The Asian Reporter

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The first giant panda cub born in Indonesia squeals, squirms in video

PRECOCIOUS PANDA. *A zoo on Java island released photos of Indonesia's first locally born giant panda cub and said the male cub was showing signs of being in good health. The mother, 15-year-old Hu Chun, gave birth to Satrio Wiratama — nicknamed Rio — on November 27 at the zoo's facility in Cisarua, West Java province. See story on page 3. (Indonesian Safari Park via AP)*

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Mark your calendar!

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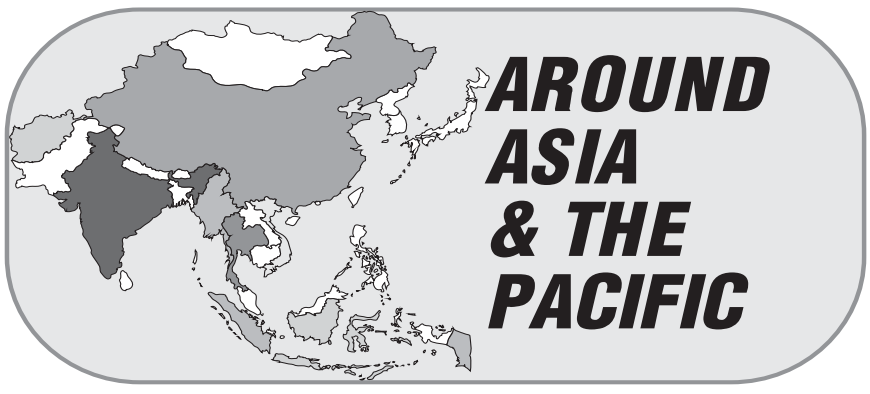
The Asian Reporter's Lunar New Year special issue will be published on Monday, February 2, 2026.



Japan's former Emperor Akihito turns 92

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's beloved former Emperor Akihito marked his 92nd birthday in December as his heart condition stabilized, palace officials said, following health concerns earlier last year. Akihito, the father of Emperor Naruhito, was diagnosed in May with insufficient blood flow to the heart muscles but has been in stable condition since he started a new medication in July, the Imperial Household Agency (IHA) said in a statement. He still enjoys scientific research into goby fish, career work in which he found 10 new species, and he visits a biology lab on the palace compound twice a week, the agency said. Akihito has held the title of emperor emeritus since his abdication in 2019. Known for his efforts to make amends for Japan's wartime past, Akihito has repeatedly prayed for its victims and the survivors who faced hardships as he marked the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. Akihito and his wife, Empress Emerita Michiko, offered a moment of silence on four key dates of the war 80 years ago — the end of the Battle of Okinawa, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the day marking Japan's surrender — the IHA said. He has said the war, fought in the name of his father Hirohito, should not be forgotten. In August, Akihito and his wife visited a central Japan resort in Karuizawa, where he temporarily evacuated as a child during the war, and where the couple started a romance years later.

Blackmailer of South Korean soccer star gets 4 years in jail

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A woman has been sentenced to four years in prison for blackmailing soccer star Son Heung-min, according to a South Korean court. The woman, identified only as Yang, was charged with extorting 300 million won ($204,000) from Son in 2024 after sending him an ultrasound photo of a baby that she claimed was his and demanding money to stay silent. She later conspired with a man, identified as Yong, to try to extort more money from Son. The Seoul Central District Court said Yang "lied" to Son, although she hadn't confirmed whose child she was carrying. The court said Yang denied the charges of extortion and attempted extortion. Yong, who confessed, was sentenced to two years in prison, according to the court. The 33-year-old Son is among Asia's greatest players. After a decade at Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League, the South Korean star joined LAFC in August. South Korean news agency, Yonhap reported in May that a women in her 20s and a man in his 40s had been detained on suspicion of attempting to blackmail Son in June of last year while he was still at Tottenham.

Messi's India tour kicks off chaotically

KOLKATA, India (AP) — Lionel Messi's much-hyped tour of India got off to a rocky start in mid-December with angry fans throwing bottles and attempting to vandalize a stadium after many of them failed to get more than just a glimpse of their hero. The *Times of India* reported that many ticketholders said they failed to see Messi at all — either in person or on the stadium's big screens — despite waiting for hours. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee apologized to the Argentine soccer star for the "mismanagement" of the event. "I am deeply disturbed and shocked by the mismanagement witnessed today at Salt Lake Stadium," Banerjee wrote on social media, where she also apologized to fans who had expected more after paying for tickets. Banerjee said a committee would be constituted to "conduct a detailed enquiry into the incident, fix responsibility, and recommend measures to prevent such occurrences in the future." Irate fans — many of whom wore Messi Argentina shirts — threw seats from the stands, then forced their way past security fences onto the field and attempted to cause more damage before overwhelmed security personnel chased them away. Messi had already left. Messi's three-day "GOAT India Tour" was to bring the World Cup winner from Kolkata to Hyderabad and then Mumbai before concluding in New Delhi. He was joined by longtime teammates Luis Suárez and Rodrigo De Paul. Messi also remotely "unveiled" a 70-foot statue of himself in Kolkata.

High-speed train kills 7 elephants crossing railway tracks

GUWAHATI, India (AP) — Seven wild Asiatic elephants were killed and a calf was injured when a high-speed passenger train collided with a herd crossing the tracks in India's northeastern state of Assam, according to local authorities. The train driver spotted the herd of about 100 elephants and used the emergency brakes, but the train still hit some of the animals, Indian Railways spokesman Kapinjal Kishore Sharma told The Associated Press. Five train coaches and the engine derailed following the impact, but there were no human casualties, Sharma said. Veterinarians carried out autopsies on the dead elephants, which were to be buried later in the day. The accident site is a forested area around 78 miles southeast of Assam's capital city of Guwahati. Railway tracks in the state are frequented by elephants, but Indian Railways said in a statement the accident location wasn't a designated elephant corridor. The Rajdhani Express train, travelling from Sairang in Mizoram state bordering Myanmar, was bound for the national capital of New Delhi with 650 passengers onboard when it hit with elephants. "We delinked the coaches which were not derailed, and the train resumed its journey for New Delhi. Around 200 passengers who were in the five derailed coaches [were] moved to Guwahati in a different train," Sharma said. Speeding trains hitting wild elephants is not rare in Assam, which is home to an estimated 7,000 wild Asiatic elephants, one of the highest concentrations of the pachyderm in India. Since 2020, at least a dozen elephants have been killed by speeding trains across the state. Wild elephants often stray into human habitations this time of year, when rice fields are ready for harvesting.

ATHLETIC ART. *Peking opera actress Zhang Wanting performs during a show at the Jixiang Theatre in Beijing. Dressed in a red-and-white warrior costume, Zhang balances on one foot on the narrow handle of a rosewood chair. She bends forward, lifts her other leg high, and grasps the two long pheasant plumes on her helmet to strike a pose like a flying swallow. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A., File)*

In a breakneck digital era, the ancient art of Peking opera works hard to keep flourishing

BEIJING — Dressed in a red-and-white warrior costume, Peking opera actress Zhang Wanting balances on one foot on the narrow handle of a rosewood chair. She bends forward, lifts her other leg high, and grasps the two long pheasant plumes on her helmet to strike a pose like a flying swallow.

From more than 100 spectators in a modern Beijing theater, cheers and applause rise.

It is a Sunday afternoon in early September, and Zhang is leading *The Masked Heroine*, a signature play from the Song School of Peking opera, founded in the early 20th century as part of a Chinese tradition centuries old. It is the 30-year-old actress's first time starring in the role in a full production, but also the fruit of more than a decade of hard work that began when she was a child.

"Ever since I first started learning this play," she says, "I've always dreamed of performing it in full."

A dazzling chair trick that takes a decade to master

Growing up in China's northern Hebei province, Zhang first encountered Peking opera when she was 7 and saw children practicing at a cultural center. Fascinated, she joined them — and soon realized she had the talent and determination to pursue the art professionally. After primary school, Zhang left home for a theater school in Eastern China's Jiangsu province.

Most performers in Peking opera — its name comes from a now-obsolete way of saying Beijing in English — start training at a very young age to lay the foundation for good physical strength and flexibility. The process, full of repetitive practice, leaves participants soaked with "sweat and tears."

The pose Zhang does on the chair requires balancing on one leg, arching backward, and stretching her arms forward with absolute stillness. It derives from a basic skill in Peking opera called tanhai — literally, "gazing over the sea" — that most performers learn at the beginning of their career. Originating in Chinese martial arts, the skill demands immense balance, flexibility, and control.

At theater school, Zhang started training at 5:00am daily. "After each session, I'd lie on the floor and cry," she recalls.

Throughout the school's training, Zhang had her first exposure to Song school's plays and became fascinated. In 2015, at college, Zhang finally got the chance to study with a Peking opera artist named Song Danju, the daughter of the Song School's founder. At a time when Peking opera troupes traditionally favored roles like qingyi (a role type for dignified, virtuous female characters) as headliners, the Song School brought female martial arts roles to the stage center with their creative stunts and a fresher performance style.

The chair trick is a Song family specialty. Zhang's teacher learned it from her father and revived it by blending martial and acrobatic movements learnt from folk opera performers in northwestern China. The sequence includes moves like jumping through the chair's frame

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Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 1/02

Bangladesh Taka	122.27
Cambodian Riel	4011.4
China Renminbi	6.994
Fijian Dollar	2.27
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7918
Indian Rupee	90.079
Indonesian Rupiah	16752
Iranian Rial	42083
Japanese Yen	156.81
Laos New Kip	21637
Malaysian Ringgit	4.054
Nepal Rupee	144.1
Pakistani Rupee	280.04
Papua N.G. Kina	4.26
Philippine Peso	58.847
Russian Ruble	80.239
Saudi Riyal	3.75
Singapore Dollar	1.2862
South Korean Won	1444.5
Sri Lankan Rupee	309.71
Taiwan Dollar	31.406
Thai Baht	31.39
Vietnam Dong	26305

What to know about the mystery of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 as the search resumes

By Aniruddha Ghosal and Haruka Nuga
The Associated Press

CONTINUED MYSTERY. *Flight officer Rayan Gharazeddine scans the water in the southern Indian Ocean off Australia from a Royal Australian Air Force AP-3C Orion during a search for the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, in this March 22, 2014 file photo. (AP Photo/Rob Griffith, File)*

More than a decade ago, Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 vanished without a trace, sparking one of aviation's most baffling mysteries.

Despite years of multinational searches, investigators still do not know exactly what happened to the plane or its 239 passengers and crew.

In late December, the Malaysian government said a vessel began a new search operation for the missing plane, reigniting hopes the aircraft might finally be found.

A previous, massive search in the southern Indian Ocean, where the jet is believed to have gone down, turned up almost nothing. Apart from a few small fragments that washed ashore, no bodies or large wreckage have ever been recovered.

Here is what to know about the deadly aviation tragedy.

Flight goes missing

The Boeing 777 disappeared from air-traffic radar 39 minutes after departing Kuala Lumpur for Beijing on March 8, 2014.

"Good night, Malaysian Three Seven Zero," the pilot said in the last radio call to Kuala Lumpur and the final communication before the plane crossed into Vietnamese airspace and failed to check in with controllers there.

Minutes later, the aircraft's transponder stopped broadcasting its location. Military radar showed the jet turn back over the Andaman Sea. Satellite data suggested it continued flying for hours, possibly until fuel exhaustion, before crashing into a remote section of the southern Indian Ocean.

Theories about what happened range from hijacking to cabin depressurization or power failure. There was no distress call, ransom demand, evidence of technical failure, or severe weather.

Malaysian investigators in 2018 cleared the passengers and crew but did not rule out "unlawful interference." Authorities have said someone deliberately severed communications and diverted the plane.

The passengers came from around the world

MH370 carried 12 crew members and 227 passengers, including five young children. Most passengers were Chinese, but there also were citizens of the United States, Indonesia, France, Russia, and elsewhere.

