

Australia leader disappointed in Japan's return to whaling

TOKYO (AP) — Australia's leader has said his country is "very disappointed" with Japan's decision to resume whaling in Antarctic waters. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, on his first visit to Japan since taking the helm in September, wants to strengthen Australia-Japan ties, but also faces pressure at home to confront Japan on the whaling issue. "Australia is very disappointed that Japan has resumed whaling in the Southern Ocean this year," he told reporters in Tokyo. "We will, as good friends should, be upfront and frank about our differences of opinion." Japan stopped whaling last year after an international court ruled against its program, which is ostensibly for scientific research. Since then, Japan has revised its Antarctic whaling program to reduce the maximum catch to 333 minke whales, about one-third of its previous quota. A fleet of whaling ships set out at the beginning of December for a scaled-down, three-month hunt.

Former top leader of Chinese city admits guilt

BEIJING (AP) — A former top official for China's prosperous southern city of Guangzhou wept in court as he confessed to taking \$17 million in bribes, according to court reports. The Nanning Intermediate People's Court said in a written statement that Wan Qingliang raised no objection to the corruption charge and showed remorse when he stood trial. The court will announce the verdict later. It said Wan took the bribes from 15 companies and individuals from 2000 to 2014, when he served in various government positions in Guangdong. Wan last served as the party chief for Guangzhou, one of the most prosperous cities in China. As the party chief, he ranked above the mayor and was the city's most senior official. He came under investigation in 2014 amid a widening anti-corruption campaign launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who came into power in early 2013.

Philippine priest rebuked for riding hoverboard during mass

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — Philippine Roman Catholic Church officials have reprimanded a priest for riding a hoverboard and singing a song during Christmas Eve mass. The Diocese of San Pablo, south of Manila, said the Rev. Albert San Jose apologized for his action, which was caught on video and widely shared on YouTube. The video shows the priest in a white cassock gliding up and down the church's aisles on the two-wheeled electric scooter while singing a Christmas song. Some members of the surprised congregation applaud as he pivots and moves backward. The performance came just before the final blessing in the mass at the church in Binan city in Laguna province. "That was wrong," the diocese said in a statement, emphasizing that celebrating the mass is the church's "highest form" of worship and "demands utmost respect and reverence. ... It is not a personal celebration where one can capriciously introduce something to get the attention of the people," it said. Philippine church officials have urged priests to live simply and humbly as they minister to the poor in the Asian bastion of Catholicism, especially under the leadership of Pope Francis, who is known for his frugal lifestyle.

Toyota head resigns from Tokyo Olympic committee

TOKYO (AP) — The head of Toyota Motor Corp. has stepped down as vice president of the organizing committee for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The committee announced the resignation of Akio Toyoda in December. He is expected to be replaced by the president of Panasonic, Kazuhiro Tsuga. A Tokyo Olympic official told reporters that Toyoda may have been concerned about serving on both committees, since the organizers are seeking support from the business community. Toyoda said in a statement that he decided to reorganize his roles to intensify his efforts to encourage business support for the 2020 Games. He said he is "looking forward to forging even closer ties between the organizing committee and Japan's business community."

China names and shames five tourists over bad behavior

BEIJING (AP) — China's tourism authority has named and shamed another five tourists for bad behavior and says it is working with airlines on a possible flying ban. Those added to the list of "uncivilized behavior" by tourists include two women and a man who brawled after one woman's seat was bumped during boarding of a flight from Cambodia to the western city of Chengdu. The three were forcibly removed from the plane under captain's orders and the flight was delayed for one hour, the China National Tourism Administration said. Another man was listed after he was arrested in Japan for assaulting a convenience store clerk whom he accused of disrespecting his wife. The last was a woman who attacked her tour guide with hot tea after learning the price of her son's ticket to a western China scenic site was not included in the package. Their names and a description of their alleged misbehavior were entered onto the administration's list and will remain there for one to three years. Over that period, they can be refused service by travel agents, airlines, hotels, and scenic sites. In a further step, the administration said it was working with major Chinese airlines on "enacting definite restrictive measures" against those on the list, which currently includes 16 names in total. The government has grown concerned about the negative impact on China's image stemming from numerous incidents of bad behavior by Chinese tourists at home and abroad, ranging from fighting with air crews to defacing cultural artifacts. Social-media platforms have spread descriptions and video clips of the incidents, prompting widespread derision among the public and occasional online campaigns to identify the perpetrators. Rising incomes, relaxed regulations, and cheap flights have permitted record numbers of Chinese to travel in recent years. Among other frequent complaints are line-cutting, smoking where banned, littering, and fouling public toilets.



