



Japan's Abe seeks to burnish legacy ahead of election

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is shifting his focus to a sputtering economy as he seeks to burnish his legacy and shore up support ahead of an election in the summer. Abe said he expects to make progress on sweeping reforms he has promised but not yet delivered. He likens himself to the 18th-century “Abarenbo Shogun,” or “Rogue General” Tokugawa Yoshimune, a national leader renowned for his efforts to reduce waste, clean up corruption, and instill samurai values of discipline and leadership. Abe’s focus is bound to be on ensuring victory in the election for the upper house of parliament in July. Japan’s slow economic recovery is prompting him to highlight more obvious progress on the diplomatic front.

Malaysia bans bauxite mining in Pahang for three months

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Malaysia’s government says it has begun to ban the mining of bauxite in Pahang state for three months — beginning January 15 — to regulate the industry after its unfettered growth last year caused sea and air pollution. Bauxite mining in the central state was bolstered from mid-2014 amid strong demand from China after Indonesia banned bauxite exports and India raised ore tariffs. The mining sparked a public furor after it was blamed for contaminating part of the sea and some rivers in Pahang’s capital of Kuantan, turning the waters red again after heavy rains. The water pollution first occurred in May last year. Natural resources minister Wan Junaidi Jaafar said all mining is being halted under a three-month moratorium to clear stockpiles and build proper facilities.

Chinese parents protest to get second children registered

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese parents who bore children outside the country’s one-child policy protested outside the family-planning commission in a bid to have their fines cancelled. Starting this year, all Chinese couples are allowed to have two children. For decades, China’s family-planning policy limited most urban couples to one child, and couples who broke the policy were ordered to pay a social compensation fee. To pressure them into paying, some local authorities refused to register the child if the parents didn’t pay up. About 20 people stood in a line outside the gates of the national family-planning offices saying they wanted their fines cancelled. Protester Wan Changru said all children should be treated equally, “no matter whether they were born before or after the policy change.”

Airport apologizes for snake found on luggage cart

BANGKOK (AP) — Bangkok’s main international airport issued an apology after a snake slithered into the arrival hall and wrapped itself around the base of a luggage cart. Suvarnabhumi (pronounced “Suwanapoom”) International Airport, which was built on land previously known as “Cobra Swamp,” said it would like to “apologize for the incident that frightened passengers.” A female passenger spotted the snake after placing luggage on the cart as she prepared to leave the arrival hall, the statement said. “After being alerted, security officers captured the snake right away and no passengers were injured,” Airports of Thailand said in a statement that described the reptile as “a small baby snake,” but did not identify the species. Snake expert Thanaphong Tawan at a Bangkok snake farm run by the Thai Red Cross Society said the snake appeared to be a Malayan Bridle snake, a non-venomous variety, based on a picture taken at the airport and published by Thai media. The statement sought to “reassure that clear and strict measures have been imposed to prevent all poisonous animals from slipping into the airport’s buildings” and it was believed “the baby snake managed to slip into the airport because it was very small.” Meanwhile, on the resort island of Phuket, a Chinese tourist was bitten on the nose by a python while leaning in to kiss it on the head while visiting a snake show, *The Bangkok Post* reported. A video of the incident was widely shared on social media, showing the snake striking at the woman’s face as a loud scream is heard. Thai media reported that the woman received eight stitches and then flew home.

Indian police say U.S. tourist died after falling into paddy

PANAJI, India (AP) — Indian police say an American tourist died after a mob of villagers mistook him for a thief and chased him until he fell into a swampy rice paddy, where he choked on muddy water. The tourist, identified by his passport as 30-year-old Caitanya Holt, was eventually pulled out of the mud by police using ropes, but he was declared dead on arrival at a local hospital in the western state of Goa, police officer Umesh Gaonkar said. The Press Trust of India reported that Holt drowned in a rice paddy, citing the state’s highest elected official, chief minister Laxmikant Parsekar. American officials have asked Indian authorities for details about his death and are in contact with Holt’s family in the U.S., said Heidi Hattenbach, a consular information officer.