Among those aboard were two young Iranians travelling on stolen passports, a group of Chinese calligraphy artists, 20 employees of U.S. tech firm Freescale Semiconductor, a stunt double for actor Jet Li, and several families with young children.

Many families lost multiple members.

The search covered a vast area

Search operations began in the South China Sea between Malaysia and Vietnam before expanding to the Andaman Sea and the southern Indian Ocean.

Australia, Malaysia, and China coordinated the largest underwater search in history, covering roughly 46,000 square miles of seabed off western Australia. Aircraft, vessels equipped with sonar, and robotic submarines scoured the ocean for signs of the plane.

Signals thought to be from the plane's black box turned out to be from other sources and no wreckage was found. The first confirmed debris was a wing fragment, known as a flaperon, discovered on remote Réunion Island in July 2015, with additional fragments later found along the east coast of Africa.

The search was suspended in January 2017.

In 2018, U.S. marine robotics company Ocean Infinity resumed the hunt, under a "no-find, no-fee" agreement, focusing on areas identified through debris drift studies. The effort ended without success.

The search faced enormous challenges

One reason why such an extensive search failed to turn up clues is that no one knows exactly where to look.

The Indian Ocean is the world's third largest and the search was conducted in a difficult area where searchers encountered bad weather and average depths of around 2.5 miles.

It's not common for planes to disappear in the deep sea, but when they do remains can be very hard to locate. Over the past 50 years, dozens of planes have vanished, according to the Aviation Safety Network.

The hunt is renewed

Malaysia's government gave the green light in March for another "no-find, no-fee" contract with Ocean Infinity to resume the seabed search operation at a new site stretching over 5,800 square miles of water. Ocean Infinity will be paid $70 million only if wreckage is discovered.

However, the search was suspended in April due to bad weather. The government said that Ocean Infinity will resume the search intermittently from December 30 for 55 days in targeted areas believed to have the highest likelihood of finding the missing aircraft.

It is unclear if Ocean Infinity has new evidence of the plane's location. The company has said it would utilize new technology and has worked with many experts to analyze data and narrow the search area to the most likely site.

The first giant panda cub born in Indonesia squeals, squirms in video

By Edna Tarigan
The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — The first giant panda cub born in Indonesia is noisy, nursing well, and showing other signs of good health, the conservation park where he was born said in early December.

Indonesian Safari Park released video and photos showing the fuzzy newborn in an incubator and squirming and squealing while being cuddled by his mother.

The mother, 15-year-old Hu Chun, gave birth to Satrio Wiratama — nicknamed Rio — on November 27 at the park in Cisarua, West Java province.

The name symbolizes the hope, resilience, and shared commitment of Indonesia and China in protecting endangered species, the park said in a statement.

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto announced the baby panda's name and showed his photo when he met Wang Huning, a top Chinese political adviser and leading ideologist.

Rio is stable and showing healthy early signs such as strong vocalization, effective nursing, and steady weight gain while being monitored constantly. He's expected to develop better temperature control, fur growth, open his eyes, and move more.

The conservation park said it was prioritizing the health and welfare of the mother and baby and he would not yet be accessible to the public.

The adult pandas, Cai Tao and Hu Chun, arrived in Indonesia in 2017 on a 10-year conservation partnership with China. They live in an enclosure built for them at the park about 43 miles from Jakarta.

Pandas are widely considered as China's unofficial mascot and its loans of the animals to overseas zoos have long been seen as a tool of Beijing's soft-power diplomacy, also known as "panda diplomacy."

Giant pandas have difficulty breeding and births are particularly welcomed. There are fewer than 1,900 giant pandas in their only wild habitats in the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu.

BTS announces March comeback date, putting an end to a nearly four-year hiatus

(AP) — They're going to light up 2026 like dynamite: K-pop group BTS' comeback has an official date.

According to a note shared to social media by the entertainment company BigHit Music, the mega popular group will return on March 20.

That's after a nearly four-year hiatus, as all seven members of BTS — RM, Jin, Jimin, V, Suga, Jung Kook, and j-hope — completed South Korea's mandatory military service.

"March 20th comeback confirmed," BigHit Music wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

Rapper Suga was the last group member to be released — from his duties as a social service agent, an alternative to serving in the military that he reportedly chose due to a shoulder injury. That was in June 2025.

The six others, RM, V, Jimin, Jung Kook, Jin, and j-hope, served in the army.

BTS tiered their enlistments, giving ample time for its members to focus on solo projects while the group was on a break.

Last summer, the group teased a world tour and announced that a new album would be released in the spring of 2026. At the time, they said they would begin working on the project in July 2025.

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Sri Lanka tea workers struggle in poverty. Flooding cost many their lives.

By Krishan Francis and Sibi Arasu
The Associated Press

HOSTILE WORK ENVIRONMENT. *Arumugam Manikavalli, top photo, stands at the doorway of her living quarters after Cyclone Ditwah led to floods and landslides at Craighead Estate in Nawalapitiya, Sri Lanka. In the bottom photo, mud fills the remains of a worker's living quarters at a tea plantation after a landslide at Craighead Estate. (AP Photos/Eranga Jayawardena)*

CRAIGHEAD ESTATE, Sri Lanka — Arumugam Manikavalli, awakened by ferocious rain and rumbling earth, fled her home for the safety of a nearby temple on the tea estate where she works. That same November evening, tea worker Kumaran Elumugam's small home was crushed by a landslide, killing six family members.

He survived only because he was away, at work, along with a daughter.

"My wife, son-in-law, daughter, mother-in-law, two grandsons are all dead," Elumugam lamented. "The small one (granddaughter) is still under the mud."

Elumugam and Manikavalli were among the fortunate to reach safety as heavy rains from Cyclone Ditwah led to floods and landslides across the South Asian island nation, killing more than 640 people and leaving more than a hundred missing. Multiple villages were submerged by landslides that left behind a rubble of cement, wood, and roofing. In one area, the wreckage was dotted with clothing, schoolbooks, toys, and a sports trophy.

Among the hardest hit were the hilly regions in the island's center and the tea plantation workers who live there. Many occupied primitive, 150-year-old structures that were swept away in the landslides and flooding. Social workers said these plantation workers, already living in extremely distressed conditions, are now in an even more desperate situation.

Poorly paid tea plantation workers worst hit by the disaster

Most tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka belong to the Malaiyaha Tamil ethnic group. Descendants of Tamil indentured laborers who were brought to work from southern India by British colonists more than 200 years ago, over 1 million people belong to this community, the fourth-largest ethnic group on the island.

Sri Lanka grows some of the world's finest tea, bringing billions of dollars into the country. But most Tamils in the hill regions earn well below the minimum wage of 1,200 rupees ($4) per day, with little or no access to education, healthcare, or good jobs.

A report by the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies said most tea plantation workers own no land or homes and are living in colonial-era working quarters barely bigger than 100 square feet but accommodating as many as eight family members. Multiple houses share bathrooms or have no sanitary facilities.

Many of the tea plantations, on flatter ground, were unaffected by the cyclone while the workers' homes, which were closer to mountain slopes, were destroyed, said Melanie Gunathilaka, a Colombo-based climate activist and researcher.

"The settlements were in much more dangerous areas," she said. "This shows the amount of value placed on the lives of these people."

The Planters Association of Ceylon, the association for Sri Lanka's tea companies and estates, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The government said more than 100,000 houses were destroyed or damaged across Sri Lanka. It has promised compensation packages to rebuild houses or to find safer lands and build new houses.

Sundaralingam Pradeep, Sri Lanka's deputy minister for plantations and community infrastructure, told The Associated Press that the government is negotiating with the tea companies to identify lands to build homes for all those affected by the disaster, including retirees still living in company line houses.

The minister said an Indian-assisted project to build 7,000 homes will provide the first batch of houses for the impacted workers.

Tea workers say help can't come soon enough.

"It doesn't feel safe to be living here," said Karuppiah Kamani, pointing to a huge rock next to her home at the edge of a tea plantation.

Sellamuttu Darshani Devi, another tea worker, and her family were asked to move as a precaution after the worst landslides. That's been routine for years, she said. Her house has so far been unaffected, but she's afraid to go back now.

"We are so scared when it rains," Devi said.

She said despite the disaster she had to go pick tea leaves at the estates even now as tea company owners refused to provide any support unless they work. "When it gets sunny, the authorities tell us to go back. We need a home desperately," she said.

Sri Lanka is vulnerable to climate change, but debt hampers readiness

Sri Lanka accounts for less than 1% of planet-warming gasses in the atmosphere but is considered among nations most at risk from the extreme weather made worse by climate change.

According to the United Nations, Sri Lanka loses more than $300 million every year from climate-triggered extreme weather. At least 750,000 people are affected every year by extreme weather and nearly 19 million of Sri Lanka's 23 million people live in low-lying, landslide-prone, or other disaster-vulnerable areas.

But building resilience is difficult. The country owes billions of dollars to the International Monetary Fund, other multilateral development banks, countries such as China, Japan, and India, and some private banks and private lenders. Sri Lanka is highly dependent on tourism, which was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Severe economic problems led to mass protests and the eventual ouster of the nation's established political elite.

"In countries like Sri Lanka, disasters don't break the system. What disasters do is they expose the already broken systems," said Sandun Thudugala of the Colombo-based nonprofit Law and Society Trust. Thudugala said Sri Lanka needs to rethink how it builds and plans, he said, taking into account a future where extreme weather is the norm.

Climate activist Gunathilaka said the country's debt burden has forced it to prioritize economic growth above everything else so they can repay on time. She said that Sri Lanka could prioritize building climate-resilient homes, invest in early warning infrastructure, and have more money to respond to disasters if they didn't have to worry about the billions in loans and high interest rates that they come attached with.

Global leaders have acknowledged that countries need trillions of dollars to adapt to climate change.

For the people in Sri Lanka's hill provinces, the need is urgent.

"We are so scared, anything can happen anytime here," said Chellaya Pathmanathan, a tea plantation worker whose family is sheltering in a government school after their home was damaged. He said the family doesn't have enough food to eat.

"We want to create a safe future for our kids. I hope someone can help us," he said.

AP photographer Eranga Jayawardena contributed to this report. Arasu reported from Bengaluru, India.

The Associated Press' climate and environmental coverage receives financial support from multiple private foundations. AP is solely responsible for content.

Tibetans depart Nepal, a former safe haven transformed under Chinese pressure

By Manish Swarup, David Goldman, and Aniruddha Ghosal
The Associated Press

DHARAMSHALA, India — Sonam Tashi refuses to let his son inherit the same fear.

Once active in the Free Tibet movement in Kathmandu, he found himself silenced. Unable to secure identity papers for his son, he left for the Tibetan capital in exile in India last year where his son will begin an education he can't have at home.

There he joined a rare protest in a city so reminiscent of what Kathmandu once was — where monks walk freely and the Dalai Lama's portrait is not a risk.

An investigation by The Associated Press found that much of the Chinese technology used to surveil Tibetans in Nepal originally came from American companies. Despite warnings that Chinese firms were copying or outright stealing their designs, these firms built, customized, and expanded China's surveillance apparatus over the past quarter-century.

Born in Nepal to Tibetan refugees, Tashi spent years on the frontlines of protest, a regular presence outside the Chinese embassy in Kathmandu. In the early days, arrests were brief — just a day or two — but by 2015, police were holding protesters for weeks. The crowds thinned. Eventually, Tashi was one of the last still showing up.

Surveillance trailed them beyond the protests.

Police began showing up hours before any gathering could start, demanding answers to questions they shouldn't have known to ask: What are you doing tomorrow? Where are you going?

Cameras multiplied — around Tibetan settlements, in temples, even near private homes. In Boudha, the comfort of lingering beneath the stupa's all-seeing eyes curdled.

Now 49, Tashi is focused on his 10-year-old son. Once an organizer, he's now just a father trying to get his son out — before the net pulls tighter. On a winding bus ride toward the Indian border, Sonam stared out the window as terraced hills gave way to forest, thinking about what comes next.

"There are cameras everywhere," he said. "There is no future."

