



Malibu it's not, but North Korea seen as possible surf spot

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP) — Here's a new take on gnarly. A pro surfer who coaches the Chinese National Surf Team and a tourism agency based in New Jersey plan a surfing expedition and training camp in North Korea, which has pristine beaches, virgin waves, and, they say, the potential to become an international wave-riding destination. Nik Zanella, a native of Italy who, along with coaching Chinese surfers, is a representative of the International Surfing Association, said the decision to hold the surfing camp for a small group of North Koreans and foreign tourists along North Korea's east coast follows a year of studying the area to assess wave and weather conditions. "The DPRK will not become the next Malibu, but it receives enough swells to sustain a vast surf community," he told AP in an e-mail, referring to North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. "Our goal is to evaluate the resources and make them available to local surfers in a sustainable and safe way. We are not there to simply go surf, brag about it, and then bail." The expedition, scheduled for September, has been approved by the North Korean government, which is eager to boost its small but developing tourism sector. Andrea Lee, CEO of Uri Tours, which is organizing the excursion, said it will be used to map the coastline for prime surfing locations, take risk assessments, and develop evacuation and safety plans. Though most North Koreans don't have the means or leisure time to devote themselves to recreational hobbies, she said the government is keen on getting the mapping data and on drawing tourists. "We want to open the DPRK as a surfing destination on a larger scale," she said. "The hope is to create a foundation and to pave the way for future surfers."

Woman dies after trapped in escalator, but saves son

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese woman died after being trapped in a shopping mall escalator, but not before pushing her two-year-old son to safety. The horrific accident in the central city of Jingzhou was caught on surveillance camera footage. The woman — identified in media reports as 30-year-old Xiang Liujuan — had reached the top of the escalator when the section of landing platform she had stepped onto suddenly collapsed, trapping her inside the still-moving machinery. The footage shows that Xiang managed to push her son into the arms of shop attendants near the top of the escalator. The attendants tried to pull her to safety, but Xiang fell into the mechanism and was killed. Media reports say her body was recovered four hours later, after crews disassembled the escalator.

China lifting ban on sales of video game consoles

BEIJING (AP) — China is lifting its ban on the sale of video game consoles to promote the industry and a new manufacturing zone in Shanghai. Consoles produced in the Shanghai Free-Trade Zone will automatically be approved for sale in the rest of China, according to a Ministry of Culture notice. The announcement eases a sales ban imposed in 2000 due to concern Chinese children would waste time playing video games. Communist leaders are promoting entertainment and technology development as part of a marathon effort to shift the world's second-largest economy to more sustainable growth supported by domestic consumption and cleaner industries. The Shanghai trade zone was created in 2013 and gives foreign companies wider access to a range of industries, allowing bigger ownership stakes and activities that are prohibited elsewhere in China. Sony Corp. and Microsoft Corp. both have announced plans to manufacture game consoles in the Shanghai zone with Chinese partners. "We welcome the move," said a Sony spokesman, Sousuke Kamei, in an e-mail. "We remain committed to deliver fun and exciting console gaming experiences to as many Chinese users as possible." Nintendo Co., another video game maker, declined comment. The latest rules are intended to promote technology development and a "healthy and progressive" entertainment environment, the ministry notice said. Content of games will be subject to censorship, it said.

College librarian admits he replaced art with fakes

BEIJING (AP) — A former chief librarian at a Chinese university has admitted in court to stealing more than 140 paintings by grandmasters in a gallery under his watch and replacing them with fakes he painted himself. For two years up until 2006, Xiao Yuan substituted famous works including landscapes and calligraphies in a gallery within the library of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. He told the court in his defense that the practice appeared to be rampant and the handling of such paintings was not secure. He said he noticed fakes already hanging in the gallery on his first day on the job. Later, after he replaced some of the remaining masters with his own fakes, he was surprised when he noticed his fake paintings were being substituted with even more fakes. "I realized someone else had replaced my paintings with their own because I could clearly discern that their works were terribly bad," Xiao, 57, told Guangzhou People's Intermediate Court, which posted a video of the two-hour hearing on its website. Xiao said he didn't know who had replaced his fakes, but that students and professors could take out paintings in the same way they borrow library books. Xiao sold 125 of the paintings at auction between 2004 and 2011 for more than 34 million yuan (\$6 million), and used the money to buy apartments and other paintings. The 18 others he stole are estimated to be worth more than 70 million yuan (\$11 million), according to prosecutors. Xiao pleaded guilty to a corruption charge for substituting the 143 paintings, and said he deeply regretted his crime. He was the university's chief librarian until 2010. His crimes came to light when an employee discovered what had happened and went to the police.



