



China's first female astronaut has baby, resumes training

BEIJING (AP) — China's first female astronaut has begun training for her next mission after having a baby, state media reported. The selection of China's female astronauts had been somewhat controversial because of a reported preference for married women who have children, purportedly to guard against radiation damaging their reproductive health. Those fears have so far proven unfounded, although no pregnant woman has flown in space as far as is known. The official *China Daily* newspaper quoted Liu Yang as confirming at an award ceremony that she had given birth, but the report gave no more details about the child. She was quoted as saying she was training for her next mission, an attempt to dock with a future space station for which no firm date has been set. Liu, 37, was a member of the three-person Shenzhou 9 mission that flew the first trip to China's experimental space station Tiangong 1 in 2012. China plans to launch a more permanent Tiangong 2 space station in about five years. China sent its first astronaut into space in 2003, becoming the third nation after Russia and the United States to achieve manned space travel independently. Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman in space in 1963. Twenty years later, Sally Ride became the first American to travel to space, flying twice on the space shuttle Challenger before leaving NASA in 1987. A total of 59 women have flown in space.

Kim Jong Un, Ban Ki-moon exchange New Year's cards

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Nothing says Happy New Year like a holiday card from North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. In an exchange that raised eyebrows, the young leader and the United Nations secretary-general, who is South Korean, sent each other holiday cards last month. A diplomat with North Korea's mission to the U.N., Kim Song, confirmed the rare exchange of greetings. "Our leader has sent a New Year's card in return for Ban Ki-moon's New Year card," he said. A spokesman for Ban did not comment on the exchange, which follows a letter from Kim that North Korea's foreign minister delivered to Ban last year during the annual U.N. General Assembly. North and South Korea technically remain in a state of war, and Pyongyang strongly objects to Seoul's joint military drills with the U.S.

Nepal pledges to improve climbing conditions on Everest

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Nepal is improving weather forecasting systems, stepping up security, and promising swift rescues if needed during the upcoming climbing season on Everest in an attempt to recover from the worst mountaineering disaster on the world's highest peak last year. Fees for individual climbers will also be reduced to attract climbers back. The chief of Nepal's Mountaineering Department, Puspa Raj Katuwal, said the government will ensure that conditions are safer for both international climbers and Nepalese guides, and that officials will be deployed at base camp for the three-month climbing season that begins this month. An avalanche near base camp last April killed 16 local guides and prompted climbers to abandon the 2014 climbing season. A full-time office tent is being set up at base camp throughout the climbing season that will allow officials to quickly respond to any problem on the 29,035-foot mountain. They will also provide security, settle disputes among climbers, and monitor the activities of the hundreds of climbers and guides at base camp. The Nepalese government has been repeatedly criticized for not having a presence at base camp and doing too little despite earning millions in permit fees. Additionally, the country's national weather service will provide forecasts for Everest for officials to release at base camp. The officials will also monitor the amount of garbage taken by climbers down the mountain.

Overfishing driving slavery on Thailand's seafood boats

SAMUT SAKHON, Thailand (AP) — A British environmental group says overfishing and the use of illegal and undocumented trawlers has ravaged Thailand's marine ecosystems and even encouraged the use of slave labor in the industry. A report released by the British nonprofit Environmental Justice Foundation says Thai fishing boats are now catching about 85 percent less than what they brought in 50 years ago, making it one of the most overfished regions on the planet. Depleted fisheries in the Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea have, in turn, pushed Thai fishing boats farther and farther from home. Fewer Thais are willing to take on the dangerous, low-level work, so fishing operators now use brokers and agents to enlist migrant workers from impoverished neighboring countries such as Myanmar and Cambodia, often through trickery and kidnapping.

Activists slam Lunar New Year variety show for sexist jokes

BEIJING (AP) — China's annual Lunar New Year variety show, which mocked unmarried women and suggested female officials provide sexual favors to get promoted, has led to online outrage and some state media to urge more attention to discrimination against women. Sexism at the gala is nothing new. But this year, women's rights activists sent an open letter to broadcasting regulators demanding that reruns of the show be suspended and that the director and state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) apologize for it. This year's gala was directed by a woman, who hasn't publicly commented on the criticism. Despite waning viewership, CCTV's annual gala is the country's most-watched program and is used to push political messages. Letter signatory Feng Yuan said activists counted 44 examples of sexism in the four-and-a-half hour show.



SKY SCRAPER. Three of Red Bull's single-engine and single-seater aircraft fly in a formation while performing on the second day of the Aero India 2015 at Yelahanka air base in Bangalore, India. During a performance later the same day, two aircraft of the aerobatic team from the Czech Republic scraped each other in the sky. Both landed safely, but the wing of one of the planes was damaged. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)

Aerobatic stunt duo has scrape in sky, lands safely in India

BANGALORE, India (AP) — Two aircraft of an aerobatic team scraped each other in the sky last month while performing stunts at an air show in southern India. Both landed safely, but the wing of one of the planes was damaged.

Aircraft from the Flying Bulls stunt team from the Czech Republic grazed each other at the Aero India show held on the outskirts of

Bangalore city.

Hundreds of people had gathered to see the show.

Aero India is a biennial event with flying demonstrations by stunt teams and militaries as well as commercial pavilions where aviation companies display their products and technology. The Czech team had performed previously in Bangalore in 2011 and 2013.

Spy chief says teenager joined Islamic State group

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A teenager who went missing in Turkey in January is probably the first known South Korean to join the Islamic State group, according to officials.

The director of South Korea's National Intelligence Service, Lee Byung-kee, told legislators in a closed-door meeting that the 18-year-old man is now in Syria with an Islamic State group unit that trains combat personnel, opposition lawmaker Kim Kwang Jin said.

Kim said Lee didn't reveal how the spy agency obtained the information or where the Islamic State group unit is based.

The man, identified only by his last name, Kim, was last seen leaving a hotel in the Turkish border town of Kilis on January 10. An official from Seoul's Foreign Ministry, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing office rules, confirmed that he would be the first known South Korean to join the militant

group.

Kim's religious beliefs are unclear, and Muslims are a very small minority in South Korea.

Police said in a news conference that Kim probably attempted to enter Syria with the intention of joining the Islamic State group, citing his computer, social media, and telephone records that showed him actively communicating with people suspected to be recruiters from the group.

Kim, the lawmaker, also said Lee told the legislators that there was no evidence to support media reports that Kim Kyong Hui, the aunt of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, was dead. Kim Kyong Hui last made a public appearance in September 2013, three months before Kim Jong Un executed her husband, Jang Song Thaek, on treason charges, according to South Korea's Unification Ministry.

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Fijian Dollar	2.0396
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7555
Indian Rupee	61.839
Indonesian Rupiah	12932
Iranian Rial	27669
Japanese Yen	119.63
Laos New Kip	8108.5
Malaysian Ringgit	3.6042
Nepal Rupee	99.027
Pakistani Rupee	101.86
Papua N.G. Kina	2.6351
Philippine Peso	44.095
Russian Ruble	61.754
Saudi Riyal	3.7503
Singapore Dollar	1.3629
South Korean Won	1098.0
Sri Lankan Rupee	133.15
Taiwan Dollar	31.458
Thai Baht	32.358
Vietnam Dong	21348