This surveillance has helped silence Nepal's once-vibrant "Free Tibet" movement. Thousands of Tibetans once fled to Nepal every year, but last year, the number was down to the single digits, according to Tibetan officials in Nepal.

Across the world, in Washington, D.C., Namkyi's eyes hold the loneliness that haunts Tibetans in exile.

Arrested at 15 and sentenced to three years in prison for protesting Chinese rule, Namkyi travelled to the U.S. to recount her story of what it means a lose a home.

Dressed in black, with two small pins — Tibetan and American — on her coat, she recounts how under withering surveillance, silence has become survival for Nepal's dwindling Tibetan community.

"They know they are being watched," she said.

Her eyes shine, not with certainty, but with the fragile hope that being heard might one day matter.

Japan's Takaichi is winning fans not with politics but with her style and 'work, work, work' mantra

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — The pledge by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi to "work, work, work, work and work" for her country has been named the catchphrase of the year, recognizing the effort Japan's first female leader had to make to reach the top.

The ultraconservative Takaichi uttered the phrase in October when she was elected as head of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Many were initially as worried about her work ethic as supportive of her enthusiasm.

In a country notorious for long working hours, especially for working women who are also burdened with homemaking and caregiving, overwork is a sensitive topic. The recognition triggered a mixed reaction, with some interpreting it as satire.

Accepting her award from a private committee last month, Takaichi said she only wanted to stress her enthusiasm.

"I have no intention of encouraging other people to overwork, or suggesting long working hours as a virtue," Takaichi said. "I hope there is no misunderstanding."

Takaichi, within weeks of taking office in late October, sparked a deepening spat with Beijing over her remark about possible Japanese military action in the event that China attacks Taiwan.

As the nation's first female prime minister, Takaichi has captured public attention for her workwear, with women scrambling to copy her style, and the interest has not worn off.

But while her dress sense has won admiration from younger women who say they are "Sana-katsu," or rooting for Sanae, it is unclear if her hardline conservative policies will win the same praise.

Takaichi is looking to regain right-wing supporters after the LDP's big election losses under her moderate predecessor Shigeru Ishiba.

During her speech to party members October 4 she promised an all-out effort to rebuild the struggling party and regain public support, urging lawmakers to "work like a horse." Then she added: "I will abandon the idea of a 'work-life balance' — I will work, work, work, work and work."

Repeating the word "work" in a low, determined voice left a strong impression at the time.

Hard work — and then a hot tub

Takaichi's apparent long working hours and lack of sleep have worried fellow lawmakers. She held a meeting with aides at 3:00am before the first day of parliament on November 7, though she hasn't started that early since.

"I sleep about two hours now, four hours at the longest," Takaichi, who also provides care for her husband who is recovering from a stroke, told MPs at a budget committee meeting in November. "It's probably bad for my skin."

She says she likes to soak in a hot tub in the morning and at night to relax. "That's my blissful time," she said.

Her style-icon status has been boosted by her black bag, dubbed a "Sanae Bag," which is officially called the Grace Delight Tote. It is made by Hamano Inc., a 145-year-old bagmaker based in Tokyo.

Priced at 136,400 yen ($875), the simple leather bag is just large enough to fit A4-sized papers. It is selling the best since its debut 30 years ago, according to the company.

Takaichi was carrying the bag as she walked into the prime minister's office on October 21, and the scene immediately caused a sensation on social media.

Hamano spokesperson Takanori Kobayashi said his company is delighted to see Japan's first female prime minister carrying the bag.

Within days, inquiries and orders for the bag surged, and all eight colors sold out. The bag, which is carefully made of high quality leather, cannot be mass-produced, and those who ordered it now have to wait until August, Kobayashi says.

Another popular item is a sparkly light-pink pen Takaichi uses to take notes; it's Mitsubishi Pencil Co.'s Jetstream 4&1.


AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko, Pool


Kyodo News via AP

POLITICIAN & INFLUENCER. *Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, top photo, speaks during a press conference at the prime minister's office in Tokyo. Takaichi's style-icon status has been boosted by her black bag, dubbed a "Sanae Bag," which is officially called the Grace Delight Tote. In the bottom photo, Takaichi arrives at the prime minister's office on October 21 with her black bag.*

The pen, the "Sanae Takaichi model," is often out of stock at stores and internet shopping sites. Those who have found one often proudly post photos with a message: "Matching Sanae."

Style icon, but no feminist

The attention Takaichi is receiving is usually reserved for pop stars, athletes, and influencers in Japan who fans have access to only through television or the internet.

The prime minister's fans show their loyalty by buying the same bag and pen she uses, just as fans of star athletes like Shohei Ohtani buy replicas of his uniform to cheer on the Dodgers, experts say.

Takaichi has won admiration as a new type of role model for women who have not usually rooted for prime ministers in the past, says Namiko Kubo-Kawai, a psychology professor at Nagoya Shukutoku University.

In Japan, many female role models typically were supported for their femininity, but Takaichi is unique as a high-powered politician. Her short haircut and no-frills workwear also stand out from conventional female models.

She may not inspire many feminists, however. Takaichi is a staunch conservative who champions Japan's traditional gender and paternalistic values. She has supported keeping the succession of Japan's monarchy male only. She also opposes changing a 19th-century law that would allow married couples the option of keeping separate surnames.

Still, as the first female prime minister, "she fits perfectly as a stylish role model and has won admiration from many women who have been looking for one even though they probably have never thought of rooting for a prime minister," Kubo-Kawai said. "Female role models are becoming more diverse."

AP video journalist Mayuko Ono contributed to this report.

Life begins at 59 for the globe's oldest professional soccer player

TOKYO (AP) — He turns 59 in February, and the globe's oldest professional soccer player has a new club as he gets set for his 41st season.

This is of course Kazuyoshi Miura, who is known in Japan as "King Kazu."

Miura announced his signing with third-division J-League team Fukushima United in late December.

Continued on page 15

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Contributing Editors
Ronault L.S. Catalani (Polo), Jeff Wenger
Correspondents
Ian Blazina, Josephine Bridges, Pamela Ellgen, Maileen Hamto, Edward J. Han, A.P. Kryza, Marie Lo, Simeon Mamaril, Julie Stegeman, Toni Tabora-Roberts, Allison Voigts
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MY TURN

■ ***Wayne Chan***

Foodie without a clue

I am what people might call an equal opportunity foodie.

Expensive or fast food — it doesn't matter. I'm all in. That's not to say that there aren't some problems that accompany this type of food mentality. But I'll address my expanding waistline in a future column.

My beautiful wife Maya and I recently celebrated our 34th anniversary. Unfortunately for me, I did not realize this important milestone was coming until about a week before. The period upon realizing it and the day itself can officially be called the scrambling-to-come-up-with-a-plan phase.

Fortunately for me, whether it was just my lucky day or the stars perfectly aligning, it didn't take too long to find a perfect way to celebrate.

I managed to score a reservation at Lilo, the only restaurant in San Diego to earn a Michelin star this year. And to top it off, Lilo is inspired by French cooking with elements of Japanese flavors. What's not to like?

In all honesty, I was a little hesitant to reveal the name of the restaurant, not because we didn't have an amazing experience (we absolutely did), but because of the challenges I experienced during our visit, which were completely self-inflicted.

To be perfectly clear, Lilo was amazing and they can't possibly address how clueless I can be at times.

I've been lucky enough to eat at a few Michelin-starred restaurants in my life, and they've all been amazing. There's another thing they have in common. They tend to be pricy. And because they are expensive, I want to get as much value out of my meal as humanly possible. How this objective manifests itself is that no matter what is served, I will eat it.

For example, Maya, and pretty much anyone who has ever met me, knows that I absolutely can't stand bean sprouts. They are vile weeds. Ever since I was a kid, if I was served a plate of noodles with bean sprouts on top, I would pick them out one by one, using a magnifying glass if I had to. Maya jokes that if she ever needed to "do me in," she would simply sneak some bean sprouts into a cupcake or something. What I'm trying to say is that in my world, bean sprouts would simply not exist if I had my way.

And yet, this becomes a conflict when I'm at a Michelin-starred restaurant. It's the one exception where I could be served emulsion of bean sprouts topped with bean sprout as jus layered with shaved bean sprout a la mode and I would reluctantly scoop it into my mouth.

Happily, Lilo didn't force me to make that choice — there were no bean sprouts listed on the night's tasting menu. Since I always try to savor every bite and experience every nuance of flavor and texture in my meal, my challenge this time fell within the fact that there were a number of items served that I had no idea what they were.

Each course was small, delicate, and presented with a variety of ingredients — which the servers dutifully explained — but in my inexperience, I had no idea what they were. Each course included a main ingredient — scallops, sea urchin, crab — which I definitely knew, but they were served with things I'd never heard of before. What is lemon verbena? What is white alyssum? What is kohlrabi?

But that wasn't the real obstacle. Each course was an adventure in flavor and I savored every bit of it.

The real difficulty was discerning which items in each course were meant to be eaten and what was just part of the presentation. One course had two shells filled with seafood and other exotic ingredients, but was centered on a plate with various plants and what looked like a river rock. Were we supposed to eat the plants? And I normally wouldn't think of eating a rock, but maybe they made foam that was supposed to look like a rock? (It was just a rock.)

Another dish was rock crab with marigolds and an infusion of cucumber and lime, but was served on an intricate plate made entirely of ice. It was an ice plate. And it was about the size of a small frisbee. Were we supposed to eat the plate or wait a while and drink it? Next to the ice plate was a small plate with two black items that looked like cylindrical rolls of chocolate on a bed of more river rocks. By now, I already knew I wasn't supposed to eat the rocks ("fool me once"), but what about the rolls?

Was I supposed to use the rolls to soak up the crab and the sauce from the slowly melting ice plate?

It took me a minute to figure out that those rolls were actually steamed towels meant to clean our hands after eating the crab.

Let me just say I didn't eat the towel. But if I had, as with everything else at Lilo, I'm sure it would have been scrumptious.

Humor writer Wayne Chan lives in the San Diego area; cartoonist Wayne Chan is based in the Bay Area.

Hawai‘i’s YouTube kicker dubbed the “Tokyo Toe” used grit to become an AP All-American with NFL hopes

By Audrey McAvoy
The Associated Press

HONOLULU — Kansei Matsuzawa became an instant star last year, with game-tying and game-winning field goals in a 23-20 victory win over Stanford and a singular backstory about teaching himself to kick on YouTube.

The Japan-born Matsuzawa’s near-perfect performance during the rest of Hawai‘i**’s** 8-4 season was even more impressive.

He made 25 consecutive field goals, tying a 43-year-old Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) record and earning first-team status as an Associated Press All-American as one the best players in the country. He was a finalist for the Lou Groza award given to the nation’s top place-kicker.

“In every moment, I always choose win. Even if I want to go home, just choose when to stay on campus and do something extra,” Matsuzawa said before his final game last season. “And that was the mindset I [had this season], and because of that now I get recognition from [the] entire country and also back home in Japan.”

Dubbed the “Tokyo Toe” by teammates, he graduated last month and took the field for the Rainbow Warriors for the last time in the Hawai‘i Bowl against California.

He has a chance of playing in the National Football League just six years after attending his first football game. Back then, he didn’t understand the rules and knew just one player’s name: Tom Brady.

Finding kickers on YouTube

Matsuzawa’s unlikely path to college football dates to 2019. The high school soccer player failed annual college entrance exams in Japan two years in a row and didn’t know what he wanted to do with his life. He was 20 years old and depressed.

“I had nothing. I lost my purpose of my life,” Matsuzawa said in an interview.

His father gave him a ticket to travel to the U.S. and see a world outside Japan. He flew to California with no agenda other than to watch an NFL game, a sport he had some affinity for because his father was a fan and they had watched Super Bowls together.

SELF-TAUGHT SENSATION. *Hawai‘i place-kicker Kansei Matsuzawa of Japan poses for a portrait at Clarence T.C. Ching Athletics Complex in Honolulu. Matsuzawa became an instant star this past football season, with game-tying and game-winning field goals. (AP Photo/Mengshin Lin)*

He didn’t fully understand what he saw on the field at Oakland Coliseum. But the energy and fan enthusiasm at the stadium was different from what he had experienced in Japanese sports. Once back home, he decided he would return to the U.S., become a kicker, and play in the NFL.

