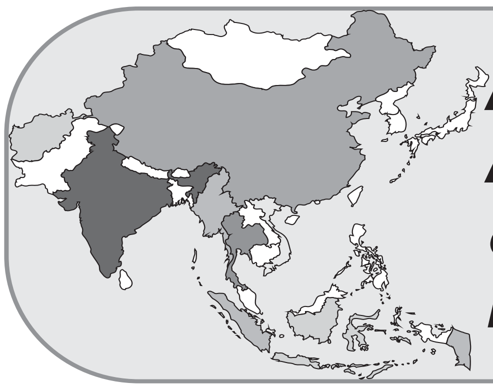

AROUND ASIA & THE PACIFIC

Man arrested after climbing into Moo Deng's enclosure

BANGKOK (AP) — A man has been arrested after he was caught climbing into the enclosure of Moo Deng, the adorable pygmy hippo who became a social media sensation, zoo officials said. The Thai man allegedly entered the enclosure while a keeper was away and no other visitors were around, the Khao Kheow Open Zoo's director, Narongwit Chodchoy, told The Associated Press. Security footage widely shared online shows a man wearing a black beanie, sunglasses, a green tank top, and brown shorts approaching Moo Deng and her mother Jona while holding a tablet, apparently recording or taking photos. The man remained inside the enclosure for a minute or two before staff noticed him, Narongwit said, adding that he did not attempt to flee while the zoo called for police. Moo Deng soared to stardom shortly after she was born in 2024, largely thanks to a keeper who shared adorable pictures and videos of the baby hippo on social media. Since then, she has drawn large crowds from Thailand and abroad who want to witness her charm in person and shoot photos and videos of her cute moments for themselves. Police have initially charged the man with trespassing, but the investigation is still ongoing and Narongwit said the zoo intends to pursue all available legal action. Police did not identify the suspect. The man has been released on bail, Narongwit said. He said Moo Deng and Jona were safe as the man did not try to touch them. In a statement posted on the zoo's official Facebook page, it said both animals appeared slightly startled by the encounter and would be monitored closely by a veterinarian. The zoo also urged visitors to "strictly follow all rules and instructions from staff for the safety of both themselves and the wildlife." The Khao Kheow Open Zoo, which is about 60 miles southeast of Bangkok, sits on almost 2,000 acres of land and is home to more than 2,000 animals.

Cambodia advances online scam center law

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Cambodian lawmakers unanimously adopted a new law targeting online scam operations with up to life in prison, following a government pledge to shut them down by the end of April. All 112 members of parliament present voted to approve the legislation, which marks Cambodia's first legal framework specifically aimed at a lucrative, illicit industry that has transformed the country into a global hub for cybercrime. The scam operations typically involve bogus investment schemes and feigned romances that collectively extort tens of billions of dollars from victims around the world every year. Justice Minister Keut Rith noted that thousands of people, especially from other Asian nations, are lured with fraudulent job offers and forced to work in scam centers in conditions of near-slavery. Keut Rith told lawmakers that these crimes threaten public security and significantly damage Cambodia's global reputation. The legislation awaits review by the senate and final approval by King Norodom Sihamoni. Directing what's described as a technology fraud site would carry five to 10 years in prison and fines reaching $250,000. For cases involving human trafficking, illegal confinement, or violence, the prison term is 10 to 20 years. If a worker dies, as is often associated with failed escape attempts, offenders face 15 to 30 years or even life imprisonment. Senior Minister Chhay Sinarith, who leads the Commission for Combating Online Scams, recently announced that authorities have targeted 250 suspected locations since July, successfully shutting down 200. He said the enforcement efforts resulted in 79 legal cases against nearly 700 ringleaders and associates. Over the same period, the government has repatriated nearly 10,000 scam center workers from 23 countries. Experts are skeptical. Jacob Sims, a visiting fellow at Harvard University's Asia Center, pointed out in response to Chhay Sinarith's remarks that past crackdowns often failed because they left financial and protection networks intact, allowing criminal operations to quickly start again.

