



Rally urges release of “Person of the Year” journalists

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Several dozen journalists and activists held a rally in Myanmar’s biggest city to mark the anniversary of the arrest of two reporters for the Reuters news agency who are among a group of journalists being honored by *TIME* magazine as its “Person of the Year.” The protesters wore t-shirts calling for the release of Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, who had reported on a brutal military-led crackdown on the Muslim Rohingya minority. They were arrested more than a year ago and charged with illegal possession of official documents. The two, who were sentenced in September to seven years imprisonment, denied the charge and said they were framed by police. Covers of some editions of *TIME*’s next issue carry a picture of the men’s wives holding photos of their husbands.

Indian bishop accused of misusing funds for family resigns

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of an Indian bishop who, according to news reports, was accused of misappropriating church funds to support a secret family. Bishop Prasad Gallela of Cuddapah in southern India denied the accusations. The Vatican said Gallela had offered to resign and Francis accepted. At 56, Gallela is well below the normal retirement age of 75 for bishops. The Ucanews news agency, which covers the Catholic Church closely in Asia, said two lay Catholics filed a criminal complaint against Gallela accusing him of misappropriating diocesan social welfare funds to support a wife and teenage son. Ucanews quoted Gallela as saying the accusations were false and that the woman identified as his wife on land deeds is actually the wife of his dead brother.

Team Japan’s coach goes with youth for Asian Cup squad

TOKYO (AP) — Southampton’s Maya Yoshida and Salzburg’s Takumi Minamino have been included in a Japan squad that will be missing Shinji Okazaki and Shinji Kagawa at next month’s Asian Cup. The January 5 through February 1 tournament in the United Arab Emirates will be Japan’s first Asian Cup under head coach Hajime Moriyasu, who has a record of four wins and a draw since succeeding Akira Nishino after the World Cup in Russia. “The last time we couldn’t win the title,” Moriyasu said. “So for this Asian Cup, I hope to win back the title and bring it back to Japan. We hope to compete with that goal in mind.” Leicester City striker Okazaki and Borussia Dortmund playmaker Kagawa were both omitted in the announcement. Moriyasu said he was eager to give younger players some international experience, overlooking some veterans who played earlier this year at the World Cup. “The players chosen this time might have less experience, but I want them to have strong feelings about building their own new national team and competing for the title with these feelings in mind,” Moriyasu said. Japan will face Turkmenistan in its Group F opener on January 9, followed by matches against Oman on January 13 and Uzbekistan on January 17. The expanded Asian Cup features 24 teams. Japan last won the quadrennial continental championship in 2011 when it beat Australia in Qatar. Australia won the last Asian Cup on home soil in 2015.

Surrogate moms freed after vowing to keep babies

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Cambodian officials say 32 women who acted illegally as surrogate mothers and were charged with human trafficking have been provisionally released from detention after agreeing to keep the babies they gave birth to rather than giving them up as originally planned. A spokeswoman for the National Committee for Counter-Trafficking said the women, who were charged in July for breaking surrogacy and human-trafficking laws, were released on bail in three groups. Acting as an intermediary between an adoptive parent and a pregnant woman carries a penalty of one to six months in prison. The human-trafficking offense is punishable by seven to 15 years of imprisonment. A Chinese man and four Cambodian women accused of managing the business were charged with the same offenses.

Japan draft defense plan seeks aircraft carrier for U.S. jets

TOKYO (AP) — Japan is seeking to possess its first aircraft carrier allowing for the deployment of U.S.-made stealth fighters as it seeks to bolster its arms capability under a new 10-year defense plan. A draft outline of Japan’s new defense plan presented by the government proposes refitting an existing helicopter carrier into one that can deploy U.S.-made F-35 stealth fighters capable of short take-offs and vertical landings. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is scrapping the current program after only five years in use, citing rapid changes in the security environment requiring higher deterrence to cope with threats from North Korea and China. Critics say possession of an aircraft carrier would give Japan a strike capability in violation to the country’s pacifist constitution.