American football is an obscure sport in Japan, ranking below baseball, soccer, sumo, golf, skating, and other pastimes in popularity. Matsuzawa wanted to learn from the best, an NFL player, but there weren’t any in Japan. So he imitated kickers on YouTube, particularly Jason Myers of the Seattle Seahawks. He liked Myers’ style, tempo, and rhythm. He told his family and a few friends but otherwise kept his plans a secret to avoid skeptics.

There are only a few football fields with goal posts in Japan, but one was an hour’s commute from his house. He begged its owners, the Fujitsu Frontiers of a Japanese industrial league, to let him practice there in exchange for running team errands.

Grit to overcome adversity

After two years of practicing and saving money from a steakhouse job, he sent video clips of himself kicking to U.S. junior college teams. Hocking College in tiny Nelsonville, Ohio, gave him a chance. He says he knew so little English he barely spoke the first three months. He’s not sure anyone there had ever seen a Japanese person before.

The culture shock didn’t deter him.

“Nothing beats me,” he said with a smile.

He eventually made it on a list of top kicking prospects. Hawai‘i’s coordinator for special teams noticed Matsuzawa’s leg strength and power, form, and technique. It was Matsuzawa’s resilience and overcoming of adversity that prompted Thomas Sheffield to recruit him.

“That’s what it’s going to take to be successful,” Sheffield said.

Matsuzawa was a walk-on, but got a scholarship a year ago and sobbed as his coach told him the good news. He was thinking of his parents, he says, who downsized their home to save money and help cover his costs, and of his grandparents, who paid his Hawai‘i tuition.

Adjusting to the intensity of FBS play took time. Sheffield left him off the travel roster for a Vanderbilt game his first year but Matsuzawa picked himself up. He focused on doing small things right every day and said he gradually earned the respect of his teammates and coaches.

“It goes back to the grit and him finding a way to put him in a situation to fulfill his dreams,” Sheffield said.

The right mindset

Matsuzawa worked with a sports psychologist twice a week this season, which he said helped. Last season, when he was 12 for 16 on field goal attempts, he set his mind on results like kicking farther and boosting his statistics. This year, he’s focused on process, on kicking footballs, and staying positive.

“Luckily my job is simple, making field goals, and that’s what I want to do,” Matsuzawa said. “Just one at a time. Go out there, kick.”

Matsuzawa credits his special teams unit for his achievements and said he will treasure their connection for the rest of his life. His holder, Caleb Freeman, said he would do anything for Matsuzawa’s success.

“It’s real easy for the position he’s in to kind of take the spotlight and run with it,” Freeman said. “But ever since the Stanford game, (when) he made the game-winning field goal, he has always just shined the light on everyone else.”

The NFL has players of Japanese ancestry, like Commanders quarterback Jayden Daniels whose great-grandmother is Japanese. Historically a dozen players have listed a birthplace in Japan, according to Elias Sports Bureau, but their backgrounds indicate they were mostly born to parents serving overseas in the U.S. military.

Hawai‘i coach Timmy Chang is confident Hawai‘i and Japan will be rooting for him.

“I think he’s going to do well,” Chang said, “if he continues his mindset and the track in which he’s at and all the things that made him who he is.”

Autoimmune diseases can strike any part of the body, and mostly affect women. Here’s what to know.

By Lauran Neergaard
The Associated Press

Our immune system has a dark side: It’s supposed to fight off invaders to keep us healthy. But sometimes it turns traitor and attacks our own cells and tissues.

What are called autoimmune diseases can affect just about every part of the body — even the brain — and tens of millions of people. While most common in women, these diseases can strike anyone, adults or children, and they’re on the rise.

New research is raising the prospect of treatments that might do more than tamp down symptoms. Dozens of clinical trials are testing ways to reprogram an out-of-whack immune system. Furthest along is a cancer treatment called CAR-T therapy that’s had some promising early successes against lupus, myositis, and certain other illnesses. It wipes out immune system B cells — both rogue and normal ones — and the theory is those that grow back are healthier. Other researchers are hunting ways to at least delay brewing autoimmune diseases, spurred by a drug that can buy some time before people show symptoms of Type 1 diabetes.

“This is probably the most exciting time that we’ve ever had to be in autoimmunity,” said Dr. Amit Saxena, a rheumatologist at NYU Langone Health.

Here are some things to know.

What are autoimmune diseases?

They’re chronic diseases that can range from mild to life-threatening, more than 100 with different names depending on how and where they do damage. Rheumatoid arthritis and psoriatic arthritis attack joints. Sjögren’s disease is known for dry eyes and mouth. Myositis and myasthenia gravis weaken muscles in different ways, the latter by attacking how nerves signal them. Lupus has widely varied symptoms including a butterfly-shaped facial rash, joint and muscle pain, fevers, and damage to the kidneys, lungs, and heart.

It can even hijack the organ that makes us “us” — the brain, with what’s called autoimmune encephalitis.

They’re also capricious: Even patients faring well for long periods can suddenly have a “flare” for no apparent reason.

Why autoimmune diseases are so difficult to diagnose

Many start with vague symptoms that come and go or mimic other illnesses. Many also have overlapping symptoms — rheumatoid arthritis and Sjögren’s also can harm major organs, for example.

Diagnosis can take multiple tests, including some blood tests to detect antibodies that mistakenly latch onto healthy tissue. It usually centers on symptoms and involves ruling out other causes. Depending on the disease it can take years and seeing multiple doctors before one puts the clues together.

There are efforts to improve. The National MS Society is educating doctors about newly updated guidelines to streamline diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. And scientists are discovering a growing list of rogue antibodies responsible for the memory loss, seizures, even psychosis that can signal autoimmune encephalitis. That’s helping doctors better identify it.

How the immune system gets out of whack

The human immune system is a complex army with sentinels to detect threats like germs or cancer cells, a variety of soldiers to attack them, and peacemakers to calm things down once the danger is over. Key is that it can distinguish what’s foreign from what’s “you,” what scientists call tolerance.

Sometimes confused immune cells or antibodies slip through, or the peacemakers can’t calm things down after a battle. If the system can’t spot and fix the problem, autoimmune diseases gradually develop.

Autoimmune diseases are often set off by a trigger

Most autoimmune diseases, especially in adults, aren’t caused by a specific gene defect. Instead, a variety of genes that affect immune functions can make people susceptible. Scientists say it then takes some “environmental” trigger, such as an infection, smoking, or pollutants, to set the disease into motion.

Scientists are zeroing in on the earliest molecular triggers. For example, white blood cells called neutrophils are first responders to signs of infection or injury — but abnormally overactive ones are suspected of playing a key role in lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, and other diseases.

New research links a virus to lupus

Among infectious triggers, scientists already know the Epstein-Barr virus can set some people on the path to multiple sclerosis — and new evidence links it to lupus, too.

Just about everybody gets that virus by young adulthood and after the initial infection, it still hides out, inactive, in the body. Stanford University researchers found a hiding place is in a tiny proportion of the immune system’s B cells. They found that occasionally, in some people, the virus nudges certain B cells into an inflammatory state that can spur an autoimmune chain reaction.

The research doesn’t explain why 95% of adults have been infected with Epstein-Barr yet only a small fraction of the population gets lupus. But it’s a new clue into how infections can have a lasting impact on the immune system.

Women are at highest risk for autoimmune diseases

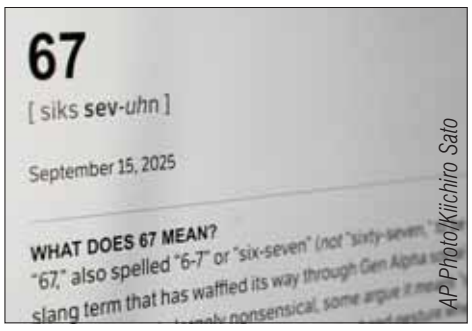
Women account for about 4 of 5 autoimmune patients, many of them young.

Continued on page 8

"6-7," Dubai chocolate, Labubu: You took 2025, now scat!

By Leanne Italie
AP Lifestyles Writer


AP Photo/Daniel Niemann, File



2025 TRENDS. *In the left photo, pieces of Dubai chocolate are seen in a Lindt shop in Aachen, Germany. In the right photo, the Dictionary.com page shows the newest word of the year — "6-7" — on a computer screen. With the arrival of 2026, it's time to bid farewell to a few things that went hard last year.*

NEW YORK — With Labubus hanging from our bags, Dubai chocolate in our bellies, and "6-7" ringing in our ears, it's almost time to bid farewell to a few things that went hard in 2025.

Scat. Don't follow us into the new year. You've had your 15 minutes. We're over you.

Deep six the "6-7" gripes

The young have made up slang for centuries. For Gen Alpha and their juniors, it's skibidi and rizz and, yes, "6-7." The numbers come with a juggling-esque, palms-up hand gesture and serve to annoy lots of teachers and parents (it's the frequency, group pile on, and decibel level that really gets 'em).

Just breathe, dear grownies. Your youth-speak also served to annoy. It's just, that was a long time ago and you don't really remember it. But wait. There's a whole 'nother contingent of adults who are all in on "6-7." Please stop. It's not yours. You don't get to say it. You receive zero cool parent points.

Like most memes, there's an origin story: rapper Skrilla's "6-7" lyric in "Doot Doot (6 7)," for starters, along with Charlotte Hornet LaMelo Ball's height. The 6-7-ness of it all blew up on TikTok and stayed put throughout 2025.

So what does it actually mean? Nothing, but it serves its purpose: To be random and to confuse the unfamiliar. It also did well as clickbait for Dictionary.com, which made the two numbers its word of the year.

Mission accomplished, "6-7." Farewell.

Positive vibes only?

Maintain a positive mindset. At all times. No matter what.

Sorry, toxic positivity people, but that's not how human emotion works, especially in these divisive times. Emotion shaming, in many ways, was on the march in 2025.

"Good vibes only." "Don't be so negative." "It could be worse." Sounds harmless, or even helpful, with empathy. Often, though, those words are shot like arrows to quelch legit feelings for no good reason.

Optimism in itself is a great thing, with numerous studies over the decades demonstrating a link between a positive outlook and good health outcomes. That said, check your "positive vibes only" demand at the door as we head into a new year. In other words, just let them …

Feel the feels. Get help if you need it. Suppression is oppression.

Protein, protein everywhere

Protein is a fundamental building block. We need protein. But does the average healthy adult need *THIS* much added protein? Big Food has produced an onslaught of high-protein processed foods, from Starbucks foam for drinks to Pop-Tarts, popcorn, cookies, and muffins.

Here's the thing, according to nutritionists: Your body is pretty good at making protein. You don't need a lot from food, unless you're bulking or maxing. In which case, do you.

The amount of protein you need depends on your age, weight, and personal nutritional needs. It's especially important to make sure children and older adults get enough protein-rich foods.

That said, let's leave behind the mass commodification of added protein in processed foods that just might not be so healthy to begin with.

Logic.

Say bye-bye to Labubu

The plush toy/charm/collectible famously known as Labubu has been around for a decade, but it's only in the last year or so the thing reached craze level in the U.S.

China's Pop Mart began U.S. sales of the furry little monsters on key rings back in 2023. Now, they're everywhere. Labubu hashtags on TikTok and Instagram have morphed into numerous search word combinations with millions of hits.

Boomers on down to kids collect Labubu and its pals, all of which sport pointy ears and serrated teeth. Rihanna, Kim Kardashian, and Lisa of Blackpink have shown theirs off. So have David Beckham and Dillon Brooks.

Thank you Kasing Lung. Back in 2015, the Hong Kong-born artist and illustrator raised in the Netherlands created the character and a universe of monsters for picture books inspired by the tales of Nordic mythology he enjoyed as a child.

Peak saturation has been achieved. The new year may be just the right time to say labu-bye.

