



SANCTIONS CIRCUMVENTED. A North Korean woman walks outside Bugsae Shop, one of the stores known as the Singapore shops, in Pyongyang, North Korea. Despite the unwanted publicity of a criminal trial for one of their main suppliers, business is booming at Pyongyang's Singapore shops, which sell everything from Ukrainian vodka to brand-name knockoffs from China. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

North Korea's "Singapore shops" expose gap in sanctions push

By Eric Talmadge
The Associated Press

PYONGYANG, North Korea — Despite the unwanted publicity of a criminal trial for one of their main suppliers, business is booming at Pyongyang's "Singapore shops," which sell everything from Ukrainian vodka to brand-name knockoffs from China. The stores stock many of the very things United Nations' (U.N.) sanctions banning trade in luxury goods are intended to block and provide a nagging reminder that not all potential trade partners are lining up behind the U.N.'s pronouncements or the Trump administration's policy of maximum pressure on the North.

Especially when there's a buck — or a few million bucks — to be made.

The stores are anything but secret.

They are well marked, open to walk-ins, and distribute their own membership cards to reward regular customers. Until recently, the name of their Singaporean partner, the OCN Group, was printed on the Bugsae Shop's plastic shopping bags. And while being the focus of the court case that could land OCN's former director in prison for a very long time, they continue

to unabashedly specialize in imported products — perfumes, fine jewelry, wines, clothing, and cosmetics — that would appear to blatantly violate U.N. restrictions.

Formally known as the Potonggang Ryugyong Shop and the Bugsae Shop, the stores are a fixture of the upscale shopping scene in Pyongyang, catering to the capital's elites, Chinese businessmen, and members of the diplomatic corps. Purchases can be made in dollars, euros, and Chinese yuan. The price in each is displayed digitally on the cash register.

Both stores have been substantially renovated since last summer.

The Ryugyong store now has a coffee shop behind the imported shoe section on its second floor. The Bugsae Shop has installed dark wood panelling and glass casing for its wines and spirits corner, which was recently dominated by vodkas from the Ukraine. It has separate display areas for snacks and soft drinks from Japan, Malaysia, and China, a row dedicated to fancy shampoos, and a section in the rear for imported electronic appliances and household goods.

The well-stocked shelves belie the hit supplies must have taken with the arrest

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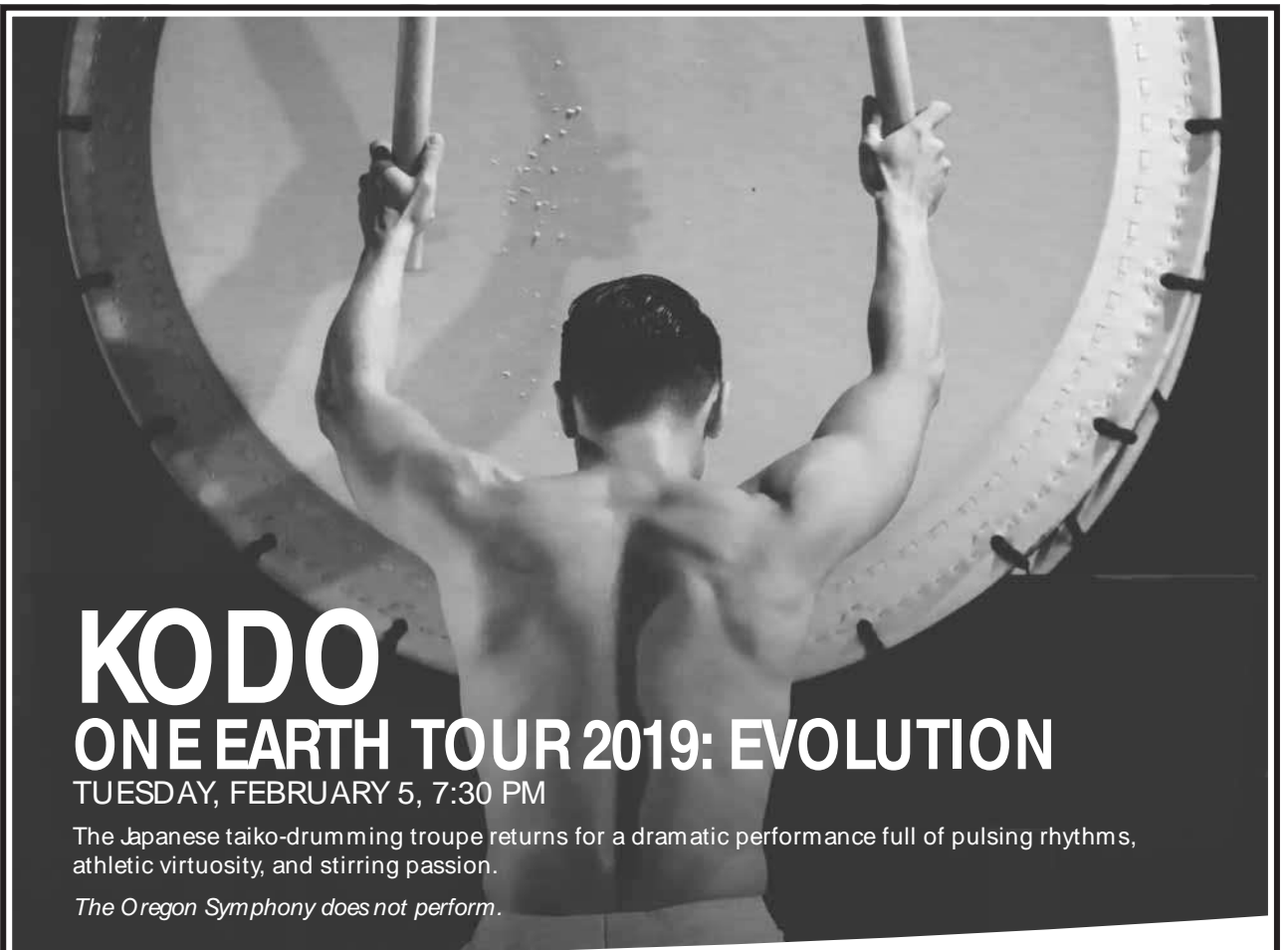


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