



Leopard runs into house before being captured in India

HYDERABAD, India (AP) — A leopard that ran into a house and sparked a frantic search and a frenzy of attention in southern India was caught and tranquilized. The big cat emerged from the Kamdanam forest and ran into a house in Shadnagar town in Telangana state, said Dr. Mohammad Abdul Hakeem, a wildlife official. After people were evacuated from the immediate area, wildlife officials worked to catch the animal and residents swarmed to watch and snap photos. A video shot by a resident showed the leopard resting on the terrace of a house. The leopard was transported to the zoo for observation. Deadly conflict between humans and animals has increased in recent years in India largely due to shrinking forest habitats and urban expansion. According to official data, 224 people in India were killed in the last five years by tigers. India is home to 70% of tigers in the world.

Japan's former Emperor Akihito better day after fainting

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's 86-year-old former Emperor Akihito fainted at his residence though he regained strength after a good night's sleep, the palace said. Akihito underwent an MRI of his brain that showed no clinical condition that could cause a fall, but doctors recommended close monitoring of his health for a while, according to the Imperial Household Agency. Akihito abdicated last April and now holds the title of Emperor Emeritus. His wife Michiko was at his side when Akihito fainted at the Imperial Palace and she called the palace doctor, palace officials said. The doctor found Akihito still unconscious and sounding as if he was snoring. He regained consciousness and went to bed but woke up normally the next morning, officials said. The popular former emperor had symptoms of cerebral anemia, or low red blood cell count, last July, when he briefly had difficulty standing, officials said. Akihito reigned for 30 years and gained widespread respect and sympathy as a politically neutral symbol of the nation and for his dedication to pacifism. Akihito's son, Naruhito, ascended to the Chrysanthemum Throne May 1 last year.

Over 100 makeshift homes destroyed in Pakistan fire

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — A massive fire burned more than 100 burlap-and-plastic shelters in the southern port city of Karachi, forcing hundreds of poor nomads to spend the night in the open amid winter temperatures, but there were no casualties, police said. It was unclear what caused the evening fire in the city's Teenhatti neighborhood, where hundreds of nomad families live in makeshift homes, area police chief Liaquat Hayyat said. He said firefighters quickly doused the flames but they could not save the 100 or so makeshift homes. TV footage showed a massive fire sweeping through the shelters as dwellers cried for help. One tearful woman whose makeshift home was burned told reporters in a televised comment that the dowry for her daughter's marriage she worked for years to build was gutted by the blaze in minutes. Another woman sat next to her burned up makeshift home and said she was still waiting for help from the government. Hours after the fire, inhabitants were seen retrieving utensils and other items from the ashes. Authorities say the government will provide tents to those who lost homes in the fire. Karachi is the capital of southern Sindh province, where thousands of nomads live in open areas along the Lyari canal. Some have tin roofs but the majority of the houses are made up of cane, burlap, and plastic. Male members of the families work as laborers while nomad women and children either beg on the streets or work as maids in nearby homes.

Crowded footbridge breaks over Indonesian river, killing 9

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — A footbridge on Indonesia's Sumatra island broke while it was packed with people and several fell into the overflowing river below and drowned, officials said. Nine bodies were pulled from the water as far as 12.4 miles from the bridge that broke in Kaur district of Bengkulu province. Rescuers continued to search for a 14-year-old boy still missing and feared dead, said Ujang Syafiri, who heads a local disaster mitigation agency. About 30 people, most of them teenagers, had just returned from a tour at a nearby hydropower plant and stopped on the footbridge to take photos of the extreme flow of the river. "It was apparently (beyond) its capacity. Some teens even had rocked the bridge while joking," Syafiri said. He said about 20 survivors were rescued and one was hospitalized with serious injuries. Photos released by the agency showed rescuers using an inflatable boat while they searched for victims near the broken bridge and villagers using bamboo and clothes to carry a body. Seasonal rains in recent weeks have caused severe flooding and landslides in Indonesia. Many of the nation's nearly 270 million people live in mountainous areas prone to landslides or plains close to rivers that flood regularly. The archipelago of 17,000 islands also has frequent seismic and volcanic activity.