Ai says LEGO policy change is a victory

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese artist Ai Weiwei says a change in policy by LEGO to allow bulk orders of their toy bricks for projects with a political purpose is a victory for freedom of expression. The LEGO Group last year refused a bulk order for the toy bricks for an exhibition of Ai’s in Melbourne, Australia. Ai called that move “an act of censorship and discrimination,” but LEGO said it had a decades-old policy of not endorsing the use of its bricks in projects with a “political agenda.” It announced in mid-January it will no longer ask what the “thematic purpose” of a project is. Instead, customers who intend to display their creations in public will be asked to make clear that LEGO does not support or endorse them.



FINAL FILLETS. An employee of Kiyomura Co. shows a fillet of a bluefin tuna the company bought at the celebratory first auction of the year as it is sliced for customers at his sushi restaurant near Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo. The 440-pound glistening tuna was auctioned for about 14 million Japanese yen (\$118,000) during the last auction at Tokyo’s 80-year-old market, which is due to move in November to a massive complex further south in Tokyo Bay, making way for redevelopment of the prime slice of downtown real estate. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi)

80-year-old Tokyo fish market holds final New Year auction

By Elaine Kurtenbach
AP Business Writer

TOKYO — It’s among the biggest of Japan’s many New Year holiday rituals: A huge, glistening tuna was auctioned for about 14 million Japanese yen (\$118,000) at Tokyo’s 80-year-old Tsukiji market. Next year, if all goes as planned, the tradition won’t be quite the same.

The world’s biggest and most famous fish and seafood market — also a major tourist attraction in Tokyo — is due to move in November to a massive complex further south in Tokyo Bay, making way for redevelopment of the prime slice of downtown real estate.

The closure of the Tsukiji market will punctuate the end of the post-war era for many of the mom-and-pop shops just outside the main market that peddle a cornucopia of sea-related products, from dried squid and seaweed to whale bacon and caviar.

The auction is typical of Japan’s penchant for fresh starts at the beginning of the year — the first visit of the year to a shrine and the first dream of the year are other important firsts — and it’s meant to set an auspicious precedent for the 12 months to come.

Sushi restaurateur Kiyoshi Kimura has prevailed in most of the recent new year auctions, and he did so again this year in the bidding for a 440-pound tuna.

In 2013, a bidding war drove his record winning bid to 154.4 million yen (at the current exchange rates: about \$1.3 million) for a 490-pound fish.

That drew complaints that prices had soared

way out of line, and the winning price in 2014 was dramatically lower. Last year, a 380-pound tuna caught off Japan’s northern region of Aomori fetched a winning bid of 4.51 million yen (\$37,480).

Japanese eat about 80 percent of all bluefin tuna caught worldwide, and stocks of all three bluefin species — the Pacific, Southern, and Atlantic — have fallen over the past 15 years amid overfishing.

But while the new year and daily tuna auctions are Tsukiji’s best-known events, the market is about much more than just tuna.

On a recent year-end day, shop owners in rubber boots and aprons rushed to clean up and sell off the last of their inventory, as the last few hundred shoppers milled around hunting for bargains.

Already, some shops outside the market have been razed and a new building that will house a smaller “outer market” is under construction. Conceptual drawings from the Tokyo city government show the nearly 57-acre market site that fronts the Sumida River’s outlet into Tokyo Bay being transformed into an open waterfront park surrounded by greenery, with a wide shopping plaza and a passenger terminal for tourist ferries traversing the bay and river.

“We are contributing with all our efforts to the revitalization of our historic Tsukiji,” said a banner emblazoned with the logos of the architect and other contractors hanging from scaffolding of the new building.

Tsukiji’s predawn auctions are a fixture on the tourist circuit, and since it was not set up to accommodate large crowds, the market’s

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Fijian Dollar	2.145
Hong Kong Dollar	7.795
Indian Rupee	67.605
Indonesian Rupiah	13910
Iranian Rial	30117
Japanese Yen	116.98
Laos New Kip	8153.0
Malaysian Ringgit	4.3967
Nepal Rupee	108.24
Pakistani Rupee	104.92
Papua N.G. Kina	3.0166
Philippine Peso	47.78
Russian Ruble	77.705
Saudi Riyal	3.7489
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Taiwan Dollar	32.66
Thai Baht	36.355
Vietnam Dong	22416