



South Korean K-Pop singers to perform in North Korea

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea sent a 160-member artistic delegation to North Korea, including about 10 popular K-Pop singers, on March 31. A joint statement issued after the two Koreas made the agreement said the South Korean artistic group’s visit to Pyongyang, North Korea’s capital, would last through April 4 and feature two performances. The development occurred during a thaw in the North Korean nuclear crisis. A North Korean band performed in South Korea during the recently ended PyeongChang Winter Olympics. The South Korean delegation includes some of the country’s most celebrated singers, including Cho Yong-pil, Lee Sunhee, and Cho Jin Hee, who performed in Pyongyang during a previous era of detente. Popular girl band Red Velvet is also among the South Korean groups.

Papuan teen dies hours after release from Indonesia jail

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — A spokesman for the family of a Papuan teenager who died after 24 hours in Indonesian police custody said the 17-year-old had multiple bruises and injuries, and that it did not accept the explanation he died of alcohol poisoning. Rico Ayomi died March 13 just hours after police returned him to his family after holding him in custody for alleged theft. According to police, they had rescued him from an angry mob in the coastal West Papua city of Sorong. A photo released by police showed the dead teenager with a container of 70 percent alcohol beside him. The leader of the Sorong Youth and Student Association, Simon Soren, who is representing Ayomi’s family, said police officers returned Ayomi to his family home unable to stand or speak.

Tahiti loses rugby qualifier over ineligible players

SYDNEY (AP) — Tahiti’s 13-9 win over the Cook Islands in a Rugby World Cup qualifier has been overturned because Tahiti used two ineligible players, meaning the Cook Islands will proceed to the next round of qualifying for next year’s tournament in Japan. World Rugby said in a statement that followed a request from the Cook Islands Rugby Union, it investigated claims that the Tahiti Rugby Union had used the ineligible players during the match in Rarotonga on August 4, 2017. It said independent judicial officer Tim Gresson of New Zealand determined that the Tahiti Rugby Union had breached regulations because neither player had family ties to Tahiti or had fulfilled three-year residency requirements to make them eligible to play. With Cook Islands declared the winner, they will now play the winner of the Asia Rugby Championship in the Cook Islands on June 30, and the return leg on July 7. Malaysia, South Korea, and Hong Kong will play in the Asia Rugby Championship, a four-match round-robin tournament ending in early June.

Ban on Filipinos going to work in Kuwait stays as talks fail

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — A Filipino official says the Philippines and Kuwait have failed to conclude a migrant labor protection pact after two days of talks sparked by the February discovery of a dead Filipina housemaid in an apartment freezer there. Labor secretary Silvestre Bello III told reporters that a ban on Filipino workers going to Kuwait will continue indefinitely after negotiators failed to conclude a labor pact after the talks in Manila. They agreed to hold more talks later. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has said the ban won’t be lifted until Filipino workers are given better protection in Kuwait and justice is served for the death of the woman, Joana Demafelis.

Thailand drafting plans to regulate, tax cryptocurrencies

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand’s cabinet has agreed to draft a law to oversee cryptocurrency trading, seeking to tax the largely unregulated market. Government spokesman Nathporn Chatusripitak said the Ministry of Finance also proposed the new regulations to help prevent the use of digital currencies in money laundering and fraud. He said details of the proposed regulations would be announced soon. In February, Thailand’s central bank issued a circular asking financial institutions to not handle transactions involving cryptocurrencies. Across Asia, governments have been belatedly moving to exert control over bitcoin exchanges and other fast-growing cryptocurrency-related activities.

India sends notice to Facebook over alleged data breach

NEW DELHI (AP) — India’s government has sent a notice to Facebook asking whether the personal data of Indian voters and users has been compromised by U.K.-based Cambridge Analytica or any other downstream entity. A similar notice was dispatched to Cambridge Analytica following media reports that it had misused data to profile Indians and influence their elections. The government set an early April deadline for Cambridge Analytica and April 7 for Facebook to respond to its inquiry. Facebook is facing unprecedented scrutiny following reports that the data-mining firm used ill-gotten data from tens of millions of its users to try to influence elections. India’s Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said in a statement that Facebook has its largest footprint in India in terms of its user base and sought to know “what proactive measures it is taking to ensure the safety, security, and privacy of such large user data and to prevent its misuse by any third party.” The governing Bharatiya Janata Party and the main opposition Congress Party have accused each other of utilizing the services of the British company, but denied any link with it. Cambridge Analytica’s allegedly unauthorized harvesting of Facebook data and a series of leaks linked to India’s biometric database has refocused public attention on digital privacy in the country. Digital law experts say Indian regulations offered particularly weak safeguards against data breach.



