



Japan unveils proposal to promote marriage, raise birthrate

TOKYO (AP) — A Japanese cabinet minister in charge of tackling the country’s declining birthrate has unveiled a draft proposal aimed at reversing the downtrend, including increased subsidies for childrearing and education and a salary increase for younger workers to incentivize marrying and having kids. Japan’s population of more than 125 million has been declining for 15 years and is projected to fall to 86.7 million by 2060. A shrinking and aging population has huge implications for the economy and for national security as the country fortifies its military to counter China’s increasingly assertive territorial ambitions. Children’s Policies minister Masanobu Ogura said the next few years are possibly “a last chance” for Japan to reverse its declining births. If the number of births keeps falling at the rate since the beginning of 2000, the young population will shrink at twice the current pace in the 2030s, he said. Many younger Japanese have balked at marrying or having families, discouraged by bleak job prospects, corporate cultures incompatible with having both parents — but especially women — work, and the lack of public tolerance for small children. In 2022, Japan had 799,728 newborns, a record low, falling below 800,000 for the first time since surveys began in 1899. Many couples are hesitating to add to their families because of rising costs. Japan is the world’s third biggest economy but living costs are high, wage increases have been slow, and about 40% of Japanese are part-time or contract workers. Critics say the government has lagged in making society more inclusive for children, women, and minorities. The majority of Japanese between the ages of 18 and 34 say they hope to marry at some point but plan to have fewer than two children. A growing percentage say they have no intention of getting married, according to data cited in the proposal.

China e-commerce giant Alibaba outlines future strategy

HONG KONG (AP) — Alibaba plans to spin off some of its sprawling e-commerce and finance empire as independent businesses to make them more flexible and maximize their value, its top executives said late last month, as the company emerges from regulatory crackdowns that rattled Chinese tech industries. Alibaba CEO Daniel Zhang outlined details of a plan to split Alibaba into six main groups as a prelude toward stock listings of some of its companies. The restructuring marks a new stage in Alibaba’s growth after a series of setbacks as regulators tightened oversight of the industry. Alibaba, whose headquarters is in the eastern city of Hangzhou, will be “in the nature of a holding company that is the controlling shareholder of the business group companies,” Zhang said in a conference call. Alibaba’s CFO, Toby Xu, said the company would continue to evaluate the strategic importance of group companies after they go public and decide whether or not to retain control. He declined to say when they might go public. “We believe the market is the best litmus test, so each business group company can pursue independent fundraising and IPOs as and when they are ready,” Xu said. The plan, and the recent return of Alibaba founder Jack Ma to China after months abroad appear to mark a turnaround after several hard years. Chinese regulators singled out Alibaba for scrutiny in a crackdown on technology and internet companies, putting the brakes on a planned initial public offering in 2020 of Alibaba’s financial affiliate Ant Group. Ant had been set to raise \$34.5 billion in what would have been the world’s largest share offering at the time. Alibaba was later investigated and fined \$2.8 billion for breaching antitrust rules as Chinese authorities cracked down on the once-freewheeling technology industry.

Japanese musician Ryuichi Sakamoto dies at 71

TOKYO (AP) — Ryuichi Sakamoto, a world-renowned Japanese musician and actor who composed for Hollywood hits such as *The Last Emperor* and *The Revenant*, has died. He was 71. Japan’s recording company Avex said in a statement over the weekend that Sakamoto died on March 28 while undergoing treatment for cancer. He was first diagnosed with throat cancer in 2014. In 2022, he revealed he had terminal cancer, a year after he disclosed suffering from rectal cancer. Sakamoto was a pioneer of the electronics music of the late 1970s and founded the Yellow Magic Orchestra, also known as YMO, with Haruomi Hosono and Yukihiro Takahashi. Takahashi died in January. Despite his battle with cancer, Sakamoto released a full-length album, *12*, on his 71st birthday in January, stating that composing had a “small healing effect on my damaged body and soul,” according to an official statement released with the latest album.