Japan, Indonesia to boost energy security cooperation

TOKYO (AP) — Japan and resource-rich Indonesia have agreed to deepen economic ties and cooperation in energy security as the two Asian countries face growing uncertainty over oil and gas supplies prompted by the war in the Middle East. "In the wake of the Iran situation, the importance of resources and energy security is being recognized globally," said Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi in a joint news conference after holding talks with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto in Tokyo. The details of the agreement are yet to be made public. The two countries signed a deal this month to boost economic collaboration on critical minerals and nuclear energy, Takaichi said. Under the memorandum signed on March 15, the two sides will cooperate in building a new nuclear power plant, possibly in Indonesia's West Kalimantan, using Japanese expertise, with potential funding by development banks, according to a document released by Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry. Probowo also said his country invited Japanese cooperation in processing critical minerals such as rare earth elements, as well as in renewables and nuclear power. Japan, despite the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, is now promoting nuclear energy and seeking to expand cooperation with Southeast Asian nations as part of its zero-carbon emissions initiative. Indonesia is looking to nuclear power to meet surging energy demands. Indonesia last year announced plans to build two small modular reactors on a southern Indonesian island by 2034. Officials there say Canada and Russia have issued formal cooperation proposals. Takaichi and Prabowo also agreed to deepen cooperation to help stabilize supply chains, including liquefied natural gas (LNG), Japan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Resource-scarce Japan is among the world's top importers of LNG.

EXPENSIVE ENERGY. *An elderly couple carries a gas cylinder to their home after collecting it from a depot in New Delhi on March 19, 2026. Countries in Asia are scrambling to conserve energy and protect consumers as the war on Iran and attacks on gas fields and oil refineries disrupt critical supplies, rattling markets and driving up prices. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)*

Asia scrambles to conserve energy as Iran war disrupts oil & gas supplies

By Sheikh Saaliq and Anton L. Delgado
The Associated Press

NEW DELHI — Countries in Asia are scrambling to conserve energy and protect consumers as the war on Iran and attacks on gas fields and oil refineries disrupt critical supplies, rattling markets and driving up prices.

The crisis is hitting Asia hardest because of its heavy reliance on imported energy, much of which is shipped through the Strait of Hormuz, a key choke point now under strain. Only about 90 vessels — mostly Indian-, Pakistani-, and Chinese-flagged — have made it through the strait since the beginning of Israeli and U.S. attacks on Iran, and Iran's strikes against Israel and Gulf Arab neighbors, on February 28.

"The countries that are exposed to that supply disruption are not so much in Europe, or in the Americas, they're actually really in the Asia region," said Michael Williamson of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Asia should prepare for "cascading impacts into all economic activities," according to Ramnath Iyer of the U.S.-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

Japan

Japan is among the countries most exposed to disruptions in the strait, relying on the route for about 93% of its oil imports. Fuel prices are already climbing. A liter of regular gasoline was selling for about 175 yen ($1.09) in mid-March, up from around 144 yen ($0.91) a month prior.

To cushion the impact, Japan released 15 days of private-sector oil stockpiles, followed by a month's worth of supplies from the national reserves. Japanese ministries said the country had roughly 250 days of reserves as of the end of last year.

But public concern is mounting. Analysts warn of a repeat of the oil shock of the 1970s — also the result of upheaval in the Mideast — when surging prices triggered shortages and long lines. Calls are also growing to accelerate renewable energy use, as Japan lags behind other industrialized nations in wind and solar power.

South Korea

South Korea imports about 70% of its oil and 20% of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Middle East. Rising oil prices have created queues at cheaper gas stations, while delivery workers, truckers, and greenhouse farmers grapple with expenses. However, disruptions remain limited, and officials say reserves could last about seven months.

The government is taking additional steps to shore up energy supplies by lifting a national cap on coal-fired power generation, planning to boost nuclear output, and considering a resumption of Russian crude oil and naphtha imports, a key input for plastics manufacturing.

China

Despite China's heavy reliance on shipments through the strait — the largest by volume globally — China is relatively well insulated. Ample strategic reserves of oil and gas, along with a growing share of renewables that now account for about 30% of its power mix, have helped China cushion the immediate impact.

Chinese consumers, however, are facing

Continued on page 4

Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 4/03

Bangladesh Taka	122.88
Cambodian Riel	3997.8
China Renminbi	6.8782
Fijian Dollar	2.25
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8367
Indian Rupee	93.209
Indonesian Rupiah	16973
Japanese Yen	159.63
Laos New Kip	21964
Malaysian Ringgit	4.034
Nepal Rupee	148.64
New Zealand Dollar	1.7373
Pakistani Rupee	278.84
Papua N.G. Kina	4.3
Philippine Peso	60.616
Russian Ruble	80.127
Saudi Riyal	3.75
Singapore Dollar	1.2872
South Korean Won	1518.8
Sri Lankan Rupee	315.33
Taiwan Dollar	31.951
Thai Baht	32.644
Vietnam Dong	26340