



Nepal census adds third gender, recognizing LGBT minority

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Nepal will count a third gender in its next population census, for the first time counting LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) people as a minority group that can be allocated government jobs and education. The LGBT community in the Himalayan nation has long demanded the census taken every 10 years count sexual minorities. Nepal's laws prescribe special quotas for minorities in workplaces, schools, and colleges, and access to discounted healthcare, but LGBT people say the absence of census data omits them from such programs. Dhundi Raj Lamichane, an official at Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics, said the national census is planned for the summer of 2021 but a trial will be done in selected districts this month. Citizens will be able to identify themselves as male, female, or other gender. Though the change is specific to gender rather than any person's sexual identity, activists welcomed it as increasing the visibility of the LGBT community. They estimate about 900,000 of Nepal's 29 million people are LGBT. Sexual minorities have made significant progress securing rights in Nepal in recent years. The constitution adopted in 2015 forbids discrimination based on sexual orientation, reaffirming a 2008 Supreme Court ruling. Citizenship certificates and passports now offer a "non-male, non-female" option in the gender category.

Panasonic scraps solar panels partnership with Tesla

TOKYO (AP) — Panasonic is pulling out of its partnership with Tesla to produce solar panels at a factory in New York state, the Japanese electronics maker said. Panasonic's production at the factory in Buffalo will end by May, with an exit by September, it said in a statement. The decision is to streamline the company's global solar energy operations, it said. Panasonic will continue making batteries for Tesla's electric vehicles in another factory in Nevada, it said. Panasonic also quoted Tesla as saying that the move won't affect Tesla's solar business plans. Panasonic will also continue selling solar panels under its brand in the U.S. through its own distribution channels, it said. The two companies' agreement to work on solar energy was announced in 2016. Panasonic will offer severance packages to employees at the Buffalo plant. Tesla will hire as many as possible of those who wish to keep working there, according to Panasonic. Panasonic is a major manufacturer of home appliances, such as washing machines and refrigerators, but its operations include services and products for businesses. Tesla, based in Palo Alto, California, leads the world in electric vehicle sales. Competition from cheaper Chinese manufacturing of solar components has posed a problem for Panasonic as it strives to reposition itself for future growth.

Gas leak kills seven at India carpet factory

LUCKNOW, India (AP) — A gas leak killed seven people, including three children, at a carpet-weaving factory in northern India, a government official said. Magistrate Suresh Kumar said the gas apparently leaked from a tanker delivering acid used for washing woven carpets. Five of the seven killed were members of one family, including one woman and three children, he said. It wasn't clear how many worked there or if some were visiting the factory. Hydrofluoric acid and ammonia solution are generally used for cleaning carpets. The factory is in Sitapur, a town 50 miles southeast of Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh state. Uttar Pradesh is known for its hand-knotted carpet weaving industry. Such accidents are common in India because of poor safety standards in many factories.

Philippines notifies U.S. of intent to end major security pact

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — The Philippines has notified the United States it will end a major security pact allowing American forces to train in the country, in the most serious threat under President Rodrigo Duterte to the 69-year treaty alliance. Foreign secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said in a tweet that Manila's notice of termination of the Visiting Forces Agreement was received by the deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Manila. The termination would take effect after 180 days unless both sides agree to keep it. Locsin signed the notice on the order of Duterte, who has often criticized U.S. security policies while praising those of China and Russia despite the Philippine military's close historic ties with its American counterpart.

