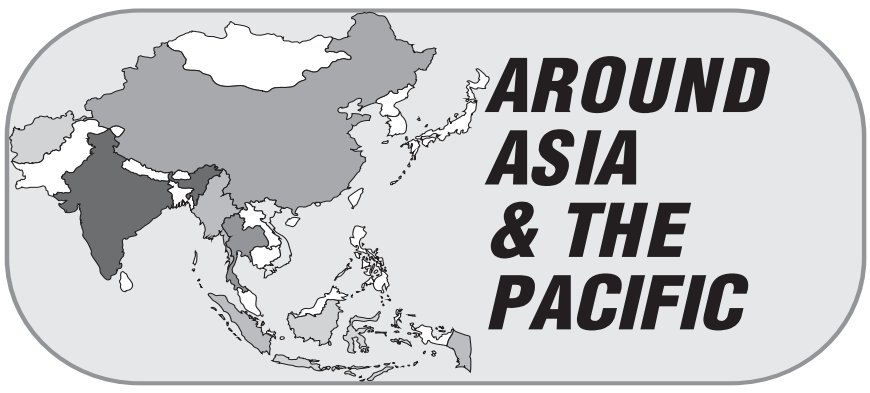


Briton sentenced to six months for slapping official

DENPASAR, Indonesia (AP) — A British woman has been sentenced to six months in prison on charges of slapping an immigration officer on the Indonesian tourist island of Bali after missing her flight due to an expired visa. Video showing Auj-e Taqaddas purportedly cursing and hitting an officer at Bali's international airport went viral last year. She has been sentenced and will appeal. The footage appears to show the 43-year-old throwing a lengthy tantrum after being asked to pay a fine of $4,000 for overstaying her visa and missing her flight. She was charged with violent behavior against a government official. During the trial that began in December, Taqaddas, who pleaded not guilty, said the video had been edited.

Hong Kong police destroy WWI grenade found in potatoes

HONG KONG (AP) — A Hong Kong police bomb squad has destroyed a World War I-era hand grenade found at a food-processing facility in a shipment of potatoes from France, according to news reports. Employees reported a suspicious object encased in mud at the facility in Tseung Kwan O district in the New Territories, according to the *Sing Tao Daily* newspaper and other outlets. A bomb squad concluded the 2.2-pound object was a hand grenade, possibly made in Germany. Officers moved cars and piled sandbags around the grenade, then detonated it, according to *Sing Tao*, the *Observer*, and other outlets. No injuries were reported. *Sing Tao* said police found no sign of criminal activity.

Blast in Chinese fireworks shop kills five at start of new year

BEIJING (AP) — An explosion at a fireworks shop in southern China killed five people at the start of Lunar New Year celebrations, news reports said. The shop in Rong'an county in the Guangxi region west of Hong Kong operated without required fire safety and business licenses, the Xinhua News Agency said. Investigators blamed the explosion on the shopkeeper, identified only by the surname Zhang, setting off fireworks outside the shop at 2:00am, according to Xinhua. It said five people were killed but gave no other details. Zhang survived and was detained by county authorities, the newspaper *Beijing Youth Daily* reported. Such disasters occur regularly in China, where the traditional new year is celebrated by setting off billions of firecrackers. But the number reported has fallen sharply in recent years as authorities banned fireworks in cities and tightened controls on producers and vendors.

Philippine agents arrest journalist critical of president

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — Philippine authorities have arrested the head of an online news site that has criticized the president's policies. Maria Ressa, who was selected by *TIME* magazine last year as one of its Persons of the Year, was arrested over a libel complaint which Amnesty International has condemned as "brazenly politically motivated." President Rodrigo Duterte's government says it was a normal step in response to a private complaint. Rappler Inc., the news site which Ressa heads, says National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) agents served the warrant and she was escorted to NBI headquarters. Justice secretary Menardo Guevarra said Ressa was indicted in early February. Rappler is one of several news agencies deemed critical of Duterte's policies, including his anti-drug campaign that has left thousands of suspects dead.

Prada to create diversity council after blackface outrage

MILAN (AP) — Prada has announced a diversity council aiming to "elevate voices of color within the company and fashion industry at large" in response to recent accusations about racism. The luxury fashion house said the group will be chaired by artist and activist Theaster Gates and film director Ava DuVernay. The council will work to develop "diverse talent" and create more opportunities for students of color. Prada had to apologize and withdraw bag charms that resembled black monkeys with exaggerated red lips after critics said they depicted racist caricatures of black people. The controversy intensified after a similar misstep by Gucci. Director Spike Lee has said he would wear neither Prada nor Gucci until they included black designers.

Japan cancels port call by warship in S. Korea amid row

TOKYO (AP) — Japan says it cancelled a port call in South Korea by its main warship during a multilateral naval exercise as relations between the two Asian neighbors fall to their lowest level in recent years. The Defense Ministry said it would not send the helicopter carrier *Izumo* to Busan in southern South Korea in April. The ministry said Japan plans to participate in the rest of the exercise and hopes that bilateral ties will improve constructively. Japan and South Korea, both key allies of the United States and close economic partners, are locked in disputes involving alleged military provocations as well as wartime history.

