



LOYALTY CAMPAIGN. Students make story boards depicting North Korean flags being raised during a multimedia production class at Pyongyang Teachers' University, a teacher training college, in Pyongyang, North Korea. North Korea is stepping up a new loyalty campaign that began with the introduction of a song in praise of the nation's flag. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

North Korea pushing flag at center of new loyalty campaign

By Eric Talmadge
The Associated Press

PYONGYANG, North Korea — North Korea is stepping up a new loyalty campaign as leader Kim Jong Un prepares for his second summit with President Donald Trump.

The campaign began in January with the introduction of a song in praise of the nation's flag.

A video now being aired on state-run television to promote the song — called “Our National Flag” — shows repeated images of the flag being raised at international sports competitions and being formed by a sea of people holding up colored lengths of cloth at a parade and rally on Kim Il Sung Square. Other images show recent improvements in the economy and standard of living, a reflection of a current government policy shift that focuses on development and prosperity.

The video is a departure from the tone of propaganda that dominated just two years ago, when tensions with Washington were escalating and the focus was on North Korea's successful missile tests.

In the summer of 2017, the country's most popular musical group, the all-female Moranbong Band, released “The Song of the Hwasong Rocket” to commemorate the successful launch of North Korea's first intercontinental ballistic missile. They also performed at concerts with big-screen images of the ICBM behind them.

The new video incorporates imagery from the most recent mass games event, which was staged last September to mark the country's 70th anniversary. It briefly shows troops at attention during a

military parade and fighter jets creating smoke trails in the national colors of blue, red, and white. But it also is interspersed with shots of civilians marching at the same parade, clips of new high-rise apartments in the capital, Pyongyang, fireworks displays, and rows of students in their school uniforms.

Lyrics to “Our National Flag” have been distributed widely. Large posters showing the flag and the lyrics are being displayed in factories.

The song opens with the lines, “As we watch our blue-red banner flying sky high, our hearts are bursting with the blood of patriotism. We feel the breath of our nation as the flag strongly flaps in the wind. The flag as important as life carries the fate of our people. We will love the shining flag of our nation. Please fly until the end of this world.”

A note above one poster seen by The Associated Press urged workers at the Kim Jong Suk Textile Factory in Pyongyang to study the song closely.

Coming after years of what had seemed to be deepening hostility, Kim's outreach to Washington and his Chinese and South Korean neighbors presents a bit of a conundrum for North Korea's propaganda chiefs.

Few details of Kim's negotiations with Trump over the future of North Korea's nuclear arsenal have been made public in the North. The official media have instead focused on how Kim has been welcomed on the world stage and asserted that he is leading the way to defuse tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

But the nationalist call for unity and the less-militaristic message of the new video are in keeping with an effort in North Korea to dial back its public displays of overtly anti-U.S. propaganda and redirect attention to Kim's current priority of mobilizing the entire country behind improving the economy.

Kim unveiled that shift in his New Year's address last year, opening the door to a stunning series of summits with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, South Korean President Moon Jae-in, and, last June, with Trump in Singapore.

Kim has since made some big strides with Beijing and Seoul toward undercutting support for the U.S.-backed sanctions that have constrained his development plans.

Though little progress has been made on Washington's main concern, denuclearization, Trump announced during his State of the Union address that he will again meet with Kim, this time in Vietnam on February 27 and 28.

Associated Press writer Kim Tong-hyung in Seoul, South Korea, contributed to this report.

Historic candidacy of princess upends tradition in Thailand

By Grant Peck
The Associated Press

BANGKOK — A Thai political party named a princess as its nominee to be the next prime minister, upending the tradition of the palace eschewing politics and upsetting all predictions about what might happen in the upcoming elections.

The selection of Princess Ubolratana Mahidol by the Thai Raksa Chart Party marks a shock realignment of Thai politics by tying the king's eldest sister to the political machine of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, which hardcore royalists have long dismissed as opposed in spirit to the monarchy.

