



## Malaysia approves new search for missing plane

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Malaysia's government has approved a new attempt by a private company to find the wreckage of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, nearly four years after its disappearance sparked one of aviation's biggest mysteries. The Houston, Texas-based company Ocean Infinity has dispatched a search vessel to look in the southern Indian Ocean for debris from the plane, which disappeared March 8, 2014, on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 227 passengers and 12 crew members. The governments of Malaysia, China, and Australia called off a nearly three-year official search last January. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau's final report on the search conceded that authorities were no closer to knowing the reasons for the Boeing 777's disappearance, or its exact location. "The basis of the offer from Ocean Infinity is based on 'no cure, no fee,'" Malaysian transport minister Liow Tiong Lai said, meaning that payment will be made only if the company finds the wreckage.

## Court says theaters do not have to play Indian anthem

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's Supreme Court has reversed a ruling that ordered the national anthem to be played before movie screenings while audiences stood, a ruling that sparked a spate of arrests and attacks on cinema-goers who refused to rise. The new decision, Indian news outlets reported, allows theaters to choose whether to play the national anthem. The 2016 ruling, which the court said was designed to instill patriotism, set off a wave of attacks in theaters, including one on a disabled man in a wheelchair. The court indicated it might reverse its ruling. During a hearing last year, a group of justices noted that "citizens cannot be forced to carry patriotism on their sleeves and courts cannot inculcate patriotism among people through its order," the Press Trust of India news agency reported. The court also ordered that a government commission be established to recommend further decisions on whether the anthem should be played in theaters.

## French president offers Chinese leader Xi special gift horse

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron has offered a very special gift to his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, during his trip to China — a horse from France's famed Garde Republicaine. The nine-year-old gelding bred in Normandy, named Vesuve de Brekka, is trained and ready for use. A member of the Garde said in a video on Macron's Twitter account that Vesuve de Brekka was among the horses on parade on France's July 14 Bastille Day when the Garde Republicaine cavalry prances down the Champs-Élysées. The tweet said the horse is "a symbol of our friendship." Macron hopes for big things in return. On the second day of his visit, Macron said the two nations should "settle on an economic and geopolitical plan for the affairs of our world."

## 38-year ban on women buying, selling alcohol lifted

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka has revoked a 38-year ban on selling alcohol to women and employing them in places where the drinks are produced and sold. Finance minister Mangala Samaraweera signed the notification revoking the ban to restore gender equality and promote tourism, a government statement said. The ban had been in force since 1979, the early years of Sri Lanka embracing an open market economy. But many businesses had employed women to sell and serve alcohol and sold alcohol to them in spite of the ban. The government also decided to allow liquor outlets to stay open an hour later, until 10:00pm. The decision could become politically sensitive with clergy in the predominantly Buddhist nation opposing liberalizing alcohol consumption. However, many Sri Lankans consume alcohol.

## Putin calls Kim Jong Un "competent" and "mature" leader

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin says North Korea's Kim Jong Un has shown himself to be a mature leader who is interested in calming down the tensions over its nuclear and long-range missile programs. Meeting with top Russian media figures, Putin said Kim "is an absolutely competent and already mature politician" who has "solved his strategic task — he has a nuclear warhead and a global-range missile." Now, in Putin's view, Kim is "cleaning up the situation, smoothing it, calming it." Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump have engaged in an increasingly sharp war of words as North Korea's weapons programs advance, each of them belittling the other.

## China's 2017 movie ticket sales rise 13.5 percent

BEIJING (AP) — Domestic movie ticket sales rose 13.5 percent in 2017 in China, the world's second-biggest global film market. The Xinhua News Agency, citing data from China's film regulator, said domestic ticket sales totalled 55.9 billion yuan (\$8.6 billion) last year. The top-grossing title was the domestically made action picture *Wolf Warrior 2*, which took in 5.7 billion yuan (\$875 million). China's film market is narrowing the gap with the top market, the United States, where last year's domestic box office is estimated to have declined 2.6 percent from 2016 to \$11.1 billion. Xinhua said mainland-made movies accounted for 54 percent of ticket sales, or 30.1 billion yuan (\$4.6 billion).

## Vietnam arrests tycoon accused of revealing state secrets

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Vietnamese police have arrested a business tycoon wanted for revealing state secrets after he was deported by Singapore. Vietnamese officials said in a statement that Phan Van Anh Vu was arrested and will be investigated "in accordance with the law." The 42-year-old Vu is a real estate developer who also served as a senior officer in the Vietnamese intelligence service. Police raided his home in the central city of Danang on December 21.