Lawmakers pass measure to ease political ban

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Cambodia’s parliament has passed legislation that could allow a five-year ban on political activity by top opposition politicians to be lifted. The action was the latest in a low-key charm offensive to improve relations with western nations that accuse Prime Minister Hun Sen’s government of suppressing human and democratic rights. The main point of contention has been this year’s general election, which critics charge was neither free nor fair because the only credible opposition party was dissolved and its candidates barred from politics. The legislature’s action would allow the 118 top members of the dissolved opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party to apply to have their bans lifted. However, there would be conditions to restoration of political rights that some opposition politicians have already rejected.



**LUNAR LANDING.** In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, the Chang’e 4 lunar probe is launched from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in southwestern China’s Sichuan province on December 8, 2018. China began its ground-breaking mission to land a spacecraft on the largely unexplored far side of the moon, demonstrating its growing ambition as a space power to rival Russia, the European Union, and the U.S. (Jiang Hongjing/Xinhua via AP)

China launches pioneering mission to far side of moon

By Christopher Bodeen  
The Associated Press

BEIJING — China has launched a groundbreaking mission to land a spacecraft on the largely unexplored far side of the moon, demonstrating its growing ambition as a space power to rival Russia, the European Union, and the U.S.

A Long March 3B rocket carrying a lunar probe blasted off December 8 at 2:23am from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province, southwestern China, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

With its Chang’e 4 mission, China hopes to be the first country to make a soft landing, which is a landing of a spacecraft during which no serious damage is incurred. The moon’s far side is also known as the dark side because it faces away from Earth and remains comparatively unknown. It has a different composition than sites on the near side, where previous missions have landed.

If successful, the mission would propel the Chinese space program to a leading position in one of the most important areas of lunar exploration.

China landed its Yutu, or “Jade Rabbit,” rover on the moon five years ago and plans to send its Chang’e 5 probe there next year and have it return to Earth with samples — the first time that will have been done since 1976. A crewed lunar mission is also under consideration.

Chang’e 4 is a lander-rover combination and will explore both above and below the lunar surface after arriving at the South Pole-

Aitken basin’s Von Karman crater following a 27-day journey.

It will also perform radio-astronomical studies that, because the far side always faces away from Earth, will be “free from interference from our planet’s ionosphere, human-made radio frequencies, and auroral radiation noise,” space industry expert Leonard David wrote on the website Space.com.

It may also carry plant seeds and silkworm eggs, according to Xinhua.

Chang’e is the goddess of the moon in Chinese mythology.

China conducted its first crewed space mission in 2003, making it only the third country after Russia and the U.S. to do so. It has put a pair of space stations into orbit, one of which is still operating as a precursor to a more than 60-ton station that is due to come online in 2022. The launch of a Mars rover is planned for the mid-2020s.

To facilitate communication between controllers on Earth and the Chang’e 4 mission, China in May launched a relay satellite named Queqiao, or “Magpie Bridge,” after an ancient Chinese folk tale.

China’s space program has benefitted from cooperation with Russia and European nations, although it was excluded from the 420-ton International Space Station, mainly due to U.S. legislation barring such cooperation amid concerns over its strong military connections. Its program also suffered a rare setback last year with the failed launch of its Long March 5 rocket.

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Fijian Dollar	2.1435
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8106
Indian Rupee	71.935
Indonesian Rupiah	14574
Iranian Rial	42025
Japanese Yen	113.3
Laos New Kip	8536.8
Malaysian Ringgit	4.182
Nepal Rupee	115.62
Pakistani Rupee	138.74
Papua N.G. Kina	3.2645
Philippine Peso	53.058
Russian Ruble	66.729
Saudi Riyal	3.7472
Singapore Dollar	1.3733
South Korean Won	1133.0
Sri Lankan Rupee	179.84
Taiwan Dollar	30.904
Thai Baht	32.834
Vietnam Dong	23472