Taking sides to the nth degree

"There is unrest in the Forest. There is trouble with the trees. For the Maples want more sunlight. And the Oaks ignore their pleas."

Consider that a parable, courtesy of a little band called Rush in the 1978 song "The Trees." Sound familiar?

If 2025 was anything, it was about taking sides, as opposed to, oh let's see, meaningful negotiation, civil discourse. How about just plain manners?

We fought over The Cracker Barrel logo. There was a protracted U.S. government shutdown amid the high-stakes schism that is politics and culture war in America.

We're a house haunted by taking sides. We all know the issues. Will it take a generation to get us back to the table? Here's hoping it happens sooner rather than later. While unlikely, we implore: Do better 2026.

"There is trouble in the Forest. And the creatures all have fled. As the Maples scream, 'Oppression!' And the Oaks, just shake their heads."

You're a barrel and you're a barrel

They hug the hips. They widen at the thighs. They reach peak circumference around the knees. They taper at the ankles.

So wrote *Vogue* in 2023 about barrel jeans, a puzzling style then and now. The stakes got higher for the divisive look when Alaïa put them on the runway for fall-winter that year. There were others, too, with some saying the look was reminiscent of jodhpurs and 1920s workwear.

As *Vogue* noted, quite a few fashion editors loved them. So did Gigi Hadid and Blake Lively. Could it have anything to do with the notion that barrel pants look good on exactly one body type: theirs. Tall. Slim. Leggy.

Here in 2025, the rest of us try. We really, really do. Amplified volume is just so, well, troubling, for oh so many.

So where will our pants go in the new year? Somewhere a little less, well, weird would be nice.

Dubai chocolate, oh boy

When we weren't navigating Labubu mania this year, what were we doing? Why, eating, making, and procuring Dubai chocolate, of course. Or some variant thereof.

Dubai chocolate is to 2025 what sourdough starter was to pandemic lockdowns. Relentless. And, really, does anybody like/need that much filling in chocolate bars?

What is pistachio cream, tahini, and crunchy kataifi pastry for the original filling has spun off wildly into other flavor profiles and products, including milkshakes and brownies. Amazon, Trader Joe's, Walmart, and Costco are in on the bonanza.

How did it all begin? With a pregnancy craving for Sarah Hamouda, the British Egyptian co-founder of FIX Dessert Chocolatier. She wanted creamy, crunchy, and familiar, and came up with the "Can't Get Knafeh Of It" chocolate bar in 2022, with help from chef Nouel Catis Omamalin.

Knafeh is a traditional Middle Eastern treat made of noodle-shaped toasted kataifi with a cheese layer, all soaked in a sweet syrup. Kataifi is a type of phyllo dough.

Hamouda and her husband, Yezen Alani, were working full-time corporate jobs in Dubai but left those gigs once their chocolate took over the world. They were helped along in a huge way by ASMR TikToker Maria Vehera, who crunched her way through one of their bars in 2023.

Vehera's video has been viewed more than 140 million times.

Stuff yourselves silly with Dubai chocolate if you must, for now. But let's modulate the craziness when 2026, and the next big thing, rolls around.

Over It runners-up

I'm available: Don't be a 24-hour availability person in the new year. It's not good for your health, and it shouldn't be necessary to get ahead in life. Break the cycle!

AI slop: There's no escaping AI, it seems, so get it right. Quality matters. Effort matters. Substance counts. Verbosity. Fabrications. Junk AI no more in 2026.

Sneaky little terms of agreement: Especially the ones that say, in their own words, "We can harass you with texts and e-mails forever, even if you unsubscribe." Be gone!

Autoimmune diseases can strike any part of the body, and mostly affect women. Here's what to know.

Continued from page 7

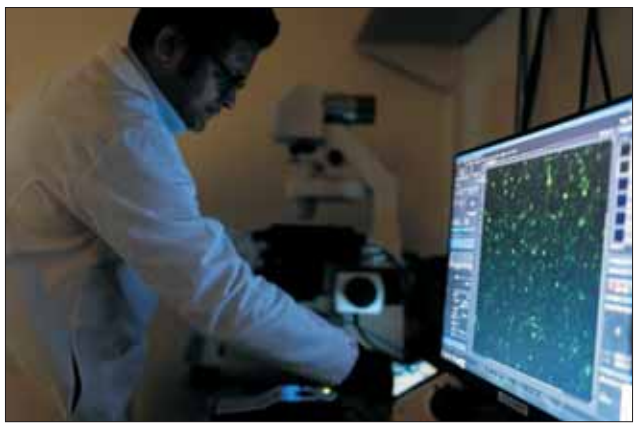
Hormones are thought to play a role. But also, females have two X chromosomes while males have one X and one Y. Some research suggests an abnormality in how female cells switch off that extra X can increase women's vulnerability.

But men do suffer from autoimmune diseases. One especially severe one named VEXAS syndrome wasn't discovered until 2020. It mainly affects men over 50 and in addition to typical autoimmune symptoms it can cause blood clots, shortness of breath, and night sweats.

Certain populations also have higher risks. For example, lupus is more common in Black and Hispanic women. Northern Europeans have a higher risk of MS than other groups.

Treatment for autoimmune diseases is complicated

According to investment research company Morningstar, the global market for autoimmune disease treatments is $100 billion a year. That's not counting doctor visits and such things as lost time at work. Treatment is lifelong and, while usually covered by insurance, can be pricey.



IMMUNE SYSTEM OVERLOAD. *Dr. Sachin Surwase uses a microscope to view cells in the lab where he works on autoimmune research at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, in this May 13, 2025 file photo. Our immune systems have a dark side: They are supposed to fight off invaders to keep us healthy. But sometimes it turns traitor and attacks our own cells and tissues. (AP Photo/David Goldman, File)*

Not so long ago there was little to offer for many autoimmune diseases beyond high-dose steroids and broad immune-suppressing drugs, with side effects that include a risk of infections and cancer. Today some newer options target specific molecules, somewhat less immune dampening. But for many autoimmune diseases, treatment is trial and error, with little to guide patient decisions.

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Neergaard is an Associated Press medical writer who covers research on brain health, infectious diseases, organ transplantation, and more. She is based in Washington, D.C.

Sure, the newspaper informed. But as it fades, those who used it for other things must adjust, too.

By Michael Weissenstein
The Associated Press

END OF AN ERA. *In the left photo, a copy of the* Montana Standard *is seen on a doorstep in Butte, Montana. In the right photo, a* Montana Standard *crossword puzzle is seen on a chair. The gradual dwindling of the printed paper — the item that so many millions read to inform themselves and then repurposed into household workflows — has quietly altered the texture of daily life. Children who grew up in homes with printed newspapers and magazines randomly came across news and socialized into a news-reading habit, Anne Kaun, a professor of media and communication studies at Södertörn University in Stockholm, observes. With cellphones, though, that doesn't happen. (Colleen Elliott via AP)*

The sun would rise over the Rockies, and Robin Gammons would run to the front porch to grab the morning paper before school.

She wanted the comics and her dad wanted sports, but the *Montana Standard* meant more than their daily race to grab "Calvin and Hobbes" or baseball scores. When one of the three kids made honor roll, won a basketball game, or dressed a freshly slain bison for the History Club, appearing in the *Standard*'s pages made the achievement feel more real. Robin became an artist with a one-woman show at a downtown gallery and the front-page article went on the fridge, too. Five years later, the yellowing article is still there.

The *Montana Standard* slashed print circulation to three days a week two years ago, cutting back the expense of printing like 1,200 U.S. newspapers over the past two decades. About 3,500 papers closed over the same time. An average of two a week shut down in 2025.

That slow fade, it turns out, means more than changing news habits. It speaks directly to the newspaper's presence in our lives — not just in terms of the information printed upon it, but in its identity as a physical object with many other uses.

"You can pass it on. You can keep it. And then, of course, there's all the fun things," says Diane DeBlois, one of the founders of the Ephemera Society of America, a group of scholars, researchers, dealers, and collectors who focus on what they call "precious primary source information."

"Newspapers wrapped fish. They washed windows. They appeared in outhouses," she says. "And — free toilet paper."

The downward lurch in the media business has changed American democracy over the last two decades — some think for better, many for worse. What's indisputable: The gradual dwindling of the printed paper — the item that so many millions read to inform themselves and then repurposed into household workflows — has quietly altered the texture of daily life.

American democracy and pet cages

People used to catch up on the world, then save their precious memories, protect their floors and furniture, wrap gifts, line pet cages, and light fires. In Butte, in San Antonio, Texas, in much of New Jersey, and worldwide, lives without the printed paper are just a tiny bit different.

For newspaper publishers, the expense of printing is just too high in an industry that's under strain in an online society. For ordinary people, the physical paper is joining the pay phone, the cassette tape, the answering machine, the bank check, the sound of the internal combustion engine, and the ivory-white pair of women's gloves as objects whose disappearance marks the passage of time.

"Very hard to see it while it's happening, much easier to see things like that in even modest retrospect," says Marilyn Nissenson, co-author of *Going Going Gone: Vanishing Americana*. "Young women were going to work and they wore them for a while and then one day they looked at them and thought, 'This is ludicrous.' That was a small but telling icon for a much larger social change."

Nick Mathews thinks a lot about newspapers. Both of his parents worked at the Pekin (Illinois) *Daily Times*. He went on to become sports editor of the *Houston Chronicle* and, now, an assistant professor at the University of Missouri's School of Journalism.

"I have fond memories of my parents using newspapers to wrap presents," he says. "In my family, you always knew that the gift was from my parents because of what it was wrapped in."

In Houston, he recently recalled, the *Chronicle* reliably sold out when the Astros, Rockets, or Texas won a championship because so many people wanted the paper as a keepsake.

Four years ago, Mathews interviewed 19 people in Caroline County, Virginia, about the 2018 shuttering of the *Caroline Progress*, a 99-year-old weekly paper that closed up shop months before its 100th anniversary.

In "Print Imprint: The Connection Between the Physical Newspaper and the Self," published in the *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, wistful Virginians remember their senior high school portrait and their daughter's picture in a wedding dress appearing in the *Progress*. Plus, one told Mathews, "My fingers are too clean now. I feel sad without ink smudges."

The many and varied uses

Flush with cash from Omahans who invested years ago with local boy Warren Buffett, Nebraska Wildlife Rehab is a well-equipped center for migratory waterfowl, wading birds, reptiles, foxes, bobcats, coyotes, mink, and beaver.

"We get over 8,000 animals every year and we use that newspaper for almost all of those animals," executive director Laura Stastny says.

Getting old newspapers has never been a problem in this neighborly Midwestern city. Yet Stastny frets about the electronic future.

"We do pretty well now," she says. "If we lost that source and had to use something else or had to purchase something, that, with the available options that we have now, would cost us more than $10,000 a year easily."

That would be nearly 1% of the budget, Stastny says, but "I've never been in a position to be without them, so I might be shocked with a higher dollar figure."

Until 1974, the *Omaha World-Herald* printed a morning edition and two afternoon ones, including a late-afternoon Wall Street Edition with closing prices.

"Afternoon major-league baseball was still standard then, so I got to gorge on both baseball and stock market facts," an 85-year-old Buffett told the *World-Herald* in 2013, By then, he had become the world's most famous investor and the paper's owner.

The *World-Herald* ended its second afternoon edition in 2016 and Buffett left the newspaper business five years ago. Fewer than 60,000 households take the paper today, according to Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, down from nearly more than 190,000 in 2005, or about one per household.

Time marches on

Few places symbolize the move from print to digital more than Akalla, a district of Stockholm where the ST01 data center sits at a site once occupied by the factory that prints *Sweden* main newspaper, Kaun says.

"They have less and less machines, and instead the building is taken over more and more by this co-location data center," she says.

Data centers use huge amounts of energy, of course, and the environmental benefit of using less printing paper is also offset by the enormous popularity of online shopping.

"You will see a decline in printed papers, but there is a huge increase in packaging," says Cecilia Alcoreza, manager, of forest sector transformation for the World Wildlife Fund.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution announced in August that it would stop providing a print edition at year's end and go completely digital, making Atlanta the largest U.S. metro area without a printed daily newspaper.