Body of Pakistani reporter found hours after missing

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — The body of a Pakistani journalist was found just hours after he went missing while on his way to work, according to police. His family said he was brutally killed but that they have no idea who was behind the slaying. Aziz Memon, age 56, had worked as a reporter and cameraman for a local TV station in southwestern Sindh province. Police chief Mohammad Farooq said the body was found dumped in a canal in Mehrabpur village and that an investigation was under way. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the abduction and killing of Memon. His brother, Abdul Hafeez, said Memon had received threats last year after reporting that a politician from the area had paid bribe money to locals to attend an opposition rally. The International Federation of Journalists and its affiliate, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, asked the government to investigate. Pakistan is considered a dangerous place for journalists and those involved in attacks on journalists are rarely punished. The country has also witnessed an intensified crackdown on human-rights defenders, activists, journalists, and members of civil society over the past years. Journalists, who have taken on military dictators and been beaten and jailed in the pursuit of a free press, say they now face a form of censorship that is more subtle but no less chilling, spearheaded by the security services, to quash critical coverage.



MARIO MIRRORING MICKEY? A Super Mario figure is displayed at a showroom in Tokyo in this July 30, 2019 file photo. Will Mario follow in the steps of Mickey Mouse? Japanese video game maker Nintendo Co. said it is bullish about profiting from its characters by mirroring the historical appeal of the Disney franchise. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara, File)

Mario like Mickey? Nintendo banks on profits from characters

By Yuri Kageyama
AP Business Writer

TOKYO — Will Mario follow in the steps of Mickey Mouse? Japanese video game maker Nintendo Co. said it is bullish about profiting from its characters by mirroring the historical appeal of the Disney franchise.

"We are thinking about the Nintendo brand that way," said the company's game designer, Shigeru Miyamoto. He stressed that Nintendo characters have an extra, interactive element because they originate from video games.

"We want more people to know our characters, not just through games," he said.

Nintendo has been banking on its intellectual property. Its own branded store and event space in Tokyo has opened recently, and a Nintendo park is set to open at Universal Studios Japan in Osaka, central Japan, later this year. More are in the works, including in Hollywood and Singapore, according to the company.

Kyoto-based Nintendo reported worldwide

Japan to close schools nationwide to control spread of virus

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has asked all elementary, middle, and high schools nationwide to close until late March to help control the spread of the new virus in the country.

The request caught many local officials by surprise. While not legally binding, it is expected to be largely followed. It will affect 12.8 million students at about 34,800 schools nationwide, according to the education

demand for the Switch console during the year-end shopping season. The Switch is a hybrid game machine that works both as a console and a tablet.

Nintendo said it continues to see opportunities for growth from the handheld Switch Lite, launched in September, which is a compact and lightweight version of the Switch meant for on-the-go playing.

Nintendo chief executive Shuntaro Furukawa said that four years after it was launched, the Switch holds promise for more growth that didn't exist for previous consoles that peaked out after a few years. People may buy several Switch Lite machines in addition to the original Switch, he said.

Miyamoto said one strength of Nintendo products was that grandparents are playing with their grandchildren, highlighting a wide age range of users.

"We want to value that great appeal and do something unique," he said of how characters might play out in future games, a Hollywood film, and the theme parks.

ministry.

"The coming week or two is an extremely important time," Abe said. "This is to prioritize the health and safety of the children and take precautions to avoid the risk of possible large-scale infections."

The decision comes amid growing concern about the rise in the number of untraceable cases of the virus in northern Japan and elsewhere. Japan now has more than 961 cases, including 705 from a quarantined cruise ship. A 12th death from the virus was

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Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 2/28

Bangladesh Taka	84.65
Cambodian Riel	4,072.7
China Renminbi	6.9906
Fijian Dollar	2.2153
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7933
Indian Rupee	72.534
Indonesian Rupiah	14453
Iranian Rial	42025
Japanese Yen	108.13
Laos New Kip	8892.1
Malaysian Ringgit	4.216
Nepal Rupee	116.1
Pakistani Rupee	153.65
Papua N.G. Kina	3.41
Philippine Peso	51.11
Russian Ruble	67.013
Saudi Riyal	3.7514
Singapore Dollar	1.3946
South Korean Won	1204.1
Sri Lankan Rupee	181.87
Taiwan Dollar	30.177
Thai Baht	31.53
Vietnam Dong	23243