



Not all S. Koreans are happy about unified hockey team

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Koreans seem generally happy they'll see the North Koreans at their Olympics, but aren't as pleased about sharing a team with them. The agreement to field a unified women's ice hockey team at the Winter Olympics triggered a debate in South Korea, where there's no longer strong public clamor for reunification or for using sports to make political statements. President Moon Jae-in, who views the games as an opportunity to improve ties after a year of tension over the North's nuclear weapons program, says the unified team will provide a "historically grand moment" once it appears on the ice. Not all South Koreans are in the mood. There are few objections to the North's presence at the Olympics, which some hope will ensure a respite from new weapons test.

Woman dies in Nepal village because of menstrual exile

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — A woman has died in a remote village in Nepal because of a tradition in which women are exiled from their homes and forced to live in huts during menstruation, according to the government. The 21-year-old is believed to have died from smoke inhalation from a fire she lit in the hut to keep warm in the freezing temperatures in the mountain village, said government administrator Tul Bahadur Kawcha. Kawcha said the tradition is still practiced in some remote villages despite a government ban on the practice and a law introduced last year to punish people who force women to follow the custom. The new law goes into effect in August this year, with violators who force women into exile during menstruation facing up to three months in prison or a fine of 3,000 Nepalese rupees (\$29). Many menstruating women are still forced to leave their homes and take shelter in unhygienic or insecure huts or cow sheds until their cycle ends, though the practice — called *Chhaupadi* — was actually outlawed a decade ago. But without any penalties, the custom continued in many parts of the majority Hindu Himalayan country, especially in the western hills. While exiled in isolation, some women face bitter cold or attacks by wild animals. Unclean conditions can also cause infections.

China's birthrate drops despite allowing two-child families

BEIJING (AP) — The birthrate in China fell last year despite the country easing its family planning policies and allowing all couples to have two children, a result parents say of the stresses of urban life. There were 17.2 million births in the country last year, down from 17.9 million in 2016, the National Bureau of Statistics reported. With almost 1.4 billion people, China has the world's largest population, but it is aging fast even before reaching its expected peak of 1.45 billion in 2029. China changed its longstanding one-child policy in 2015 in hopes of increasing the size of the younger working population that will eventually have to support their elders. The number of births rose nearly eight percent in 2016, with nearly half of the babies born to couples who already had a child. That appears to have been a one-time increase, however, with the decision of couples to not have a second child affected by the trend toward later marriage, the desire for smaller families, and concerns about the high cost of raising children. Studies predicted the loosening of the one-child policy would bring only a relatively small increase in population growth. Experts recommend that the country increase its retirement age to address an expected labor shortage and declining economic vitality. China enacted its one-child policy in 1979, enforced with fines and in some cases state-mandated abortions. The expected future reduction in the working-age population is exacerbated by a skewed male-female birth ratio resulting from the traditional preference for male offspring.

Philippines to back U.S. fight vs. terror, if efforts coincide

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — The Philippine defense chief reacted guardedly to U.S. President Donald Trump's remarks on fighting terrorism in his first State of the Union address, saying Manila would lend its support whenever the efforts of the two nations coincide. Defense secretary Delfin Lorenzana told The Associated Press it did not really matter that Trump failed to mention U.S. policy on the South China Sea disputes involving China, the Philippines, and four other governments, saying "that's his call." He continued: "If our efforts against terrorists coincide, well and good, we cooperate. But in reality, each country will be addressing its own security problems by any legal means at its disposal." The U.S. deployed surveillance aircraft to help Philippine forces quell an Islamic State group-linked siege in southern Marawi city last year. Lorenzana did not comment on Trump's order to the Pentagon to keep the Guantanamo Bay detention center open in contrast to the failed efforts of former U.S. President Barack Obama to shut down the prison for high-profile terrorism suspects.

