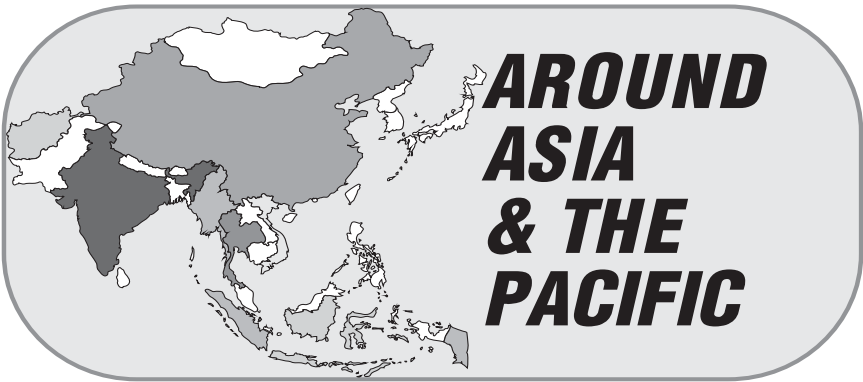




Overnight rescue dig saves toddler trapped in Thai well

BANGKOK (AP) — An overnight rescue operation in early February successfully retrieved a 19-month-old girl from a dry artesian well shaft — 18 hours after she fell into the hole at a cassava farm in northern Thailand. Rescuers clapped and cheered as the toddler, the daughter of migrant workers from Myanmar, was pulled out of the 49-foot-deep well shaft and placed on a stretcher that carried her to a waiting ambulance. “Great job, guys. We did it!” exclaimed one rescuer as his colleagues in Tak province’s Phop Phra district wept and hugged each other. The child fell into the hole in the late afternoon while her parents were working at the plantation. The deep pit, dug by the landowner to be an artesian well, was left uncovered after it failed to strike groundwater, Phop Phra district chief Sanya Phetset told Thairath TV. The first rescuers to arrive at the scene shouted down the hole and heard the child cry back, local media reported. A camera was then lowered into the hole to check the situation, and after that a tube was snaked into it to provide oxygen. Rescuers dug overnight alongside the pit, about 12 inches wide, using several backhoes and other excavation devices. “It seemed like an easy operation at first because it looked like loose dirt, but once we started digging we found rock, which made it difficult because excavators can’t dig through it,” Sanya said. He explained that the operation was delicate because the digging risked collapsing the sides of the well onto the child. The toddler was immediately sent to Phop Phra Hospital after being carried to safety. “She is safe now. She’s a bit tired but there’s nothing serious,” Sanya said.

Cambodian leader says radio station closure is permanent

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — A day after one of Cambodia’s few independent media outlets was shut at his order, Prime Minister Hun Sen declared that Voice of Democracy radio will not be allowed to reopen despite pleas and protests from around the world. Voice of Democracy, better known as VoD, was closed on February 13, 2023 after Hun Sen said it had not properly apologized for a story that he claimed had slandered his son, Lt. Gen. Hun Manet. The story said his son signed a document on his father’s behalf authorizing a \$100,000 donation for quake relief for Turkey. Hun Sen said the article misrepresented the facts and that only the prime minister has the authority to make decisions on foreign aid. VoD acknowledged it had made a mistake, but Hun Sen said its statement was unsatisfactory. Hun Sen has led Cambodia with an iron fist for 38 years. The closing of VoD has triggered a torrent of criticism from rights groups and some western governments.

Disney cuts Simpsons “forced labor” episode in Hong Kong

HONG KONG (AP) — Walt Disney Co. has removed an episode from “The Simpsons” cartoon series that included a reference to “forced labor camps” in China from its streaming service in Hong Kong. The company declined to comment on why the episode, “One Angry Lisa” from The Simpsons’ 34th season, was not available to stream on the Disney Plus streaming service in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory, according to checks by The Associated Press. The episode first aired on television in October and it was not clear when the episode was removed from the Hong Kong streaming service. In the episode, Simpsons character Marge Simpson takes a virtual spin class whose instructor is in front of a virtual background of the Great Wall of China and says: “Behold the wonders of China. Bitcoin mines, forced labor camps where children make smart-phones.” The issue of forced labor is sensitive in China. Communist-ruled Beijing has increasingly imposed its controls over Hong Kong, a former British colony, after taking control of the territory in 1997. China promised that Hong Kong would retain its western-style freedoms for 50 years after the handover from British rule. But Beijing has been tightening controls after imposing a National Security Law following massive pro-democracy protests in 2019, raising concerns over a weakening of civil liberties such as freedom of speech and the press.

