



HK drama bags nominations at Golden Horse Awards

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan’s annual Golden Horse Awards kicked off in late November with a Hong Kong drama receiving the most nominations for the Asian equivalent of the Academy Awards. The Golden Horse Awards, which began in 1962, are considered one of the most prestigious awards for Chinese-language films. This year, the Hong Kong film *Drifting*, which is based on a 2012 court case involving homeless people in the working neighborhood of Sham Shui Po, received 12 nominations including for Best Director, Best Leading Actor, and Best Cinematography. *Till We Meet Again* and *The Falls* received 11 nominations each. *The Falls* won Best Original Screenplay, while *Drifting* won Best Adapted Screenplay. *Revolution of Our Times*, a documentary about the Hong Kong political unrest in 2019 by Hong Kong director Kiwi Chow, won Best Documentary Feature. The film was a controversial topic in Hong Kong and Chow was accused of flouting coronavirus rules after authorities raided a private screening of the documentary in Hong Kong. Under Hong Kong laws, private gatherings are not limited by coronavirus restrictions. Chow has since sold the copyright of the documentary to a European distributor and disposed of all his footage, in light of risks from a sweeping national security law implemented in the city following the political unrest. The Golden Horse Awards took place at the National Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in Taipei, with Singaporean actor Mark Lee and Chinese-American actress Bai Ling presenting awards. This year, a total of 573 entries were submitted to the Golden Horse Awards, up from 465 last year.

WHO says measures for delta should work for omicron

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — Measures used to counter the delta variant should remain the foundation for fighting the coronavirus pandemic, even in the face of the new omicron version of the virus, World Health Organization (WHO) officials say, while acknowledging that the travel restrictions imposed by some countries may buy time. While about three dozen countries worldwide have reported omicron infections, including the U.S. on Wednesday and India on Thursday last week, the numbers so far are small outside of South Africa, which is facing a rapid rise in COVID-19 cases and where the new variant may be becoming dominant. Still, much remains unclear about omicron, including whether it is more contagious, as some health authorities suspect, whether it makes people more seriously ill, or whether it can evade vaccine protection.

India’s economy grows by 8.4% amid signs of recovery

NEW DELHI (AP) — India’s economy grew at an 8.4% annual pace in the July-September quarter in the latest sign of an economic recovery in Asia’s third-largest economy, the government reported. India suffered one of the biggest setbacks of any major economy in the last fiscal year. In the same quarter a year before, the economy contracted by 7.4%, badly hit by rising COVID-19 cases and a stringent nationwide lockdown, with restrictions lasting months that dealt a huge blow to economic activity. After a devastating surge in virus cases stoked by the delta variant earlier this year, the situation has improved in recent months. Daily cases have sunk to about 10,000 after breaching 400,000 in May. The pace of vaccinations has picked up, instilling confidence in reopening businesses and industries. Streets and markets across the country are now abuzz with activity. Sectors like agriculture and mining performed well and helped lead the growth seen in the July-September quarter, experts said. The economy expanded at a 20.1% pace in the April-June quarter, the fastest growth since India began publishing GDP figures in 1996. But economists caution that the rise was calculated from 2020’s smaller base, when the economy shrank by 24.4% in April-June, pulling the country into a recession. A country enters a technical recession if its economy contracts for two successive quarters. In 2020-2021, India’s growth contracted by 7.3%, worsening from a slowdown that slashed growth to 4% from 8% in the two years before the pandemic hit.

South Korea to launch task force on banning dog meat

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea has said it will launch a task force to consider outlawing dog meat consumption after the country’s president offered to look into ending the centuries-old practice. Restaurants that serve dog meat are dwindling in South Korea as younger people find dog meat a less appetizing dining option and pets are growing in popularity. Recent surveys indicate more people oppose banning dog meat even if many don’t eat it. In a statement, seven government offices including the Agriculture Ministry said they decided to launch the group comprising officials, civilian experts, and people from related organizations to deliver recommendations on possibly outlawing dog meat consumption. It said authorities will gather information on dog farms, restaurants, and other facilities while examining public opinion. “As the number of families with pet animals has risen rapidly and public interest in animal rights and welfare has grown in our country, there have been increasing voices saying that it’s difficult now to see dog meat consumption as just traditional food culture,” Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum, the country’s No. 2 official, said ahead of the statement’s release. The government says the initiative, the first of its kind, doesn’t necessarily guarantee the banning of dog meat. The joint statement noted that “public awareness of the basic right (to eat preferred foods) and animal-rights issues are tangled in a complicated manner” when it comes to dog meat consumption. The seemingly vague stance drew quick protests from both dog farmers and animal-rights activists. Farmers say the task force’s launch is nothing but a formality to shut down their farms and dog meat restaurants, while activists argue the government’s announcement lacks resolve to outlaw dog meat consumption.



