



**HOMEWARD BOUND.** Former New York Mets pitcher Daisuke Matsuzaka throws a pitch during a baseball game in New York in this August 28, 2014 photo. Matsuzaka has signed a contract with the Softbank Hawks of Japan's Pacific League. (AP Photo/Kathy Kmonicek)

## Matsuzaka returns to Japan to pitch for Softbank

FUKUOKA, Japan (AP) — Daisuke Matsuzaka has signed a contract with the Softbank Hawks of Japan's Pacific League after eight years in Major League Baseball.

The 34-year-old right-hander, who went 3-3 with 78 strikeouts and a 3.89 ERA for the New York Mets in 2014, led the Pacific League in wins three times with the Seibu Lions before signing a six-year, \$52-million contract with the Boston Red Sox in 2006.

"This is a very solid team," Matsuzaka said at a press conference. "I remember from my days pitching in Japan, how difficult they were to face. It should be a very enjoyable team to pitch for."

Terms of Matsuzaka's deal were not released.

During his first season in the majors in 2007, Matsuzaka helped Boston win the World Series. His best season was 2008, when he went 18-3 with 154 strikeouts and a 2.90 ERA, but he didn't live up to expectations after that.

The Hawks won the Japan Series in 2014 and are among the more successful teams in Nippon Professional Baseball. "As we look to win the championship again, we think he (Matsuzaka) can make a major contribution," said Softbank chairman Sadaharu Oh.



**CONTROVERSIAL FESTIVAL.** A butcher with a butcher knife prepares to participate in a mass sacrifice ceremony at Gadhimai temple in the jungles of Bara district, about 100 miles south of Kathmandu, Nepal. (AP Photo/Sunil Sharma)

## Animals sacrificed in Nepal to bring good luck

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — A festival believed to be the largest animal-sacrifice ritual in the world took place last month in southern Nepal, where devotees believe the sacrifices bring good luck and a Hindu goddess will grant their wishes.

In the fields outside a temple before dawn, a priest dropped five drops of his own blood and sacrificed a rat, chicken, pigeon, goat, and pig to start the festival. More than 5,000 buffaloes were ritually killed during the day.

Many other animals were killed during the two-day festival at Gadhimai temple in the jungles of Bara district about 100 miles south of Kathmandu.

Organizers and authorities defend the festival held every five years as a generations-old tradition, though animal-rights activists decry it as barbaric. During the 2009 festival, an estimated 200,000 animals and birds were sacrificed. Most people who attend the festival are from neighboring India, even though that country bans the export of animals for the festival.

# Chinese gay dating app grows to 15 million users

By Louise Watt and Aritz Parra  
The Associated Press

**B**EIJING — By day, Ma Baoli was a high-ranking officer in a seaside city police force. By night, he ran a website for gay people to share experiences and on which he spoke under a pseudonym about the pressure he faced as a homosexual.

After several years, the police force found out and told him he could not run a private website that was earning money from advertisements while serving as a police officer.

Ma chose his website, a move that later proved fruitful. His Danlan.org site has spawned a Chinese-language dating app for men called BlueD that has garnered 15 million users, 3 million of them outside China, over two years.

And last month, his company, Blue City, received \$30 million in funding from Silicon Valley venture capital company DCM Ventures. Ma hopes to use the money to expand abroad and possibly prepare for an IPO. He is also considering launching a dating app for lesbians.

In a country where the government considers any activism dangerous and where homosexuality has traditionally been taboo, Ma has managed to build his business partly by reaching out to government agencies and showing them he can provide a public service in spreading safe-sex messages.

In 2012, he was invited to meet with now-premier Li Keqiang because of his AIDS prevention work.

Wu Zunyou, director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention's AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases center, praised the app for its usefulness in conveying information to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or LGBT, community.