Myanmar’s military rulers to let “loyal” citizens carry guns

BANGKOK (AP) — Myanmar’s military government plans to allow people who are “loyal to the nation,” including government employees and retired military personnel, to carry licensed firearms, but they must comply with orders from local authorities to participate in security and law enforcement actions, according to the military and media reports. The announcement fanned fears of even more violence in a country wracked by what some United Nations experts have called a civil war. The military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi two years ago, triggering widespread peaceful protests that turned into armed resistance after security forces used lethal force to suppress all opposition. A 15-page document about the new gun policy attributed to the Ministry of Home Affairs was initially circulated on pro-military Facebook accounts and Telegram channels. It was also published by pro-military and independent news outlets, which stated that it had been issued January 31 after being approved in December at a cabinet meeting. The new policy would allow people older than the age of 18 to be licensed to carry several types of guns and ammunition. The document says recipients of gun permits must be “loyal to the nation, of good moral character,” and not involved in disturbing state security. The military’s spokesperson, Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun, confirmed the policy to the BBC Burmese-language service, saying it needed to be issued because some people were asking to carry weapons to protect against attacks by anti-military groups. The decision to license guns is widely seen as a way for the military government to arm its supporters to help state security forces battle pro-democracy opponents.



PANDA PROGRAM. Giant panda Xiang Xiang is seen in her enclosure at Ueno Zoo during the last day of viewing before her return to China for good, on February 19, 2023, in Tokyo, Japan. Xiang Xiang, who was born six years ago, was the first giant panda to be born and raised naturally at the zoo and was sent back to China for breeding purposes. (Masanori Takei/Kyodo News via AP)

Japanese bid farewell to beloved panda returning to China

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Thousands of Japanese fans, some wiping away tears, bid farewell to a beloved Japan-born giant panda that made her final public appearance on Sunday, February 19 before flying to her home country, China.

The panda fans gathered at Tokyo’s Ueno Zoo for one last look at Xiang Xiang, the park’s idol since her birth in June 2017.

The Sunday viewing was limited to 2,600 lucky ones who won their tickets in an extremely competitive lottery. But many others who didn’t win came anyway to say their goodbyes from outside of the panda house.

“Xiang Xiang is not only cute but charming and funny. She’s so attractive that if you see her once, you want to see her more. I don’t think there is any panda like her in the universe,” said a visitor who only gave her first name, Yukie. “I’ve made friends here by sharing it, and that is also her attraction.”

Though she was born and grew up at the Tokyo zoo, Xiang Xiang, whose parents Ri Ri and Shin Shin are on loan from China, must return to that country.

China sends pandas abroad as a sign of goodwill but maintains ownership over the animals and any cubs they produce. The animals are native to southwestern China and are an unofficial national mascot.

Divided into groups of about 10, the visitors were given only a few minutes to quietly say goodbye to Xiang Xiang as she nonchalantly nibbled on bamboo sticks. Viewers held up their mobile phones and cameras to capture

her every move.

“I wish Japan-born pandas could stay in Japan,” said Takamichi Masui, an auto parts maker who travelled from Mie, in central Japan. “So many people who came today and fans are sad to see her go. When I saw (Xiang Xiang), I got teary. I wish Xiang Xiang could stay, though I understand it’s difficult.”

He said he worries if Xiang Xiang can smoothly adapt to her new life in China.

Natsuki Mizuguchi, a graphic designer, wore a parka, socks, and shoes decorated with Xiang Xiang’s head photo that she had taken.

Mizuguchi said she first saw Xiang Xiang when she was recovering from health issues but has since gotten better. “I wanted to express my appreciation to Xiang Xiang,” Mizuguchi said. “I’m certain she will be an idol in China too and I hope she serves the friendship between our two countries.”

Her friend, Akane Hiramoto, a nurse, said she could not win a slot Sunday and her visit Saturday became her last.

“I would love to go see her in China,” Hiramoto said. “I hope Japan and China can deepen friendship through pandas like Xiang Xiang and also environmental issues, for instance.”

Despite strained political ties between Japan and China, pandas have connected people in both countries and contributed to the friendship, Japanese fans say.

Xiang Xiang, accompanied by two Ueno Zoo staff, was flown to China last month. She is joining other pandas at a facility in Sichuan province, close to the original panda habitat.

“I became emotional when I saw may people

Continued on page 8

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Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 3/03

Bangladesh Taka	· · · ·	106.5
Cambodian Riel	· · · ·	4050.6
China Renminbi	· · · ·	6.9048
Fijian Dollar	· · · ·	2.1805
Hong Kong Dollar	· · · ·	7.8498
Indian Rupee	· · · ·	81.778
Indonesian Rupiah	· · · ·	15285
Iranian Rial	· · · ·	42006
Japanese Yen	· · · ·	136.3
Laos New Kip	· · · ·	16943
Malaysian Ringgit	· · · ·	4.473
Nepal Rupee	· · · ·	130.76
Pakistani Rupee	· · · ·	264.75
Papua N.G. Kina	· · · ·	3.52
Philippine Peso	· · · ·	54.75
Russian Ruble	· · · ·	75.52
Saudi Riyal	· · · ·	3.7529
Singapore Dollar	· · · ·	1.3469
South Korean Won	· · · ·	1301.4
Sri Lankan Rupee	· · · ·	343.4
Taiwan Dollar	· · · ·	30.607
Thai Baht	· · · ·	34.57
Vietnam Dong	· · · ·	25715