BOOK BUS. Afghan children read books inside a bus library in Kabul, Afghanistan. From sunrise to sunset, the bus drives around Kabul’s neighborhoods, stopping in each place for a couple of hours at a time. The mobile library was the initiative of 25-year-old Freshta Karim, who wanted to give Kabul’s children something badly missing in her own childhood — a chance to widen one’s horizons, free of the shadow of war and poverty. (AP Photo/Rahmat Gul)

Library on wheels brings joy of books to Afghan kids

By **Rahim Faiez**
The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The children of Kabul love the blue bus — they rush toward it every time it pulls into their street, eager to come onboard, their young eyes brimming with excitement.

But it’s no ordinary bus. Its name is Charmaghz, the Dari word for Walnut, and it’s a library on wheels — the first such enterprise in Afghanistan’s war-battered capital.

Inside the bus are rows of neatly stacked books for children, hundreds of them in both Dari and Pashto, the two main languages in Afghanistan. And small tables and stools for the kids to sit on as they discover the joys of reading.

From sunrise to sunset, the bus drives around Kabul’s neighborhoods, stopping in each place for a couple of hours at a time.

The library was the initiative of Freshta Karim, a 25-year-old who recently earned her master’s degree in public policy from the University of Oxford, England. She wanted to give Kabul’s children something badly missing in her own childhood — a chance to widen one’s horizons, free of the shadow of war and poverty.

The idea came to her two years ago, Karim said, when she was hosting a small reading club for children at her home. She thought about ways to expand the project and bring reading opportunities to more children in the city.

“I don’t know how many of us can really forget the pain that the war has given us. Maybe children are too young to think about it, but I still feel that they realize it,” she said. “I hope a program like this can give them an

opportunity to forget those things.”

Just weeks into the project, she was thrilled by the kids’ fondness for the bus.

“We were not expecting so much love from the people and such acceptance, I am so amazed,” she said.

Karim said few people her age remember going to libraries as kids, the war had deprived them of so much. According to Save the Children, nearly a third of all Afghan children are unable to attend school, leaving them at increased risk of child labor, recruitment by armed groups, early marriage, and other forms of exploitation.

“Many schools even don’t have buildings,” Karim said. “Talking about a library is a luxury.”

On a recent day in her western Kabul neighborhood of Kart-e-Char, 11-year-old Marwa could hardly wait for the bus to turn the corner of the road so she could see it, run, and jump in — and start reading.

“The first day I came on the bus, I was so happy that I didn’t want to leave and go home,” Marwa said, smiling.

She wants to know more about everything — her homeland and the world, she says.

Karim and her team believe it’s important for the children to choose the books that appeal to them freely and keep reading. It’s the best way to develop critical thinking, she said — and hopefully also a step toward combatting Afghanistan’s 62-percent illiteracy rate.

The blue bus, decorated with colorful paintings to appeal to the young ones, was provided by the transportation ministry. All the books have been donated by different organizations or individuals. The donations also pay for the fuel that keeps the wheels

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Hong Kong Dollar	· · ·	7.8488
Indian Rupee	· · · · ·	65.121
Indonesian Rupiah	· · ·	13728
Iranian Rial	· · · · ·	37765
Japanese Yen	· · · · ·	106.28
Laos New Kip	· · · · ·	8297.0
Malaysian Ringgit	· · ·	3.8635
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Pakistani Rupee	· · · ·	115.71
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Philippine Peso	· · · · ·	52.2
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Singapore Dollar	· · · ·	1.3115
South Korean Won	· · ·	1063.6
Sri Lankan Rupee	· · ·	155.7
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