DESIGN DECISION. Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, right, and Japan Sport Council chairman Kazumi Ohigashi pose for photographers after a press conference in Tokyo. Japan has chosen a scaled-down design for the main stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, five months after scrapping the initial design and construction plan for being too costly. Kuma's new design will still cost 153 billion yen (\$1.26 billion) to design, build, and maintain. The initial stadium proposal would have cost 252 billion yen (\$2.1 billion). (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi)

Japan picks new design for Tokyo 2020 Olympic stadium

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan has chosen a scaled-down design for the main stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, five months after scrapping the initial design and construction plan for being too costly.

The new design, by Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, will still cost 153 billion yen (\$1.26 billion) to design, build, and maintain. The initial stadium proposal would have cost 252 billion yen (\$2.1 billion), which would have made it the most expensive stadium ever built.

Kuma's combined steel and wood structure, with a relatively flat roof with shrubbery along its outer concourses, echoes traditional temple designs. It stands 164 feet tall, with the track and field below ground level.

"This is a wonderful plan which meets the basic vision in the new construction plan and requirements for construction period and the budget," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in announcing the choice.

The announcement was a major step for organizers, who were forced to start over on a new design less than five years before the 2020 Games.

The scrapping of the initial stadium plan forced the 2019 Rugby World Cup to change venues, and the late change had raised concerns about whether it could even be completed in time for the Olympics.

Organizers also had to deal with a plagiarism scandal over the logo for the event, and an investigation found backroom dealings

in the selection process.

Chief cabinet secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters that the design selection process was more transparent than that for the previous stadium plan, and also addressed the main problems: cost and post-Olympic use.

The winning project will be led by major construction company Taisei Corp. Lead architect Kuma, known for his Japanese aesthetic, also designed Tokyo's kabuki theater, which was renewed in 2013.

Officials said the design won by a small margin over the alternative plan led by architect Toyo Ito and three construction companies: Takenaka, Shimizu, and Obayashi.

Suga said Kuma's plan was superior because of its ample environmental consideration and a possibility of shrinking the construction period.

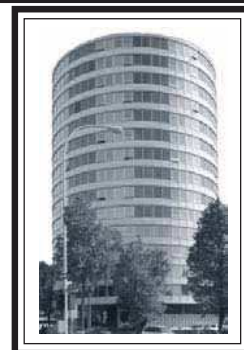
The original plan by British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid was criticized for its massive cost and scale.

Hadid said Japan's scrapping of her plan was "shocking" and that she said it was not about design or budget.

"In fact, much of our two years of detailed design work and the cost savings we recommended have been validated by the remarkable similarities of our original detailed stadium layout and our seating bowl configuration with those of the design announced today," she said in a statement to The Associated Press.

Associated Press writer Ken Moritsugu contributed to this report.

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Hong Kong Dollar	7.75
Indian Rupee	66.14
Indonesian Rupiah	13830
Iranian Rial	30117
Japanese Yen	120.55
Laos New Kip	8148.0
Malaysian Ringgit	4.2932
Nepal Rupee	105.9
Pakistani Rupee	104.73
Papua N.G. Kina	3.0075
Philippine Peso	46.9
Russian Ruble	72.521
Saudi Riyal	3.754
Singapore Dollar	1.4111
South Korean Won	1172.5
Sri Lankan Rupee	143.9
Taiwan Dollar	32.835
Thai Baht	36.028
Vietnam Dong	22495