STARTING FROM SCRATCH. An artist's rendering released by the Japan Sport Council shows an image of the Olympic stadium planned for the 2020 Tokyo Games, which was also supposed to be used for the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Japan has scrapped the design of the Olympic stadium for the Tokyo Games because of soaring costs and said it will re-open bidding for a new plan, in a stunning reversal that leaves the Rugby World Cup without a main venue. (Japan Sport Council via AP)

Japan to start from scratch on Tokyo Olympic stadium plan

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan has scrapped the design of the Olympic stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Games because of soaring costs and said it will reopen bidding for a new plan, in a stunning reversal that leaves the 2019 Rugby World Cup without a main venue.

"We have decided to go back to the start on the Tokyo Olympics-Paralympics stadium plan, and start over from zero," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters after a meeting with Yoshiro Mori, chairman of the Tokyo 2020 organizing committee. "The cost has ballooned just too much."

The government has been under mounting criticism as the estimated cost of the new National Stadium rose to 252 billion yen (\$2 billion), nearly twice as much as the initial estimate of 130 billion yen.

Abe said he secured the consent of Mori, a former prime minister, and instructed the sports and Olympics ministers to immediately prepare a process to choose a new stadium plan.

"I have been listening to the voices of the people and the athletes for about a month now, thinking about the possibility of a review," Abe said. "We will minimize the cost as much as we can and make one that is best and realistic."

The Tokyo 2020 organizing committee said it respected Abe's decision, but wants to ensure the construction of the stadium is completed in time for the games and will not "adversely affect" the event.

The huge cost of the stadium went against the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) "Olympic Agenda 2020" reform program, which seeks to make the games less expensive and ensure long-term use of venues.

John Coates, head of the IOC coordination

commission for the Tokyo Games, said the Japanese government was in a position to decide on the project.

"We take note of the decision by Prime Minister Abe to review the design plan and to look for a feasible solution that will offer a state-of-the-art stadium with top level conditions for athletes and spectators," Coates said in an IOC statement. "We understand that the review of the stadium will not affect its delivery for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and we will work with the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee to ensure that what is needed for the games is delivered in the revised plan."

Abe said the stadium won't be completed in time for the 2019 Rugby World Cup, the first in Asia.

The new 80,000-seat stadium had been scheduled to serve as the showpiece venue for the rugby tournament, hosting the opening game, semifinals, and final.

World Rugby, the sport's international governing body, said it was "extremely disappointed" because Japan has repeatedly assured the stadium would be ready for 2019. The organization said it is seeking clarification from the Japanese organizing committee and will consider the options of the impact of the announcement.

The leading candidate for an alternate main venue is the 72,000-seat International Stadium in Yokohama, just south of Tokyo. The stadium, which hosted the 2002 soccer World Cup final, was one of 11 other venues selected for the 2019 tournament.

For weeks, the public line of Abe and other government officials has been that they would stick with the stadium designed by award-winning architect Zaha Hadid.

His abrupt decision was seen as damage
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Units per U.S. dollar as of 7/31

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Cambodian Riel	4104.1
China Renminbi	6.2096
Fijian Dollar	2.1411
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7528
Indian Rupee	64.136
Indonesian Rupiah	13539
Iranian Rial	29566
Japanese Yen	123.83
Laos New Kip	8191.0
Malaysian Ringgit	3.831
Nepal Rupee	102.38
Pakistani Rupee	101.78
Papua N.G. Kina	2.7739
Philippine Peso	45.74
Russian Ruble	60.759
Saudi Riyal	3.7502
Singapore Dollar	1.37
South Korean Won	1170.3
Sri Lankan Rupee	133.83
Taiwan Dollar	31.675
Thai Baht	35.066
Vietnam Dong	21818