Greenland to stay in daylight saving time forever

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Residents of Greenland have switched to daylight saving time and moved their clocks one hour forward for the very last time. Unlike most of Europe, Greenlanders will leave their clocks untouched come autumn when daylight saving time ends. While Europe and the U.S. debate whether to stick to the twice-yearly practice, Greenland — a vast Danish semi-independent territory in the Arctic — has resolved to perennially remain only 3 hours behind Copenhagen and most other European countries instead of 4. Greenland’s parliament, Inatsisartut, voted in November to stick to daylight saving time year-round. Officials say it will give Greenlanders another hour of daylight in the afternoons and more time to do business with Europe and farther afield. “The shift of time zone marks an exciting new beginning, an equal connection to North America and Europe, and an opportunity to slow down in a fast-paced world,” Visit Greenland, the local government’s tourism office, said in a statement. Geographically, sparsely populated Greenland belongs to the North American continent but geopolitically, it is in Europe. Greenland is part of the Danish Realm and its southernmost tip is nearly 2,000 miles west of Copenhagen. Its 56,000 people are mainly Inuit, indigenous people who chiefly live on the west coast in small towns and hamlets or remote coastal settlements.



WILD RUN. A young zebra walked, trotted, and galloped for hours in the busy streets of South Korea’s capital before emergency workers tranquilized the animal and brought it back to a zoo, as seen in this image taken from video. The zebra — a male named Sero that was born in the zoo in 2021 — was in stable condition and was examined by veterinarians, said Choi Ye-ra, an official at the Children’s Grand Park in Seoul. She said the zoo was investigating how the zebra managed to escape. (AP)

Zebra runs loose in Seoul before being taken back to zoo

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A young zebra walked, trotted, and galloped for hours in the busy streets of South Korea’s capital before emergency workers tranquilized the animal and brought it back to a zoo.

The zebra — a male named Sero that was born in the zoo in 2021 — was in stable condition and was examined by veterinarians, said Choi Ye-ra, an official at the Children’s Grand Park in Seoul.

She said the zoo was investigating how the zebra managed to escape. She didn’t immediately confirm media reports that the animal partially destroyed the wooden fencing surrounding its pen before busting out around

2:50pm.

Social media was flowing with smartphone videos of the zebra trotting alongside lines of cars that were waiting for a green light at an intersection, and galloping through a street surrounded by commercial buildings as pedestrians stopped and gasped.

Police and emergency workers managed to corner the zebra after it entered a narrow alleyway between houses and shot it with tranquilizers, ending its three hours of freedom.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or property damage caused by the zebra running loose.

Retrial ordered for 87-year-old ex-boxer on Japan death row

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Tokyo’s high court has ordered a retrial for an 87-year-old former boxer who has been on death row for nearly five decades after his murder conviction. His lawyers say the conviction was based on a forced confession and fabricated evidence.

The Tokyo High Court said Iwao Hakamada deserves a retrial because of a possibility that key evidence that led to his conviction could have been fabricated by investigators, according to a statement by the Japan Bar Association.

Amnesty International says Hakamada is the world’s longest-serving death row prisoner.

He has been temporarily released since 2014, but still not cleared of charges, when the Shizuoka District Court in central Japan suspended his execution and ordered a retrial. That ruling was overturned by the Tokyo High Court until the Supreme Court in 2020 ordered the lower court to reconsider.

His defense lawyers rushed out of the courtroom and flashed banners saying “Retrial.”

“We won his retrial. I’m so glad, and that’s all I can say,” said his 90-year-old sister Hideko, who has devoted her life to proving her brother’s innocence.

Hakamada was convicted of murder in the 1966 killing of a company manager and three of his family members, and setting fire to their central Japan home, where he was a live-in employee. He was sentenced to death two years later. He initially denied the accusations, then confessed, which he later said he was forced to do because of violent interrogation by police.

Hakamada was not executed because of lengthy appeals and the retrial process. It took 27 years for the Supreme Court to deny his first appeal for a retrial. He filed a second appeal in 2008, and the court finally ruled in his favor.

The point of contention was five pieces of blood-stained clothing that investigators said Hakamada allegedly wore during the crime and hid in a tank of fermented soybean paste,

Continued on page 6

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Fijian Dollar	2.1753
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8499
Indian Rupee	82.1
Indonesian Rupiah	14962
Iranian Rial	42003
Japanese Yen	132.93
Laos New Kip	16981
Malaysian Ringgit	4.41
Nepal Rupee	131.49
Pakistani Rupee	283.2
Papua N.G. Kina	3.52
Philippine Peso	54.29
Russian Ruble	77.496
Saudi Riyal	3.7534
Singapore Dollar	1.3298
South Korean Won	1303.6
Sri Lankan Rupee	328.99
Taiwan Dollar	30.509
Thai Baht	34.07
Vietnam Dong	23455