Cambodian forest protectors slain after confrontation

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — A forest protection ranger, a military police officer, and a conservation worker have been killed in an ambush in north-eastern Cambodia where illegal logging and smuggling are rife. Keo Sopheak, a senior environmental official in Mondulokiri province, said the three-person team was attacked after patrolling in the Keo Siema wildlife conservation sanctuary. The dead civilian was a Cambodian employee of the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society. Keo Sopheak said the conservation team had confiscated chainsaws and motorcycles from some Vietnamese who were logging illegally. The official said the team was returning from their patrol when they were attacked and killed by Cambodian security forces, who are known to collaborate with illegal loggers who smuggle the wood to neighboring Vietnam. Further circumstances of their deaths were not immediately clear.



MEET SNOW & SNOWFALL. One of two giant pandas, four-year-old male Hua Bao and three-year old female Jin Baobao, arrive at the Helsinki airport in Vantaa, Finland. Finnish panda keeper Anna Palmroth said the 4,000-mile flight from Chengdu, China went smoothly, with the pandas resting and munching on their "packed lunch" of bamboo, carrots, and apples. (Markku Ulander/Lehtikuva via AP)

Pair of Chinese giant pandas get snowy welcome in Finland

By Jari Tanner
The Associated Press

HELSINKI — A pair of giant pandas has arrived in snowy Finland, China's gift to mark the small Nordic nation's 100 years of independence.

Four-year-old male panda Hua Bao and three-year old female Jin Baobao were welcomed in a ceremony at the Helsinki airport attended by the Chinese ambassador to Finland and Finnish officials.

"We think this is the best gift that Chinese people can give to Finland," said Chen Li, China's ambassador to Finland, referring to Finland's 100th anniversary on December 6, 2017.

The pandas have been renamed in Finnish as Pyry ("Snowfall") for the male and Lumi ("Snow") for the female.

Finnish panda keeper Anna Palmroth said the 4,000-mile flight from Chengdu, China went smoothly, with the pandas resting and munching on their "packed lunch" of bamboo, carrots, and apples.

The pandas immediately began their

journey to the Ahtari Zoo nature reserve in central Finland — 205 miles north of Helsinki — amid cold wintry conditions similar to their natural environment in China's mountain areas.

The panda deal was finalized in April 2017, when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Helsinki for talks with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto.

The Ahtari Zoo, which specializes in typical northern European animals such as bears, lynxes, and wolverines, will have the giant pandas for 15 years and has built a special Panda House annex at an estimated cost of 8 million euros (\$9.8 million) in hopes of luring more tourists.

Beijing has presented giant pandas as a sign of goodwill and closer political ties to some 17 nations worldwide. Europe, Austria, Britain, Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands, and Spain are countries currently with giant pandas.

Xi noted in Helsinki last year that Finland — a country of 5.5 million — began political ties with China in 1950.

50 years later, USS Pueblo is a Pyongyang museum piece

By Eric Talmadge
The Associated Press

PYONGYANG, North Korea — Fifty years after it was seized by North Korea, the *USS Pueblo* is the only U.S. Navy ship held captive by a foreign government. And though mostly forgotten in the United States, the "Pueblo Incident" for North Korea remains a potent symbol of military success.

The spy ship captured 50 years ago sits in a

frozen river on the edge of the "Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum" in Pyongyang, where thousands of North Koreans are brought each day to hear the North's version of how their country defeated the Americans in the 1950-1953 Korean War.

State media have played up the anniversary as a milestone in North Korea's struggle against the United States.

The ship has been extensively refitted to heighten its propaganda impact.

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Fijian Dollar	2.0049
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8205
Indian Rupee	64.064
Indonesian Rupiah	13452
Iranian Rial	39972
Japanese Yen	110.17
Laos New Kip	8297.5
Malaysian Ringgit	3.8855
Nepal Rupee	102.51
Pakistani Rupee	110.76
Papua N.G. Kina	3.206
Philippine Peso	51.659
Russian Ruble	56.541
Saudi Riyal	3.7501
Singapore Dollar	1.3198
South Korean Won	1079.9
Sri Lankan Rupee	153.71
Taiwan Dollar	29.226
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