And it pits her against the preferred candidate of the military, which is considered one of Thailand's most royalist institutions.

Current Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who led the 2014 coup that ousted Thailand's last elected government, accepted his selection as candidate to lead the next government by Palang Pracharat Party, widely seen as a proxy for the military.

Prayuth had been considered the frontrunner for the March 24 polls because changes in constitutional law and election rules were implemented by his government in a manner making it difficult for political parties without military backing to capture the premier's post.

N. Korea exploring sanctions-proof energy technologies

By Eric Talmadge
The Associated Press

NAMPO, North Korea — Power-strapped North Korea is exploring ambitious alternative energy sources — tidal power and coal-based synthetic fuels — that could greatly improve living standards and reduce its reliance on oil imports and vulnerability to sanctions.

Finding a lasting energy source that isn't vulnerable to sanctions has been a priority for North Korean officials. Leader Kim Jong Un used his New Year's address to call on the country to “radically increase the production of electricity” and singled out the coal-mining industry as a “primary front in developing the self-supporting economy.”

Since further development of atomic energy is unlikely anytime soon, the power-scarce country is developing technology to “gasify” coal into substitute motor fuels. It also is looking into using sea barriers with electricity-generating turbines to harness the power of the ocean's tides.

Two South Koreans arrested in Croatia trying to smuggle eels

ZAGREB, Croatia (AP) — Croatian police say two South Korean citizens were arrested after trying to smuggle about 252,000 live eels out of the country.

The two, ages 38 and 47, were caught with the young fish packed in eight cases at Zagreb's international airport. Their names were not provided.

They were arrested because European eels are a protected species. Croatian media say their market value is estimated at 180,000 euros (\$204,000).

Eels are commonly used in Korean, Chinese, and Japanese cuisine. The dishes are popular but can be expensive.

Croatian authorities said the two face charges of “destroying protected natural goods.” They could end up in jail if convicted.

Police said the fish were handed over to the Zagreb zoo.



ROYAL CANDIDATE. Thai Princess Ubolratana Mahidol waves to Thai people outside the Grand Palace in Bangkok, Thailand, in this October 27, 2017 file photo. The Thai Raksa Chart Party has named the princess as its nominee to be the next prime minister, upending the tradition of the palace eschewing politics and upsetting all predictions about what might happen in the upcoming elections. (AP Photo, File)

But Ubolratana's de facto alliance with the forces of the exiled Thaksin — whose comeback the military has made every effort to block — puts Prayuth's supporters in an extremely awkward position. Because she will be seen as a representative of the monarchy — the nation's most revered and respected institution — it will be difficult to block her political rise.

“This is a game changer,” said Allen Hicken, a political scientist at the University of Michigan specializing in Southeast Asian studies. “In the event Thaksin-aligned parties win the election, Continued on page 13

Malaysia crowns Pahang state's Sultan Abdullah as 16th king

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monarch is highly regarded as the guardian of Islam and Malay tradition, particularly among the ethnic Malay Muslim majority.

The king is the nominal head of the government and armed forces. All laws, cabinet appointments, and the dissolution of parliament for general elections require his assent. The king also issues pardons for criminals. Malaysia's constitution allocates some 5 million ringgit (\$1.21 million) a year for the expenses of the king and his household, including palace maintenance, although the sum can be increased with cabinet approval.

Study says a third of Himalayan glaciers can no longer be saved

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ing average global temperatures from rising by more than 2° C, or 1.5° C if possible.

According to a recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, emissions of the most abundant greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, would need to be reduced to a level the planet can absorb — known as net zero — by 2050 to keep global warming at 1.5° C as envisaged in the agreement.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development said the study included work by more than 350 researchers and policy experts from 22 countries. It said it had 210 authors and 125 external reviewers.

The Kathmandu-based center said it receives donations from regional countries, non-regional countries such as Australia, Austria, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, and other international programs such as USAID.

Associated Press writer Elaine Kurtenbach in Bangkok contributed to this report.



Have a safe
and prosperous
Year of the Pig!!

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