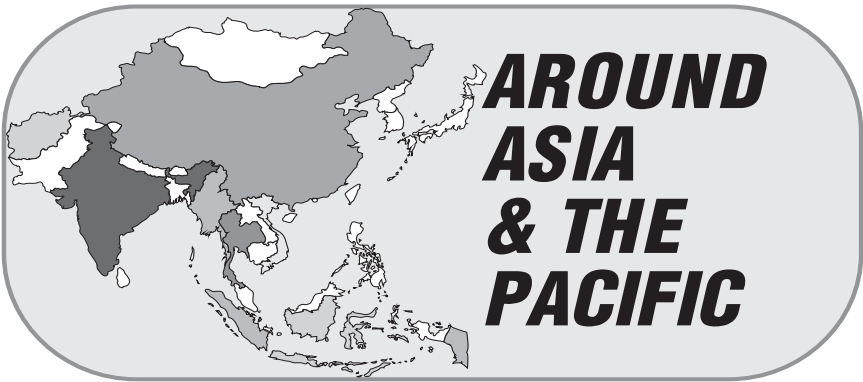




K-pop stars announce flurry of donations for HK fire victims

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — K-pop band aespa and other South Korean pop stars have announced a flurry of donations to support victims of an apartment fire in Hong Kong that killed at least 128 people in one of the city’s deadliest blazes. Girl group aespa said they will donate 500,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$64,000) to the Hong Kong Red Cross, according to a post on their official Weibo account. “We express our deepest sorrow regarding this heartbreaking news,” the band said. Stray Kids pledged 1 million Hong Kong dollars (\$128,000) through World Vision Hong Kong for temporary housing and other support for affected children and residents. “We were all very heavy-hearted upon hearing the unfortunate news from Hong Kong,” the group said. SM and JYP Entertainment, two of South Korea’s biggest entertainment companies, donated a combined 3 million Hong Kong dollars (\$384,000) for emergency relief and disaster recovery. Other K-pop groups that also pledged donations included boy bands Riize, EXO-CBX, and KickFlip who contributed 100,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$12,800) through World Vision Hong Kong. Organizers of the MAMA AWARDS, an annual two-day K-pop awards ceremony scheduled over the weekend in Hong Kong, faced online criticism in South Korea for not cancelling the event in light of the fire tragedy. South Korean entertainment company CJ E&M cancelled both days of red carpet events but said the main ceremony would proceed. “We express our deepest condolences to those who lost their lives in the fire in Hong Kong,” CJ E&M said in a statement. The company said the awards would add a “Support Hong Kong” message and include time for mourning. Organizers also pledged to donate 20 million Hong Kong dollars (\$2.6 million) to the support fund established by the Hong Kong government. “We believe in the healing and solidarity power of music,” the statement said.

India protests China’s “arbitrary detention” of citizen

NEW DELHI (AP) — India has lodged a protest with China over what it called an “arbitrary detention” of an Indian citizen at the Shanghai airport after the traveller from a northeastern state said she was held for hours because Chinese authorities refused to recognize her passport. The woman, who was stopped by Chinese authorities during a layover in Shanghai en route to Japan on November 21, said she was told her passport was invalid because her birthplace, the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, is considered to be Chinese territory. Pem Wang Thongdok said in a post on X that she was held at the airport for 18 hours. While India maintains Arunachal Pradesh to be one of its states in the northeast, Beijing calls it a part of China and names it Zangnan, or Southern Tibet. The latest episode adds pressure to a relationship already strained by the military standoff along the Himalayan frontier, restrictions on trade and technology, and competing regional interests. It comes at a time when the two nuclear-armed rivals have been working to stabilize their ties following the deadly border clash of June 2020. The strain highlights how the continuing dispute over Arunachal Pradesh remains a major obstacle to improving relations between the Asian neighbors. China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said China’s border inspection authorities handled the case “in accordance with laws and regulations” and that it had “fully protected the legitimate rights and interests” of the person involved. She denied claims that the individual was detained or harassed. Mao also reiterated that Zangnan was a Chinese territory and that Beijing never recognized the state of Arunachal Pradesh, which it claims was illegally established by India. India’s Foreign Ministry also responded, stating that Arunachal Pradesh was an integral and inalienable part of India. “No amount of denial by the Chinese side is going to change this indisputable reality,” ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a statement. He said Chinese authorities haven’t been able to explain the woman’s detention, which was in “violation of several conventions governing international air travel.” “The action by the Chinese authorities also violate their own regulations that allow visa free transit up to 24 hours for nationals of all countries,” Jaiswal said.