The habit of following the news — of being informed about the world — can't be divorced from the existence of print, says Anne Kaun, professor of media and communication studies at Södertörn University in Stockholm.

Children who grew up in homes with printed newspapers and magazines randomly came across news and socialized into a news-reading habit, Kaun observed. With cellphones, that doesn't happen.

"I do think it meaningfully changes how we relate to each other, how we relate to things like the news. It is reshaping attention spans and communications," says Sarah Wasserman, a cultural critic and assistant dean at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire who specializes in changing forms of communication.

"These things will always continue to exist in certain spheres and certain pockets and certain class niches," she says. "But I do think they're fading."

The many ways that baking is winter therapy. With a delicious ending.

By Katie Workman
The Associated Press

When people talk about baking, they often focus on the final product. The tender cookies, the domed muffins, the rich brownies. But the real draw of baking starts long before you roll out the pie crust.

Baking can be many things: an act of creation, connection, control. There's something comforting about the structure of it: the measuring, the stirring, the transformation of a handful of ingredients into something delicious.

Even if life doesn't always feel orderly, follow the recipe and things should turn out as planned. It's like therapy, with a present at the end.

"Baking is how I best connect with the world around me — making something wonderful and sharing it with others and seeing how much joy they receive from something I made with my own hands," says chef Joanne Chang, co-owner of Flour Bakery in Boston and an author of baking cookbooks.

"It's a way to make the world a bit sweeter one cookie, cake, pie at a time."

An outlet for all kinds of emotions

When it's cold outside, there's something cozy about a warm kitchen and the aroma of something sweet.

But baking can also be catharsis for more volatile feelings: The term "rage baking" was popularized by writer Tangerine Jones, who turned to flour and sugar to channel her anger at the world's injustices.

Baking can be about maintaining traditions, or possibly curiosity (what is julekake, anyway?).

BAKING BENEFITS. *Baking can be many things: an act of creation, connection, control. There's something comforting about the structure of it: the measuring, the stirring, the transformation of a handful of ingredients into something delicious. Pictured is brownie batter being poured into a pan in New York. (Cheyenne M. Cohen via AP)*

Engaging the head, as well as the heart

Hannah Skobe, a doctoral student in astrophysics in Pittsburgh, loves the chemistry aspect of baking — how butter behaves differently at different temperatures, for instance, or why the proteins in egg whites break down when they are over-beaten.

She also finds the process therapeutic, a much-needed break from work.

Ron Ben-Israel, who focuses on elaborate wedding cakes as chef and owner of Ron Ben-Israel Cakes in New York City, was drawn as a child to "watching as ingredients change through technique" in his mother's kitchen.

"Especially the process of whipping egg whites into meringue fascinated me," he said.

Tapping into one's past

For him and others, there's an element of nostalgia. A parent's rugalach recipe, the pie their favorite aunt made every Thanksgiving, the cookies they helped decorate as kids.

Or, it's a way to mark the calendar: a crunchy, buttery crisp in the fall after an apple picking expedition, Irish soda bread on St. Patrick's Day, a favorite birthday cake that must be made every year.

The beauty of getting your hands messy

Alex George of the blog Lily P Crumbs finds something satisfyingly tactile and tangible about baking. Cracking eggs, creaming butter — there's a lot of sensory pleasure to be had, especially in a screen-centric world. Kneading dough for bread, spreading the icing on cinnamon rolls.

Her readers, she says, "love the process as much as the payoff."

The thrill of discovery

George loves inventing new kinds of baked goods, seeking inspiration whenever she tries a new food: "Savory food is my favorite kind of muse. One incredible French onion soup I had recently inspired my caramelized onion biscuits with French onion soup compound butter."

Bernard Wong, an avid home baker in New York City, also enjoys delving into new techniques. He has experimented with laminated doughs (think croissants and puff pastry), and has recently played with the East Asian technique — known as tangzhong in China and yudane in Japan — of pouring boiling water over flour to partially cook it, resulting in softer, fluffier breads.

Wong takes pleasure in satisfying a craving for something by making it himself. For instance, he couldn't find anadama bread, a traditional New England yeast bread, "but I know how to make it.

"It's economical, I get to control what's inside of it, and it passes the time when I'm in my apartment and keeps my hands busy," he said.

He often chooses high-quality ingredients and still saves money compared to buying the finished product. He splurges on expensive chocolate like Callebaut and Valrhona, for instance, and jams as many

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FAST & FANCY. *Freshly baked Dried Cherry Scones are seen in New York. Scones are simple to make and fairly quick to bake. (Cheyenne M. Cohen via AP)*

Scones are a simple treat for your breakfast table

By Katie Workman
The Associated Press

Perhaps you're one of those people who are very thoughtful and assiduous about planning the Big Holiday meals. You're on top of the appetizers, entrée, the sides, the dessert. Maybe you even iron your linen napkins.

But then you slap your proverbial forehead when you realize you didn't think about what you (and maybe some houseguests?) are going to have for breakfast the day after. Or a quick breakfast any day of the week.

Scones are the answer. So simple to make, fairly quick to bake, and if you want to make the dough and pat it out into a circle the night before, you can pop them into the oven in the morning.

Scone tips

The dough for these scones is fairly sticky, so it benefits from a period of chilling in the fridge, at least two hours. If you're in a rush, it can also hang out for 30 minutes in the freezer before baking. This allows the butter to remain very cold, and as it melts while baking, small air pockets form which give the scones a light, somewhat flaky texture. The chilling also firms up the dough and prevents it from spreading. Finally, this resting period allows the gluten in the flour to relax, resulting in a more tender product.

Since refrigerator or freezer space is often tight, you can chill the dough on a parchment-lined plate, since baking sheets are big and cumbersome.

If you don't have a food processor, or just want to do this by hand, you can also cut the butter into the flour mixture using two knives, a pastry cutter, or your fingers if you work quickly.

I love dried cherries and use them often in dishes both savory and sweet. They can be pricy though, so feel free to substitute other chopped or tiny dried fruit. Try these with dried cranberries or blueberries, or chopped dried apricots.

These scones are best eaten the day they are made, but you can store them for one or two days in an airtight container at room temperature. Warming them in a 300° Fahrenheit oven for a few minutes will refresh the texture and flavor.

Katie Workman writes regularly about food for The Associated Press. She has written two cookbooks focused on family-friendly cooking, Dinner Solved! *and* The Mom 100 Cookbook.

Dried Cherry Scones
Servings: Makes 8 scones

2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for flouring the work surface
1/3 cup sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
10 tablespoons (1 stick plus 2 tablespoons)
cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
3/4 cup dried cherries
1 cup half and half, plus more for brushing the scones
1 large egg yolk
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

To serve:
Butter, jam, or jelly; clotted cream; and/or lemon curd

1. In the bowl of a food processor, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt together. Add the butter and pulse to blend until the biggest pieces of butter are pea-size but the mixture is not blended — you want it to be unevenly crumbly, with some little bits of cold butter throughout. Transfer to a large bowl and stir in the dried cherries.

2. Mix together the half and half, egg yolk, and vanilla in a small bowl until well blended. Slowly add the liquid to the dry ingredients, stirring with a fork just until it comes together into a very soft, very sticky dough.

3. Very lightly flour a piece of parchment paper at least 12-by-12 inches and place it on a baking sheet or a large flat plate. (This will be going into your refrigerator, so choose whatever will fit.) Turn the dough onto the floured surface, getting all of it out of the bowl. Lightly flour your hands and pat the dough into a 1-inch thick round. Chill the unbaked dough round in the refrigerator for at least two hours, or up to 12, or place in the freezer for 30 minutes.

4. Preheat the oven to 400° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

5. Use a sharp knife to score the top of the dough (this means cut into it only about 1/4-inch deep, creating a line, but not cutting through the dough.) You want to create 8 even wedges (think of cutting a pizza pie). Brush the tops of the scones lightly with half and half. Bake for about 24 to 28 minutes until the top is golden brown and the scones are baked though.

6. Cool the scones on the baking sheet until warm or room temperature. Serve with the condiments of your choice.

Foods with healthy-sounding buzzwords could be hiding added sugar in plain sight

By Albert Stumm
The Associated Press

CAMOUFLAGED SUGAR. *Author Albert Stumm is issuing a warning to shoppers: Many healthy grocery buzzwords often cover up an unhealthy amount of sugar. Pictured is granulated sugar falling from a spoon. (Matt Rourke/AP, File)*

Many consumers feel pride in avoiding the glazed pastries in the supermarket and instead opting for "all natural" granola that comes packed with extra protein. Same goes for low-fat yogurts "made with real fruit," "organic" plant-based milks, and bottled "superfood" smoothies.

Buyer beware: Healthy grocery buzzwords like those often cover up an unhealthy amount of sugar.

Added sugars are difficult to quickly spot because many companies use clever marketing to distract consumers, said Nicole Avena, a professor of neuroscience and psychiatry at Mount Sinai Medical School and Princeton University who has studied added sugars.

Avena said while some health-forward brands know people are starting to become aware of the hazards of added sugars, "a lot of the bigger brands don't worry so much about people's health."

Here's how to spot hidden sugars and what to do about it.

What to look for

Along with saturated fat and salt, eating excess sugar is linked to heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and other health risks.

The average American consumes 17 teaspoons of added sugar a day, which adds up to 57 pounds (26 kilograms) per year, according to the American Heart Association. About half of that comes from beverages, but much of the rest is sneaked into cereal, salsa, prepared sandwiches, dairy products, bottled sauces, and baked goods, including many brands of whole-grain bread.

To help control sugar intake, start by checking the nutrition label. Since 2021, food companies have been required to list the quantity of added sugars separately from total sugar content. But the plan backfired, Avena said.

Companies reduced common sweeteners like refined beet sugar and high-fructose corn syrup but added alternatives, such as monk fruit and the sugar alcohol erythritol, which aren't considered "added sugars" under FDA regulations.

"Now our foods are even more sweet than they were back in 2020," Avena said.

What should you do?

Collin Popp, a dietitian and professor at NYU Langone Health, said the current FDA recommendation allows for some flexibility. People should get no more than 10% of their calories from added sugar, which amounts to about 50 grams per day if eating 2,000 calories, or a bit more than

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Indulge in lychee-frosted sugar cookies with citrus notes and buttercream

By Kat Lieu
Voracious

At first glance, these Lychee-Frosted Sugar Cookies from my cookbook *108 Asian Cookies: Not-Too-Sweet Treats from a Third-Culture Kitchen* appear humble when unfrosted, like any other ordinary sugar cookie, like those you would find at the supermarket.

But don't be fooled.

These charming sugar cookies shine even on their own with their rich buttery base, tender crumb, bright refreshing citrus notes and a slight chew. Then, when topped with a luxurious buttercream infused with lychee extract, a bit of berry compote or jam, and finally crowned with chopped canned lychees, they undergo a bibbidi-bobbidi-boo moment. The more you bite into this layered and regal cookie, the more you'll feel like royalty.

When pressing the dough portions, slightly wet the bottom of a glass or measuring cup, then dip into a shallow bowl of sugar to coat the bottom. For a variation, you can skip the jam and add the lychees directly to the frosting. Store the cookies in an airtight container at room temperature, each separated by parchment paper, for up to 3 days.

Kat Lieu is a food writer, recipe developer, content creator, and the creator behind Subtle Asian Baking, the largest global online group that focuses on Asian baking and fundraising for Asian American and Native Hawaiian-Pacific Islander communities. She lives in Renton, Washington.


