



**CUTE CUB.** A panda cub born at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Chengdu, the capital of southwest China's Sichuan province, is seen on June 23, 2015. The first panda twin cubs of the year met the public for the first time a day after they were born. (Xue Yubin/Xinhua via AP)

## China displays latest set of panda twins

BEIJING (AP) — China has put on display the latest twin pandas born through artificial insemination as part of efforts to boost the numbers of its unofficial national mascot.

Still mostly hairless and with their eyes yet to open, the sisters were met by adoring fans at a breeding center in the southwestern city of Chengdu.

Their mother, seven-year old Kelin, gave birth to the twins early on June 22.

Wu Kongju, chief administrator at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding, said the twins were in good condition based on their milk consumption and normal body temperature.

The cubs were born more than four months after the mother was artificially inseminated in January. Figures released this year show 1,864 pandas live in the wild.






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## Philippine 'mud people' festival honors saint

BIBICLAT, The Philippines (AP) — At dawn every June 24, people from Bibiclat village in the northern Philippine province of Nueva Ecija pay homage to their patron saint, John the Baptist, by gathering in silence in a swampy field to cover themselves in mud, donning mud-drenched capes made of dried banana leaves.

The village's *Taong Putik*, or "mud people" festival, dates back to the Japanese occupation of the Philippines in the 1940s, according to the village chief, Norberto Eugenio.

Japanese troops in Bibiclat during World War II gathered many of the male villagers in a church courtyard for execution. The women and children prayed to Saint John the Baptist to spare them, and suddenly there was a downpour, causing the soldiers and their captives to scatter, Eugenio said.

The villagers were so happy that they rolled in the mud, he said, and they have carried on that tradition ever since.

During the festival, men, women, and children — some covered with capes from head to foot, eyes peering from a cake of mud on their faces — collect candles from bystanders along



**CANDLES & CAPES.** A muddied girl donning a cape made of dried banana leaves collects candles before attending a mass to celebrate the Feast Day of St. John the Baptist in the village of Bibiclat, Aliaga township, Nueva Ecija province, in the northern Philippines. At dawn every June 24, people from Bibiclat village pay homage to their patron saint, John the Baptist, by gathering in silence in a swampy field to cover themselves in mud, donning mud-drenched capes made of dried banana leaves. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

the village's main street on their way to St. John the Baptist's Church. They light the candles and make wishes, expecting them to be fulfilled because of their efforts.

The former parish priest of the village, William Villviza, said the mud also "reminds one of the lowness of one's being" and enables one to be "close to the earth."

## Filipino LGBT people celebrate Gay Pride, U.S. court decision

**By Oliver Teves**  
*The Associated Press*  
**M**ANILA, The Philippines — Several hundred lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) peo-

ple held a Gay Pride rally in the Philippine capital to push for LGBT rights and to celebrate last month's U.S. Supreme Court decision recognizing gay marriages in all U.S. states

as a victory for their cause. About 500 people marched around Manila's Rizal Park, many carrying placards and streamers saying "Fight for Love" and waving rainbow banners.

Some came with pets dressed in rainbow costumes.

Jonas Bagas, executive director of the pro-LGBT rights group TLF Share, said the U.S. court ruling "will reverberate in other corners of the world."

The rally was scheduled to commemorate the 1969 demonstrations in New York City that started the gay-rights movement around the world. Bagas said the U.S. court's decision made it more significant.

He said that in the predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines, where the church has fiercely opposed gay marriages along with divorce and artificial contraceptives, he expects the "conservative majority" to continue to block human rights for LGBT people.

"We hope that after this decision, the struggle for equality can be reframed to go beyond marriage equality so that we can address other dehumanizing situations that LGBTs encounter," he said.

Sylvia Estrada Claudio, a gender-rights advocate and professor of women development studies at the University of the Philippines, said the decision was also "a triumph for feminism" because of the "intimate connections" between discrimination based on biological gender and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression.

"I can't help but note that the three women justices voted for marriage equality, forming a solid core in what was a close vote," she

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