence, but said police are investigating how the 18-month-old lion named Micheal became entrapped by the cable, which is used by zookeepers to open the cage. The zoo has been criticized over the deaths of scores of animals, including another African lion and a Sumatran tiger, over the last few years. The death of a giraffe two years ago with a beach-ball-sized wad of plastic food wrappers in its belly sparked outrage among conservationists. Built over a century ago under the Dutch colonial rule, it houses some 3,500 animals, among them five African lions and a sole female wildebeest. An online petition has called on the government to shut down the facility, dubbed "the zoo of death." Problems cited by conservations include uncontrolled breeding, lack of funding for animal welfare, and suspicion that staff may be involved in illegal wildlife trafficking.



UNSUSTAINABLE SUSHI. Sushi restaurateur Kiyoshi Kimura poses with a 507-pound bluefin tuna he bought at auction before cutting it at his restaurant near Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo. Kimura paid 7.36 million yen (about \$70,000) for the bluefin tuna in the year's celebratory first auction, just one-twentieth of what he paid a year earlier despite signs the species is in serious decline. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi)

Price of bluefin tuna nosedives at Tokyo auction

By Elaine Kurtenbach
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Sushi restaurateur Kiyoshi Kimura paid 7.36 million yen (about \$70,000) for a 507-pound bluefin tuna in the year's celebratory first auction at Tokyo's Tsukiji market, just five percent of what he paid a year earlier despite signs that the species is in serious decline.

Kimura's record-winning bid last year of 154.4 million yen for a 489-pound fish drew complaints that prices had soared way out of line, even for an auction that has always drawn high bids. Kimura also set the previous record of 56.4 million yen at the 2012 auction.

The high prices don't necessarily reflect exceptionally high fish quality.

"I'm glad that the congratulatory price for this year's bid went back to being reasonable," said Kimura, whose Kiyomura Co. operates the popular Sushi-Zanmai restaurant chain.

Environmentalists say growing worldwide consumption of bluefin tuna is leading to its depletion, and that those in charge of managing fisheries for the species are failing to take responsible action to protect it.

Japanese eat about 80 percent of all bluefin tuna caught worldwide, though demand is growing as others acquire a taste for the tender, pink-and-red flesh of the torpedo-shaped speedsters of the sea.

Stocks of all three bluefin species — the Pacific, Southern, and Atlantic — have fallen over the past 15 years amid overfishing. Stocks of bluefin caught in the Atlantic and Mediterranean plunged by 60 percent between 1997 and 2007 due to rampant, often illegal,

overfishing and lax quotas. Although there has been some improvement in recent years, experts say the outlook for the species is still fragile.

According to a stock assessment released last year by the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean, the bluefin tuna population is at less than four percent of its un-fished size.

"The population has effectively been decimated," said Amanda Nickson, director for global tuna conservation for The Pew Environment Group. "Over 90 percent of bluefin tuna are caught before they reach reproductive age. You have to wonder if this is remotely sustainable."

So far, governments and management bodies have failed to take measures to protect the species that reflect the seriousness of its decline, she said.

There were 1,729 tuna sold in the first auction for 2014, according to data from the city government, down from 2,419 last year. The 32,000 yen (\$305) per kilogram paid for the top fish this year compares with 700,000 yen per kilogram last year.

Prices for bluefin tuna imported from other regions are much lower. A 189-kilogram (417-pound) farmed tuna imported from Spain sold for 662,000 yen (about \$6,400), or 3,500 yen (\$34) per kilogram, compared with a price of 4,800 yen (\$46) per kilogram for the same type of fish sold at last year's first auction.

"You have to wonder what the last fish is going to cost," Nickson said.

Associated Press writer Miki Toda contributed to this report.

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Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 1/17

| | |
|-------------------|--------|
| Bangladesh Taka | 77.665 |
| Cambodian Riel | 3995.0 |
| China Renminbi | 6.0498 |
| Fijian Dollar | 1.8872 |
| Hong Kong Dollar | 7.7556 |
| Indian Rupee | 61.55 |
| Indonesian Rupiah | 12091 |
| Iranian Rial | 24653 |
| Japanese Yen | 104.26 |
| Laos New Kip | 8035.0 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 3.2959 |
| Nepal Rupee | 99.005 |
| Pakistani Rupee | 105.4 |
| Papua N.G. Kina | 2.424 |
| Philippine Peso | 45.015 |
| Russian Ruble | 33.559 |
| Saudi Riyal | 3.7503 |
| Singapore Dollar | 1.2736 |
| South Korean Won | 1059.6 |
| Sri Lankan Rupee | 130.72 |
| Taiwan Dollar | 30.165 |
| Thai Baht | 32.845 |
| Vietnam Dong | 21090 |