Charity Burggraaf

Lychee-Frosted Sugar Cookies
Makes 9 large cookies

For the cookies:
2 1/2 cups (300 g) all-purpose flour
2/3 cup (85 g) cake flour
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar
1/2 cup or 1 stick (113 g) unsalted butter, softened
6 tablespoons (90 g) neutral oil
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons (120 g) granulated sugar, plus more for pressing the cookies
About 1/2 cup (60 g) confectioners' sugar
1 teaspoon red miso
1 large egg
1 tablespoon freshly grated lemon zest
1 teaspoon lychee extract

For the frosting:
6 tablespoons (85 g) unsalted butter, softened
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons (140 g) confectioners' sugar, divided
4 teaspoons (20 g) heavy cream
1 teaspoon lychee extract
Pink or red food coloring gel (optional, but if you use it, we want light pink, not a hot magenta pink)

For decorating the cookies (optional):
About 1/3 cup (110 g) store-bought strawberry jam
5 to 6 fresh or canned lychees, chopped
Edible pearl sprinkles or gold foil

1. Make the cookies. Whisk both flours, the baking soda, and cream of tartar together in a medium bowl. Using a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large bowl with a hand mixer, whisk, or spatula), cream the butter, oil, both sugars, and miso together until light and fluffy. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl. Add the egg, lemon zest, and lychee extract and mix until well incorporated. Again, scrape the bowl as needed. Add the flour mixture and mix on low speed just until a dough forms. Cover and chill the dough in the refrigerator for 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

2. About 25 minutes before baking, adjust a rack to the middle position and preheat the oven to 350° F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

3. Use a large cookie scoop to create nine portions of dough, each about 3.2 ounces (1/2 cup, 90 g), placing them 3 inches apart on the prepared baking sheets. Press each ball with the bottom of a sugar-lined glass or measuring cup until the cookie edges begin to crack.

4. Bake the cookies one sheet at a time (while the other sheet chills in the fridge), until the edges are crispy and golden brown, about 12 minutes. Let the cookies set on the baking sheet for a few minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

5. Make the frosting. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, mix the butter on high speed until fluffy, about 2 minutes. Scrape the bowl as needed. Add about half of the confectioners' sugar and mix on medium speed until incorporated. Add the remaining confectioners' sugar and mix until incorporated as well. Add the cream, lychee extract and food coloring, if using, and mix until combined and spreadable. Note that you will have just enough frosting for the nine large cookies. If you love the frosting, I recommend making more for these cookies.

6. Frost and decorate the cookies. Spread the frosting evenly over the cooled cookies. If you like, add about a teaspoon of jam on top and garnish with chopped lychees and edible pearl sprinkles or edible gold foil.

Foods with healthy-sounding buzzwords could be hiding added sugar in plain sight

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what's in a typical can of soda.

But that might be too flexible, Popp said.

"I would actually like to see that be less than 5%, and closer to zero for some, if they have diabetes or prediabetes," he said.

The key is to be mindful of what you're eating, even if the product seems healthy or if the package is labelled organic, Popp said. Roasted nuts, plant-based milks, and wasabi peas, for example, can include a surprising amount of added sugars. So can English muffins and Greek yogurt.

One Chobani black cherry yogurt, for example, has zero grams of fat but 9 grams of added sugar, or more than 2 teaspoons. Silk brand almond milk has 7 grams per cup.

Popp recommends taking control of how much sugar goes into your food. That could mean buying plain yogurt and adding honey or berries, or asking the barista if you can put your own oat milk into your coffee.

Taking from one column to add to another

Although they lower the calorie content of foods, artificial sweeteners like stevia and sugar alcohols may not be better because they can encourage people to overeat, Avena said. She said research shows that sweet flavors are what activate the reward center of the brain, not the sugar itself.

That's not to write off sugar alternatives, including allulose for people with Type 1 diabetes since it doesn't affect blood sugar.

But for the general public, minimizing dependence on the overall sweetness of food is key to improving health, she said.

"Don't let the food companies decide how much sugar you're eating," Avena said.

Albert Stumm writes about food, travel, and wellness.

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Arden Cho seizes her golden moment after Hollywood heartbreak

By Liam McEwan
The Associated Press

CHO'S COMEBACK. *Arden Cho poses for a portrait in Los Angeles, in this August 26, 2025 file photo. Three years ago, Cho was ready to walk away from acting. She'd finally landed a lead role only to see it cancelled after one season. She was heartbroken. Now, Cho is juggling multiple projects after voicing the lead character Rumi in the animated summertime sensation* KPop Demon Hunters. *(AP Photo/Chris Pizzello, File)*

LOS ANGELES — Three years ago, Arden Cho was ready to walk away from acting. She'd landed her first lead role in the Netflix series "Partner Track," only to see it cancelled after one season. She was heartbroken.

Her agent wouldn't let her go. "She refused to say 'You're done.' She just kept sending me things," Cho said. "She just keep being like, 'Look, I know you're not auditioning. I know you're done, but I think you'd like this.'"

Now, Cho is juggling multiple projects after voicing the lead character Rumi in Netflix's animated summertime sensation *KPop Demon Hunters*, which has become the all-time most-streamed movie on the platform — and spawned inescapable earworms "Golden" and "Soda Pop" as its soundtrack dominated pop charts.

"I am so ready," Cho said. "It feels like it is my golden moment."

Now, Cho is among The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2025. The timing feels almost cosmic. Netflix announced that *KPop Demon Hunters* was its most-watched movie on August 26 — exactly three years after it began streaming "Partner Track." "It was kind of like a gift from god of, hey, you lost something, but I've given you something better," Cho said.

Cho — who doesn't sing in the movie — says she sees her own insecurities in the character, a K-pop idol and demon hunter who loses her voice. And she's ready to join in more stories in the world created by Maggie Kang.

"I hope there are sequels, I hope there's prequels, I hope that every little Asian girl and boy feels so seen and feels like they deserve to be the main character. I hope this opens doors for more Korean and American collaborated projects," she says. "I hope that ... Rumi gets to find out a little bit more about her mom and dad. I hope to know how HUNTR/X became HUNTR/X. And I kind of hope to go save Jinu."

The movie has led a fresh wave of worldwide interest in Korean food, culture, and K-pop idol life, which Cho, her co-stars, and the singer-songwriters behind HUNTR/X have leaned into as the film's publicity tour grinds into Hollywood's awards season.

"I just feel so blessed to be able to have these conversations because I am so proud to be, obviously, to be American, but at the same time, I'm also so proud to be Korean," Cho said.

Growing up in Texas and Minnesota, she hadn't thought much about racial identity. But while attending college at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, something shifted. "I realized that was the first time when I was like, oh, people look at me and don't think that I'm an American," she recalled. "And it was interesting because I realized at that time, there are two ways to look at it. You can just be mad and say, 'Oh, I hate that we don't have representation, I hate people that don't see us, I hate that people don't see our stories,' or you can say, 'I'm going to try.'"

So she tried. In 2007, she moved to Los Angeles. "It was tough to leave my friends and family behind, it was tough to stay positive and to have thick skin. I still don't have thick skin," she said.

She found success as superpowered Kira Yukimura on MTV's "Teen Wolf" series starting in 2014 but otherwise struggled to find meaty roles before "Partner Track."

For the legal drama, she was finally No. 1 on the call sheet. But she says, "I blinked and it was done and I was devastated."

"I'm such a 'I want to take care of everything and everyone' type of personality. And I want to do it all. And so I think that whole experience sort of went by in a way where it was over before it began," Cho said. "I missed my moment because I was so busy trying to make it perfect, trying to fix it all by myself. And in a weird way, like, it reminds me so much of Rumi."

Then *KPop Demon Hunters* came her way. The film's producer, Michelle Wong, said she and other filmmakers narrowed finalists down to six actors, then did a blind "listen test" to pick the voice of Rumi. Cho was the unanimous choice.

"Our movie is dramatic, it's action, it's comedy, it's everything. The talent needs to be at the highest level, which you know, Arden obviously encapsulates all of that. She has a great range," Wong said. "I hope this opens doors for her because she deserves it."

Cho celebrated her 40th birthday in August as *Demon Hunters* was peaking in popularity.

"I think for women, sometimes people get shy to say that because they kind of think 40 is old," she said. "But I have never felt younger and better about myself. I've never felt more comfortable in my skin. And I kind of want to run around and tell everyone that because I hope that it gives people hope that age is really just a number."

The many ways that baking is winter therapy.

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chips as possible into his cookies.

Speaking the language of sweets

Even better, confections like these are shareable and can be a way of expressing a sentiment. It might be as simple as "I missed you," or "I thought you might need something sweet to get through this moment."

Skobe recently made a banana cake with cream cheese frosting for her co-workers: "I loved seeing all of my friends come to my desk to grab a slice."

As Chang puts it: "I'm grateful I get to do something that I love so much and that others love so much too."

At its heart, baking feels hopeful. It might be about feeding others, or celebrating, or creating a moment of calm in an otherwise chaotic world, but it's also about the belief that if you measure the ingredients and follow the steps, something good should come out of it.

Oh, and julekake? It's a Norwegian Christmas cake.

Katie Workman writes regularly about food for The Associated Press. She has written two cookbooks focused on family-friendly cooking, Dinner Solved! *and* The Mom 100 Cookbook.

In a breakneck digital era, the ancient art of Peking opera works hard to keep flourishing

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in one go, standing on its handle on one leg, spinning the chair using the palm of one's hand, hooking the chair leg with one's instep and hopping forward — and so on.

Though Zhang had a good foundation in skills like tanhai, incorporating them into the chair technique, she says, is "another level."

"The first thing I have to overcome is my fear," she says.

Zhang spends an entire semester repeatedly standing on a chair handle about 3 inches wide and more than 2 feet off the ground, just to conquer her fear and master balance. "I carried a chair everywhere and practiced whenever I could," she says.

Each move might take months to practice. For the jumping move, Zhang sets a goal of about 50 leaps into the narrow open space of the chair's back each day. By day's end, her muscles tremble and her thighs are pocked with bruises.

But the practice continues. And there came a moment when Zhang knew she had broken through. "The moment standing on the chair no longer feels so strenuous, and this is when I know I have truly advanced."

Young performers continue to deliver the appeals of Peking opera

For much of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Peking opera had developed into a popular form of urban entertainment. Its roots, however, stretch back even further into the Qing Dynasty, when performances were closely associated with the imperial court in Beijing's Forbidden City.

Today, the art form faces strong competition from digital entertainment and modern performing arts, and some worry it may be losing its appeal. Yet a growing number of young Peking opera artists like Zhang continue to devote years to perfecting its demanding techniques — and, they hope, to capture today's audiences.

Yang Hecheng, 26, a teacher at the Beijing Film Academy, came to watch Zhang's performance in September. "It's my first time seeing the full production and the chair sequence," he says, "What attracts me most is the beauty and spirit shown in the performer's techniques on stage."

In *The Masked Heroine*, Zhang plays Wan Xiangyou, a chivalrous woman who fights injustice and protects the weak. She leaves her family and becomes a militia leader in ancient China. During a confrontation scene, Zhang performs the tanhai pose on the chair handle while interrogating a male character. Zhang thinks the coherent integration of the trick into the play's plot makes it compelling for the audience.

"We have the classic saying: 'A play without skill is not amazing; a play without emotion is not moving,'" she explains.

Now a professional performer with the Jingju Theatre Company of Beijing, one of the top Peking opera troupes in China, Zhang has delivered more than 150 shows in nine years. Each production requires learning new stunts — or refining old ones to perfection.

Zhang says improving her technique in Peking opera remains a lifelong pursuit. "I just want to make progress step by step and perform each show the best I can," she says. "The most rewarding moment is when the show ends and the audience applauds."

Researcher Shihuan Chen in Beijing contributed to this report.