Hong Kong seizes $8 million in ivory, pangolin scales

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong customs officers have intercepted an illegal shipment of pangolin scales and ivory tusks worth more than $8 million. Acting on a tip from mainland Chinese authorities, local officials found the haul in a refrigerated container labelled as frozen meat from Nigeria. Officials said the smugglers kept the temperature low to better disguise the smell of the illicit cargo. Police arrested two people in connection with the seizure. The scales of the anteater-like pangolin have for centuries been highly valued in traditional Chinese medicine, while ivory tusks are a cherished decorative craft material in Asia. Trading in both is banned under most circumstances. Under Hong Kong law, trading in endangered species can be punished by up to 10 years in prison and a fine of $1.3 million.

PIG PARTY. *Girls display piggy banks at the start of events leading to celebrations held in honor of the Year of the Pig at Manila's Lucky Chinatown Plaza in Manila, the Philippines. Asia welcomed the Lunar New Year with visits to temples, family banquets, the world's biggest travel spree, and more. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)*

Asia welcomes Year of the Pig with banquets, temple visits, and more

Continued from page one

of Earth park.

An actor portraying an emperor bowed before an altar with dozens of people in ceremonial dress behind him.

Acrobats and drummers also performed. Vendors sold toys branded with the British cartoon character Peppa Pig, which is enjoying a surge of popularity for the Year of the Pig.

"My wishes for new year are a promotion, a raise, and finding a boyfriend," said a spectator, Cui Di, a 28-year-old employee of a foreign company.

The holiday in mainland China is marked by the biggest annual travel boom as hundreds of millions of people visit their home towns or travel abroad.

The railway ministry forecast mainland travellers would make 413 million trips during the three-week period around the holiday.

Chinese set off billions of fireworks to celebrate the new year. An explosion at an illegal fireworks shop in southern China killed five people. Investigators said it was triggered by fireworks set off by the shopkeeper outside the shop.

In Bangkok, people lit incense sticks and burned paper money and other symbolic offerings for deceased relatives despite government appeals to avoid contributing to smog.

Some shopkeepers sold symbolic ballots to burn as offerings following official promises of an election this year, the first after four years of military rule.

In the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, visitors left bouquets of flowers at statues of former leaders Kim Il Sung and his son, Kim Jong Il.

❑

39 die, dozens sick in India from drinking spurious liquor

LUCKNOW, India (AP) — At least 39 people have died and another 27 have fallen sick from drinking cheap spurious liquor containing toxic methanol in several villages in northern India, according to officials.

Senior police officer Ashok Kumar said 26 died in two separate incidents in the state of Uttar Pradesh, 190 miles east of the capital of New Delhi, while 13 others died in the neighboring state of Uttarakhand. The majority of the deaths were reported from the village of Balpur in Uttarakhand.

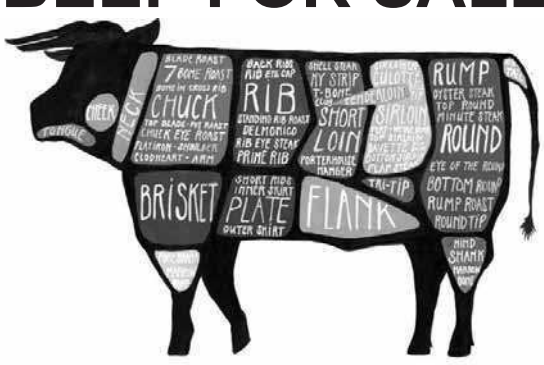
Kumar said victims consumed liquor during two customary functions, adding that the post-mortem and initial forensic reports suggested that the brew was laced with methanol.

Police arrested eight suspected bootleggers while the provincial governments have suspended 35 officials including 12 police.

Deaths from illegally brewed alcohol are common in India because the poor cannot afford licensed brands. Illicit liquor is cheap and often spiked with chemicals such as pesticides to increase potency.

Illicit liquor has also become a hugely profitable industry across India where bootleggers pay no taxes and sell enormous quantities of their product to the poor at a cheap rate.

GRASS-FED BEEF FOR SALE



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Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 2/15

Bangladesh Taka	83.593
Cambodian Riel	3979.5
China Renminbi	6.768
Fijian Dollar	2.0969
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8479
Indian Rupee	71.359
Indonesian Rupiah	14130
Iranian Rial	42024
Japanese Yen	110.54
Laos New Kip	8575.3
Malaysian Ringgit	4.083
Nepal Rupee	114.71
Pakistani Rupee	138.8
Papua N.G. Kina	3.3614
Philippine Peso	52.45
Russian Ruble	66.47
Saudi Riyal	3.7502
Singapore Dollar	1.3575
South Korean Won	1125.7
Sri Lankan Rupee	178.65
Taiwan Dollar	30.834
Thai Baht	31.23
Vietnam Dong	23274