Pakistan gas cylinder explosion kills 11 in perfume factory

LAHORE, Pakistan (AP) — A massive explosion and fire triggered by a gas cylinder explosion engulfed a small perfume factory in eastern Pakistan, killing at least 11 people, rescuer workers and police said. Two people were also injured in the blast, which caused the roof of the factory to collapse in flames, said Rana Izhar, an official with the state-run emergency service in the city of Lahore. He said the explosion was so powerful it damaged nearby homes as well. Hospital officials said one of the injured was in critical condition. Gas cylinder explosions and other similar accidents are common in Pakistan, mainly due to insufficient enforcement of safety standards and poor infrastructure. Police and emergency workers said it was not immediately clear what caused the gas cylinder to explode.



SCARCE SUPPLIES. Boat passengers on a jetty wear face masks in Bangkok, Thailand, to protect themselves from a new virus infection. Panic and pollution drive the market for protective face masks, so business is booming in Asia, where fear of the coronavirus from China is straining supplies and helping make mask-wearing the new normal. (AP Photo/Gemunu Amarasinghe)

Asian demand for face masks soars on fears of Chinese virus

By Haruka Nuga and Grant Peck
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Panic and pollution drive the market for protective face masks, so business is booming in Asia, where fear of the virus from China is straining supplies and helping make mask-wearing the new normal.

Demand for face masks and hand-sanitizing liquid has soared, as both local residents and visitors from China stock up on such products as a reassuring precaution.

Factories are rushing to boost production as the number of infections and deaths from the new virus first found in the central Chinese city of Wuhan climbs. In some parts of Asia, wearing of surgical masks has become mandatory, for now.

"Sales of disinfectant products and hygiene masks have been rising ... First Chinese tourists came to our store to buy these products to bring back with them. They bought in bulk, like two or three boxes per person," said Varumporn Krataitohg, an employee of the NanBhesaj drugstore in central Bangkok.

The outbreak began before the Lunar New Year, when tens of thousands of Chinese tourists visit Thailand, Japan, and other parts of Asia. Demand rose by 80% starting the weekend of the Lunar New Year, said Varumporn.

"Now we are out of disinfectant gel for hands. The maker just sent new lots this morning and by noon we were sold out," she said. "People keep coming and asking for these products."

Japanese often wear surgical masks to protect against colds, flu, or hay fever. Shelves of some stores were scooped bare as Japanese health officials confirmed four cases of the virus.

Christine Yuuki, a 25-year-old tourist from Hefei, west of Nanjing, was shopping in Tokyo for masks for friends and family back in China.

"In China, masks are very expensive," she said, adding that one little pack of masks costs more than 100 yuan (\$14). "They are cheaper here and easier to buy."

Iris Ohyama, a major maker of household goods and home appliances, said its mask sales tripled from the week before. It asked some workers at one of its two factories in China to cut short their 10-day Lunar New Year holiday and get back to work, it said.

Stocks of masks ran out quickly at outlets of South Korea's biggest 24-hour convenience store, CU, at airports, bus terminals, and other transportation hubs.

Sales of soap, hand sanitizer, and mouthwash more than doubled, said CU's parent company, BGF Retail. Overall, though, there were no immediate signs of major shortages in South Korea.

In Taiwan, likewise, the government said there were enough masks and that current daily production capacity of 1.88 million face masks could be boosted to 2.44 million to meet any spike in demand.

At least 10 cases of the virus have been confirmed on the island, which has imposed a month-long ban on exports of two types of surgical masks to ensure they'll be available.

Everyday use of surgical masks, once mainly confined to Japan and parts of China affected by major dust storms or smog, has expanded in recent years, mainly because of worsening air pollution. In the Philippines, which has reported two cases of the virus, the recent eruptions of the Taal volcano prompted many to wear masks to protect against ash.

Cambodia registered its first new virus case and launched a campaign to give away 1

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Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 1/31

Bangladesh Taka	84.6
Cambodian Riel	4074.3
China Renminbi	6.9364
Fijian Dollar	2.1501
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7658
Indian Rupee	71.526
Indonesian Rupiah	13768
Iranian Rial	42195
Japanese Yen	108.48
Laos New Kip	8874.3
Malaysian Ringgit	4.095
Nepal Rupee	114.99
Pakistani Rupee	153.95
Papua N.G. Kina	3.407
Philippine Peso	51.02
Russian Ruble	63.81
Saudi Riyal	3.7515
Singapore Dollar	1.3647
South Korean Won	1196.6
Sri Lankan Rupee	181.52
Taiwan Dollar	30.36
Thai Baht	31.18
Vietnam Dong	23246