"It's very hard to receive so many registered users in such a short time," Wu told The Associated Press at an AIDS awareness event held by Blue City and also attended by local government officials. "None of our public awareness websites can receive such attention. This is a very important channel to be able to spread information about AIDS prevention among the LGBT community."

The app allows users to look for people by location or the last time they logged on. It also enables group settings so people can organize activities such as hiking or assembling a basketball team, as well as providing information from health authorities on locations for HIV testing and treatment.

## Aer Lingus boss Mueller to head Malaysia Airlines

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Malaysia's government says it has picked Christoph Mueller, the chief executive of Ireland's Aer Lingus, as the new head of its beleaguered flag carrier, Malaysia Airlines.

Mueller will be the first ever foreigner to head Malaysia Airlines, which was struggling with chronic financial problems before it was further hit this year by two deadly disasters.

State investment arm Khazanah Nasional said discussions are ongoing for Mueller to start work before his contract with Aer Lingus ends May 1, but "no earlier than



**PIONEERING APP.** Condom mascots pose for photos at an event to promote awareness of HIV testing ahead of World AIDS Day, held December 1, in Beijing, China. Danlan.org, a website for gay people to share experiences, has spawned a dating app specifically for gay Chinese men and the company, Blue City, has received \$30 million in funding. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

Andrea Pastorelli, a policy specialist at the United Nations Development Programme, said the Chinese CDC had recognized the app's usefulness in reaching people they were unable to.

"They are having a real issue reaching out to the most marginalized people and in China that's where the epidemic is," he said.

"The fact that they have been able to attract this much money shows that there is interest in the so-called pink market," Pastorelli added. "Private companies are realizing that gay people exist and gay people represent a huge market."

An investment manager at the Beijing office of DCM Ventures who asked not to be named because she was not authorized to speak to the media confirmed that the company had invested \$30 million in Blue City, saying its future outlook was promising.

"Five percent of the total population are LGBT people," she said. "Social attitudes toward gay people will become more and more tolerant in the future."

For Ma, 37, who goes by the online pseudonym Geng Le, the investment signals a shift in attitudes already among Chinese toward homosexuals.

Five years ago, his Danlan.org website would be regularly shut down. Today, that doesn't happen anymore, and it carries discussions on whether to legalize same-sex marriage, for example.

"I now feel more and more comfortable saying, 'Yes, I'm gay and yes, what I do is run a gay-themed website,'" he said.

Still, the app does provide privacy for people who are worried about others finding out about their sexual orientation by allowing them to use

their smartphone to meet someone, he said.

A law against "hooliganism" that had been used to target gays was eliminated in 1997 and homosexuality was declassified as a mental disorder in 2001, but some clinics still promise to "cure" people by offering conversion therapy that includes electric shocks. China does not recognize same-sex partnerships and no laws outlaw discrimination against homosexuals.

However, more organizations are being created in China that are specifically devoted to LGBT advocacy issues, and gay bars that once could only be found in bigger cities like Beijing and Shanghai are increasingly opening up in smaller cities.

Ma quit his job as deputy director of a division of the Qinhuangdao police force in March 2012. He still misses being a police officer, his dream job since childhood. He says some former colleagues cannot accept what he is doing because they think homosexuality is "abnormal." Ma says he hopes to change their thinking.

Blue City employs about 40 software engineers, designers, salespeople, and advocates.

"I would like to use the power of the economy to promote the LGBT community," he said. "In many ways, the economy can trigger changes in policies. So if, for example, I do this thing very well, if my users go from 15 million to many more in the future, if we can go public, I can tell the government: See, we can go public being a 'gay company' and we haven't caused you any trouble."

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## There can be only one: North Korean leader's name banned

Continued from page 2

serves as the backbone of the family's authoritarian rule of the impoverished country. The North is locked in a long-running international standoff over its nuclear ambitions.

All North Koreans are required to wear lapel pins bearing the images of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and to put portraits of the leaders on the walls of their homes. Their birthdays are considered the most important holidays in North Korea.

