



**ALL IN THE FAMILY.** A crowd gathers to watch as Filipino lion dancers perform in Manila, the Philippines. The Lunar New Year performance, which featured the Pink Panther Dragon and Lion Dance Group — a business operated by eight Filipino siblings who live in a creekside slum in Manila's Chinatown area — took place February 18, 2015. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

## Chinese lions, dragons family business for Filipino siblings

By Aaron Favila  
The Associated Press

**M**ANILA, The Philippines — Amid the deafening drumbeats and firecracker blasts, the dragon snakes into a building in downtown Manila while three lion heads bob to the crowd's delight.

The Lunar New Year performance is by the Pink Panther Dragon and Lion Dance Group, a business operated by eight Filipino siblings who live in a creekside slum in Manila's Chinatown area. They are hired by businesses that believe the show will drive misfortunes away and bring good luck.

Manager Joseph Sicat says they started the business 10 years ago with only two Chinese lion heads. Now they have 25 lion heads, nine dragons, and a team of 100 workers.

"We got the name Pink Panther because when we started we were the first ones who had a pink lion," Sicat said. "We added

'Panther' because we think it sounds fierce."

The busiest season just took place, while ethnic Chinese celebrated the Lunar New Year. Two lions and drums cost 10,000 pesos (\$226) and a complete package with dragon dancers costs 35,000 pesos (\$791).

A big show could take nearly three hours, such as one the company recently did at a large post office building. A crew of about 25 went office to office and up and down stairs with their drums and costumes to perform and take selfies with workers.

"We pay our regular dancers 400 pesos (\$9) per day during the off-season. During the Chinese New Year week they usually get as much as 1,000 pesos (\$23) per day," said Sicat.

He added that while it's hard work to transport the performers, costumes, and equipment from show to show, "When you see the happy crowd, our exhaustion goes away."

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## It's on: Mayweather says he and Pacquiao will fight May 2

Continued from page 16

But it didn't take long for Pacquiao's camp to start talking, either. Promoter Bob Arum expressed his elation in making the fight, while trainer Freddie Roach predicted a big win for his fighter.

"Floyd should enjoy being the A-Side while he can because on May 2 Manny is going to put him on his backside," Roach said.

Arum, who has promoted some of the biggest fights in history, said this one would be bigger than them all.

"This boxing match will have the interest in the U.S. of a Super Bowl," Arum told The Associated Press. "I think it will set all kinds of pay-per-view records and gate records. It will be the biggest boxing event of all time."

Both fighters will bring 147-pound titles into the ring,

but the fight is about far more than belts. Mayweather, who is unbeaten in 47 fights, wants to stake his claim as one of the greatest fighters ever, and remove any doubts about his legacy by fighting the boxer who is thought to be the greatest challenge of his career.

Pacquiao, meanwhile, will try to show that a knockout loss to Juan Manuel Marquez in 2012 and a disputed decision loss to Timothy Bradley should not define a remarkable career that began 20 years ago in the Philippines

Don't tune in looking for a big knockout, either. The last time Pacquiao stopped anyone was in 2009 when he finished off Miguel Cotto in the 12th round, while Mayweather has only stopped one fighter (Victor Ortiz) in the last eight years.

## Indian river, protected by a curse, faces the modern world

Continued from page 3

pressure on the river is now just too much."

In theory, the wildest parts of the river are protected. A narrow 250-mile stretch of the Chambal was declared an official sanctuary in the late 1970s, closing it to everyone except longtime villagers, approved scientists, and the handful of tourists who made it here.

But India's wildlife agencies are woefully undertrained and underfunded. Forestry officials often need to borrow boats to patrol the river. Banditry may have faded, but corruption is rampant: Locals who illegally cut firewood in the sanctuary pass forestry department checkpoints without challenge.

More factories are being built upstream from the sanctuary, and their pollutants are leaking into the river. Increased farming has caused a spike in dangerous fertilizer and pesticide runoff, scientists say. Billions of gallons of water are siphoned away for irrigation.

The most immediate worry is illegal sand mining, which can strip away thousands of tons of riverbank in a single day, causing immense amounts of silt to spill into the river,



**THE CURSE OF MODERNIZATION.** Flames rise from the cremation pyre of an elderly woman on the banks of the Chambal River near Bhojepura village in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The fears that shaped the region go back more than a thousand years, to when sages said the Chambal (the term refers both to the river and the rugged land around it) was cursed and villagers whispered that it was unholy. In a culture where rivers have long been worshipped, farmers avoided planting along the river's banks. (AP Photo/Altai Qadri, File)

upsetting its delicate ecology.

Demand for sand has soared across India in recent years as the economy has grown, leaving an emerging middle class clamoring for housing. Since most new Indian housing is made of concrete, and concrete requires sand, the surge in building has given rise to a sprawling network of blackmarket sand dealers. The "sand mafia," as the Indian media calls it, has no qualms plundering the easy pickings along a wild riverbank.

Take a boat along the Chambal River on nearly any day, and the mafia's power quickly becomes clear. Not far from the village of Bhojepura, dozens of tractors regularly snake down a dirt road to the river, pulling trailers filled with wiry, shovel-wielding men who hop down once they reach the riverbank. These are the sand mafia's labor force, men who can earn \$15 for a long, exhausting day of work. That is good pay around here.

The mining is illegal, but the laborers say their bosses have paid off local officials. While none of the miners will give their full names, they also make no

effort to hide what they're doing. The mining area, perhaps 30 acres in total, can be easily seen from both banks of the river. While the men work, tractors rigged with loudspeakers blare Bollywood songs. There's a calm beauty to the scene. Local villagers pass by, leading camels that leave footprints the size of dinner plates in the soft sand. When the breeze picks up, the camel bells clang.

But people like Singh, the aristocrat, worry about tomorrow. Asked if he is optimistic about the area's future, Singh simply looks at the floor and shakes his head.

The laborers, poor men who spend most of the year working on tiny farms, are concerned with making extra money, not with wildlife. And that is the biggest curse that the Chambal faces today: The path of progress, sometimes, leaves little room for anything else.

"What is a sanctuary?" says Gopal, the river laborer, his voice dripping with disdain. "What is a mammal? What is a bird? I don't have time to worry about these things."

Editor's note: Tim Sullivan, who is based in India, is senior Asia correspondent for The AP.

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