**AMAZING ICE.** Visitors walk among the attractions at the Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival in Harbin, in China's Heilongjiang province. The festival in the frigid northeastern Chinese city is known for massive, elaborate, and colorfully lit ice sculptures featuring animals, cartoon characters, and landmarks. (Chinatopix via AP)

## Red Square, Bangkok temple among ice-festival sculptures

HARBIN, China (AP) — Ice sculptures of Moscow's Red Square and Bangkok's Temple of the Emerald Buddha are among landmarks featured in the world's largest ice festival.

The Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival in the frigid northeastern Chinese city is known for massive, elaborate, and colorfully lit ice sculptures featuring animals, cartoon characters, and landmarks.

Some of this year's displays center on Chinese President Xi Jinping's major foreign policy and trade initiative, the One Belt One Road, an ambitious plan to link Asia and Europe with a network of railways, ports, and other infrastructure.

Ice sculpture artist Han Zhenkun designed his work based on the historic Silk Road.

"Back then, through the Silk Road, exquisite artworks from China like potteries were transported by camels and horses to the western world," Han said.

Main activities started this month and the

festival runs through late February, with heavy crowds expected during Lunar New Year celebrations — February 15 to 23. Temperatures at this time of the year can dip below zero Fahrenheit.

Last year's festival drew 18 million visitors and 28.7 billion yuan (\$4.4 billion) in tourism revenue for Harbin, data from the city's tourism bureau show.

One park, the Harbin Ice-Snow World, features more than 2,000 ice sculptures made from 240,000 cubic yards of ice collected from the Songhua River by nearly a thousand workers. In the evening, sculptures are lit with colorful lights.

In addition to ice-sculpture competitions, the festival also includes winter swimming, ice hockey, skiing, and snow biking.

"Art has no borders," Han said. "It's an abstract language. We communicate with our works in this international competition. It means a lot."

## Rare Sumatran tiger kills Indonesian palm-oil worker

PEKANBARU, Indonesia (AP) — A rare Sumatran tiger has killed a woman working at a palm-oil plantation in western Indonesia, the latest human-tiger conflict in an area hit by widespread deforestation, according to police.

Local police chief Muhammad Rafi said the tiger mauled the 33-year-old worker in Indragiri Hilir, a district in Riau province.

Rafi said the tiger ran abruptly into the plantation owned by PT Tabung Haji Indo Plantation, causing the woman and two colleagues, who were collecting data on pests, to run in panic.

He said the three climbed a nearby palm-oil tree, but the tiger managed to pull the victim

to the ground where she was mauled to death.

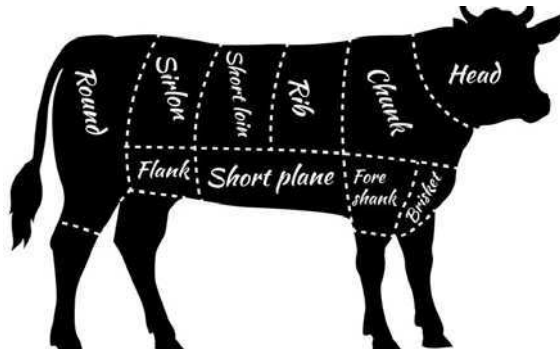
"The two survivors saw how the tiger mauled her to death, but they could not do anything to help her," Rafi said. "It was a tragic conflict between human and animal."

Indonesia is home to some 400 Sumatran tigers, but they are increasingly under threat as their jungle habitat shrinks.

As their habitat diminishes, many of the endangered animals roam into villages or plantations in search of food, setting off conflict with humans.

Sumatran tigers are the most critically endangered tiger subspecies. About 400 remain, down from 1,000 in the 1970s, because of forest destruction and poaching.

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## Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 1/11

Bangladesh Taka	82.854
Cambodian Riel	4020.2
China Renminbi	6.4881
Fijian Dollar	2.03
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8237
Indian Rupee	63.665
Indonesian Rupiah	13363
Iranian Rial	36395
Japanese Yen	111.33
Laos New Kip	8311.8
Malaysian Ringgit	3.9762
Nepal Rupee	101.86
Pakistani Rupee	110.71
Papua N.G. Kina	3.1953
Philippine Peso	50.288
Russian Ruble	56.572
Saudi Riyal	3.7503
Singapore Dollar	1.3286
South Korean Won	1065.2
Sri Lankan Rupee	153.75
Taiwan Dollar	29.573
Thai Baht	31.936
Vietnam Dong	22791