Japan’s exports rise, but Trump’s tariffs dent U.S. shipments

TOKYO (AP) — Japan’s global exports rose 3.7% in October from a year earlier while imports from the world edged up 0.6%, according to government data released. Exports to the U.S. dipped 3.1%, marking the seventh straight month of year-on-year declines mainly due to higher U.S. tariffs, Finance Ministry data showed. President Donald Trump announced a trade framework with Japan in July, placing a 15% tax on goods imported from that nation. That’s lower than the 25% rate Trump initially said would kick in starting in August. Previously, tariffs on most goods stood at 2.5%. It’s a heavy burden for an export dependent nation that is a major U.S. ally, but shipments to the rest of Asia are helping to offset those lost sales. Japan’s soybean imports from around the world surged 37.3% from a year earlier, while imports of iron and steel products dipped 17.1%. Imports from the U.S. jumped 20.9% in October from a year earlier, mainly petroleum and food such as grains. Exports of computer parts and other machinery and busses and trucks to the U.S. declined. Japan’s exports to China climbed 2.1% last month from a year earlier. Exports to Hong Kong surged 19.2%, while those to Taiwan were up 17.7%. As a result, Japan narrowed its overall trade deficit to 231.77 billion yen (\$1.5 billion) in October, down from 499.95 billion yen a year earlier. New worries have emerged recently over trade with China after Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, the nation’s first female leader, made comments about Taiwan that have angered China,. That prompted Beijing to issue an advisory against travel to Japan.



CLOSE CALL. In this November 23, 2025 photo, an emergency rescue team transports an elderly woman who was discovered to still be alive — after being considered deceased — to a local hospital before her scheduled cremation at Wat Rat Prakhong Tham temple in Nonthaburi province, Thailand. (Wat Rat Prakhong Tham via AP)

Thai woman found alive in coffin after being brought in for cremation

BANGKOK (AP) — A woman in Thailand shocked temple staff when she started moving in her coffin after being brought in for cremation.

Wat Rat Prakhong Tham, a Buddhist temple in the province of Nonthaburi on the outskirts of Bangkok, posted a video on its Facebook page showing a woman lying in a white coffin in the back of a pickup truck, slightly moving her arms and head, leaving temple staff bewildered.

Pairat Soodthoop, the temple’s general and financial affairs manager, told The Associated Press that the 65-year-old woman’s brother drove her from the province of Phitsanulok to be cremated.

He said they heard a faint knock coming from the coffin.

“I was a bit surprised, so I asked them to open the coffin, and everyone was startled,” he said. “I saw her opening her eyes slightly and knocking on the side of the coffin. She must have been knocking for quite some time.”

According to Pairat, the brother said his sister had been bedridden for about two years, when her health deteriorated and she became unresponsive, appearing to stop breathing two days ago. The brother then placed her in a coffin and made the 300-mile journey to a hospital in Bangkok, to which the woman had previously expressed a wish to donate her organs.

The hospital refused to accept the brother’s offer as he didn’t have an official death certificate, Pairat said. His temple offers a free

cremation service, which is why the brother approached them on Sunday, but was also refused due to the missing document.

The temple manager said that while he was explaining how to get a death certificate, they heard the knocking. They then assessed her and sent her to a nearby hospital.

The abbot said the temple would cover her medical expenses, according to Pairat.

□

Air pollution levels surge in New Delhi, sparking rare protests

By Rishi Lekhi

The Associated Press

NEW DELHI — A thick layer of smog enveloped India’s capital in November, filling the air with an acrid smell as pollution levels surged and worsened a public health crisis that has prompted its residents to take the streets to protest and demand government action.

New Delhi’s air quality index stood at 344, a level considered “severe” and dangerous to breathe, according to the World Health Organization’s (WHO) recommended exposure limits.

Hundreds of people, including parents and environmental activists, gathered at New Delhi’s India Gate in a rare protest, urging authorities to act. Many wore masks and carried placards, with one reading: “I miss breathing.”

“I am here just as a citizen who cares and

Continued on page 10



Mark your calendar!
The Year of the Horse
begins February 17, 2026.

Display advertising space reservations for our special Year of the Horse issue are due
Monday, January 19 at 5:00pm.

The Asian Reporter’s Lunar New Year special issue will be published on Monday, February 2, 2026.

Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 11/28

Bangladesh Taka	122.16
Cambodian Riel	4001.2
China Renminbi	7.074
Fijian Dollar	2.271
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7834
Indian Rupee	89.38
Indonesian Rupiah	16642
Iranian Rial	42047
Japanese Yen	156.2
Laos New Kip	21683
Malaysian Ringgit	4.133
Nepal Rupee	143.02
Pakistani Rupee	280.61
Papua N.G. Kina	4.24
Philippine Peso	58.66
Russian Ruble	77.661
Saudi Riyal	3.75
Singapore Dollar	1.2962
South Korean Won	1468.4
Sri Lankan Rupee	307.74
Taiwan Dollar	31.385
Thai Baht	32.195
Vietnam Dong	26393