POT PIZZA. A staff member shows a pizza topped with a cannabis leaf at a restaurant in Bangkok, Thailand. The Pizza Company, a Thai major fast-food chain, has been promoting its “Crazy Happy Pizza,” an under-the-radar product topped with a cannabis leaf. It’s legal but won’t get you high. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)

Thai chain’s cannabis pizza: trendy but won’t get you high

By **Chalida Ekvithayavechnukul**
The Associated Press

BANGKOK — One of Thailand’s major fast food chains has been promoting its “Crazy Happy Pizza,” an under-the-radar product topped with a cannabis leaf. It’s legal but won’t get you high.

Veterans of the backpacker trail, familiar with the legendary pizza parlors of neighboring Cambodia’s capital Phnom Penh that offer powerful marijuana as an optional condiment, might feel downright cheated.

“Of course, they cannot get high,” Panusak Suensatboon, general manager of The Pizza Company, said in an interview. “It’s just a marketing campaign, and you can taste the cannabis and then if you have enough, you maybe get a bit sleepy.”

The Crazy Happy Pizza is a mashup of toppings evoking the flavors of Thailand’s famous Tom Yum Gai soup along with a deep-fried cannabis leaf on top. Cannabis is also infused into the cheese crust and there’s chopped cannabis in the dipping sauce. A 9” pie costs 499 baht (about \$15). Customers preferring a do-it-yourself variety can choose their own toppings, with a 100 baht (\$3) surcharge for two or three cannabis leaves.

The cannabis plant has been used for two major purposes: as hemp for making rope and clothing, and as an intoxicating drug, known as pot, ganja, and dagga.

In recent years, a kind of middle-ground product has emerged: cannabidiol, or CBD, a chemical found in cannabis that can be processed into what is touted as a cure-all medicine. CBD can be separated out from tetrahydrocannabinol — THC — the chemical in cannabis that produces marijuana’s high.

CBD has legitimized products made with cannabis, drawing on the mystique of marijuana without flouting the law or raising major health questions. It’s become a boom industry, especially in the United States.

Recreational marijuana is still illegal in Thailand, and can earn you a fine and time in jail, even though drug laws have been liberalized in the past few years. Cannabis is regulated for medicinal use, and individuals are allowed to grow a small number of plants for their own consumption.

Thailand last December became the first country in Southeast Asia to remove specific parts and extracts of cannabis from its controlled narcotics list, and in February this year allowed them to be used in foods and beverages. The amount of THC in the CBD product must not exceed 0.2% of its total weight, virtually eliminating the possibility of getting high.

Cannabis products even before being decriminalized had become a cottage industry in Thailand, but their adoption by The Pizza Company — operated by Minor Food Group, a subsidiary of the Stock Exchange of Thailand-listed Minor International — boosts them into the commercial big-time.

Crazy Happy Pizza has been available at all of The Pizza Company’s branches in Thailand, but sales have been lackluster, according to Panusak. It has faced several handicaps — it cannot legally be advertised or sold to anyone under the age of 12. He estimated that when the company concluded its sales promotion at the end of November, it threw away about a fifth of the cannabis leaves it acquired.

“I don’t think the market is ready for cannabis products yet. We knew this since the

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Units per U.S. dollar as of 12/03	
Bangladesh Taka	85.53
Cambodian Riel	4065.9
China Renminbi	6.3758
Fijian Dollar	2.1164
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7938
Indian Rupee	75.252
Indonesian Rupiah	14330
Iranian Rial	42025
Japanese Yen	113.06
Laos New Kip	10882
Malaysian Ringgit	4.229
Nepal Rupee	121.1
Pakistani Rupee	176.35
Papua N.G. Kina	3.509
Philippine Peso	50.508
Russian Ruble	73.915
Saudi Riyal	3.7513
Singapore Dollar	1.3709
South Korean Won	1181.0
Sri Lankan Rupee	202.01
Taiwan Dollar	27.708
Thai Baht	33.89
Vietnam Dong	22875