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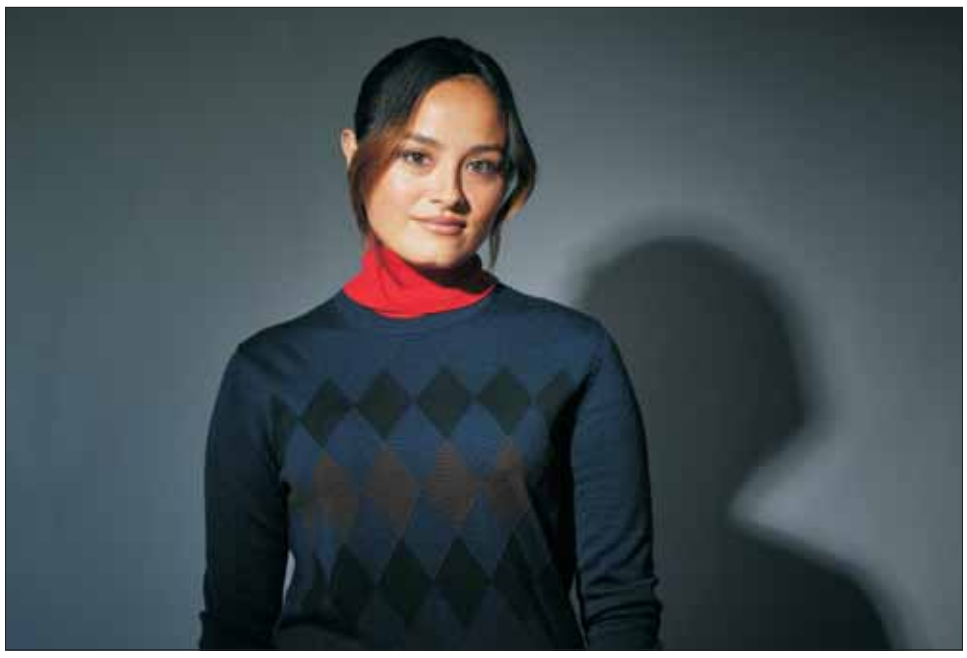
Wonders' Harvard astrophysics detour led her to Hollywood

By Gary Gerard Hamilton
The Associated Press



ASTROPHYSICS TO ACTING. *Chase Sui Wonders poses for a portrait in New York. A calculated redirection from college to film paid off for Wonders, who is now a standout cast member of "The Studio," a cynical and satirical take on the film industry. (Photo by Matt Licari/Invision/AP)*

NEW YORK — You don't need to major in astrophysics at Harvard to become an actor — but it doesn't necessarily hurt, either.

"I thought that's what you go there to do. It's like why are you paying all this money to go to this fancy school if you're not going to study a hard science to try to save the world? … But I was quickly humbled," chuckled Chase Sui Wonders, who began failing classes within her first few weeks. Her college application essay had been about making movies, so she decided she "might as well just pivot back to what I know best."

That calculated redirection paid off for the magna cum laude graduate who's now a standout cast member of the Emmy-winning comedy "The Studio," a cynical and satirical take on the film industry.

Wonders, who also starred in the *I Know What You Did Last Summer* reboot last year, is one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2025.

"The attention's definitely weird, but can feel good," said the 29-year-old, flashing her warm smile throughout the interview. "The most energizing thing about the whole thing is when you get recognition, the phone starts ringing more, and these other avenues are opening up that I always kind of dreamed about."

"The Studio" amassed an astounding 23 Emmy nominations in its debut season, taking home a record-breaking 13 wins. But Wonders may not have seemed like an obvious choice for comedy with her past roles, including the 2022 film *Bodies Bodies* and her breakout role, the teen-themed series "Genera+ion," which was cancelled by HBO Max after one season. But all it took was one virtual video audition to land the role of Quinn Hackett, the hyper-ambitious, cutthroat assistant-turned-creative executive under studio head Matt Remick, played by the show's co-creator and co-executive producer Seth Rogen.

"I had always … felt like, 'I think I'm kind of funny,'" she laughed, acknowledging feeling she had to prove herself working alongside comedic heavyweights like Rogen, Catherine O'Hara, Kathryn Hahn, and Ike Barinholtz. "That pressure felt really daunting and scary. But I think, hopefully, I rose to the occasion."

Despite mere degrees of separation from Hollywood as the niece of fashion designer Anna Sui, an acting career seemed unattainable growing up in Bloomfield Township, a Detroit suburb. Born to a father of Chinese descent and a white mother, Wonders and her siblings were primarily raised by their mom after their parents divorced.

An extremely shy child and self-described tomboy, she developed a love for sports — she won high school state championships in both ice hockey and golf — and spent much of her childhood making videos with her siblings. Thanks to her mother encouraging her to take performance arts classes, she was able to break out of her shell. But coming from an achievement-driven family, all signs pointed to a career in business.

A corporate track nearly began after struggling to break into the industry, and she even considered taking a job in Beijing to begin her adult life in the business world. But with only a week to decide on the job offer, she decided to give Hollywood one more shot. Three months later, she booked "Genera+ion."

"There have been different moments in my life where I've been seriously humbled," said Wonders, who has aspirations of directing. "It just has taught me just not to take it all too seriously. ... I do feel absurdly lucky that I get to be on set with all my friends and telling a bunch of jokes and being a weirdo on screen."

Next up for Wonders is the Gregg Araki-directed *I Want Your Sex*, starring Olivia Wilde, and she'll star in A24's horror thriller *October*. She'll also appear in the upcoming "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" reboot, with Oscar-winning filmmaker Chloé Zhao directing the pilot. And of course, a second season for "The Studio" is in the works.

Red carpets and magazine covers couldn't be a more antithetical life for the girl who assumed she'd climb the executive ranks at one of the major car companies headquartered in Detroit. Instead, she's climbing the Hollywood ladder — and she wouldn't tell her younger self to speed up the process.

"It's so fun how life surprises you," said Wonders. "I wouldn't tell her anything. I would tell her it's all going to make sense in the rearview mirror — but no spoilers."

The Korean satire *No Other Choice* is a masterful thriller from Park Chan-wook

By Jake Coyle
AP Film Writer

EVERYMAN TO ASSASSIN. *This image released by Neon shows Lee Byung-hun in a scene from* No Other Choice*, director Park Chan-wook's masterfully devilish satire with a chilling autumnal wind blowing through it. (Neon via AP)*

Leaves and bodies fall in *No Other Choice*, Park Chan-wook's masterfully devilish satire with a chilling autumnal wind blowing through it.

"Come on, fall," urges You Man-su (Lee Byung-hun) as he grills an eel for dinner for his family in the opening moments of Park's film. He's eager for the season to start but unprepared for the amount of cyclical collapse — familial, economic, even existential — that Park has in store.

Man-su pronounces the very thing no movie protagonist ever should: "I've got it all." He lives with his wife, Miri (Son Ye-jin), and two children (Kim Woo Seung, Choi So Yul) in a handsome modernist house in the woods, with two golden retrievers. But almost as soon as he says that, Man-su's fortunes turn. After 25 years at a paper mill, Man-su is laid off, as are many others, with little fanfare or apology. Desperation begins to set in. He's forced to sell the home he loves so dearly, including the attached greenhouse where he tends to plants and bonsai trees. They even have to, horror of horrors, cancel Netflix.

Another movie might have sunk with Man-su into bankruptcy and midlife struggle, following his quest to find a new line of work and restart his life. This is not that movie. Man-su, considering his prospects, decides he needs to better his odds of new employment. After posting a fake job listing and comparing all the incoming résumés, he decides he's about the fifth best option for any new paper mill managerial jobs. He decides to kill the ones with better credentials.

The concept, a Grade-A barnburner of a movie idea, is not new. *No Other Choice*, South Korea's Oscar submission, is based on Donald Westlake's 1997 crime novel *The Ax*, which Costa-Gavras also made into a film in 2005. But Park, the filmmaker of such diabolical movies as *Oldboy*, *The Handmaiden*, and *Decision to Leave*, is exquisitely suited to the material. This is a director capable of conjuring menacing brutality with nothing but a hallway and hammer.

And in *No Other Choice*, he remains at the peak of his powers, archly and elegantly spinning a yarn about a murderous rampage that accumulates wider and wider reverberations. "Hitchcockian" is a term that often, understandably, finds Park. He is, like Hitch, a seemingly polite and erudite man with a latently dark imagination. But for more than two decades, Park has cut his own bloody, unyieldingly meticulous path in movies that are rarely predictable, very funny, and sneakily revelatory.

Much of the delight of *No Other Choice*, which Park co-wrote with Lee Kyoung-mi, Don McKellar, and Jahye Lee, isn't just seeing how Man-su's scheme goes but how Park frames it. He is probably the preeminent filmmaker of putting wild, outrageous happenings into cleverly formal, eminently stylish imagery. As Man-su bumbles from target to target, each potential murder is a window into another family reckoning with unemployment. The way Man-su spies on them (or worse) adds delicious layers of satire. Relish, especially, the way Park uses reflections and trees.

How *No Other Choice* puts capitalism in the crosshairs, with a handsome house in the center, will no doubt bring to mind another Korean satire: Bong Joon Ho's *Parasite*. Park had been wanting to make his film for almost two decades. Either way, the two movies would make one hell of a destabilizing double feature.

If *Parasite* was the feat of an ensemble, *No Other Choice* belongs to Lee. His Man-su is no killer at heart, and his attempts to become one are as comical as they are Dostoyevskian. The tone is so farcical that the gruesomeness of some of Man-su's acts come slyly. How many movies have we seen about a parent driven, heroically, to extremes to defend their family? Man-su's circumstance is frightfully understandable. "Our family is in a war," he says. To keep them happy — in particular Miri — Man-su thinks whatever it takes is necessary.

But what makes *No Other Choice* brilliant is how it shows that perceived predicament as a ubiquitous mistake of modern life. I won't spoil the incredible final minutes of Park's film, but they expand the notion of necessary termination — of a job, of a life — to automation, AI, and beyond. The leaves falling in *No Other Choice* aren't coming back in the spring.

No Other Choice, a Neon release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for violence, language, and some sexual content. In Korean with English subtitles. Running time: 139 minutes.

In *Scarlet*, transplanting *Hamlet* to an anime dreamworld

By Jake Coyle
AP Film Writer

SEEING *SCARLET.* *These images released by Sony Pictures Classics shows the character Scarlet in a scene from the animated film* Scarlet*, by writer-director Mamoru Hosoda. (Sony Pictures Classics via AP)*

The Japanese writer-director Mamoru Hosoda has made some amazing films that take profound leaps into dreamlike worlds.

Hosoda's *Mirai* (2018) is about a 4-year-old boy who's resentful of his newborn sister. But in his backyard garden, he meets his sister as a teenager. This is just the first of many domestic time travels, as the boy meets other relatives from other points in their lives. A new understanding begins to dawn.

In *Belle* (2022), a teenager who's lived through tragedy finds a soaring catharsis in a virtual realm. I thought it was one of the best films of that year, and I still think it might be the best movie ever made about the internet. Either way, its song-and-soul-shattering climax is unforgettable.

Yet in Hosoda's latest, *Scarlet*, the director's enviable reach exceeds his grasp. In it, his female protagonist is a medieval princess who, after seeing her king father killed by her uncle, and dying herself, awakes in an expansive purgatory. In this strange afterlife, peopled by the dead from all time periods, she seeks revenge for her father.

Anyone, I think, would grant that a Japanese anime that transplants *Hamlet* to a surreal netherworld is a touch more ambitious than your average animated movie. Unlike the wide majority of cartoons, or even live-action movies, the problem with *Scarlet* isn't a lack of imagination. It's too much.

Hosoda, a former Studio Ghibli animator whose other films include *Wolf Children* and *Summer Wars*, has an extraordinary knack for crafting anime worlds of visual complexity while pursuing existential ideas with a childlike sincerity. But an excess of baroque design, of emotion, of scope, sinks Hosoda's *Scarlet*. It's the kind of misfire you can forgive. If you're going to fail by overreach, it might as well be with a wildly ambitious rendering of *Hamlet*.

In the thrilling prologue, set in 16th century Denmark, Scarlet (Ashida Mana) watches as her uncle Claudius (Koji Yakusho) frames her father as a traitor and has him executed. Enraged, Scarlet — without any visitation from her father's ghost — goes to kill Claudius. Only he poisons her first, and Scarlet awakes in what she learns is called the Otherlands.

It's a kind of infinite wasteland, full of wandering souls and marauding bandits. People are there for a time, and then they pass into nothingness. A stairway to heaven is rumored to exist somewhere. As she seeks Claudius, Scarlet is joined by a stranger she encounters named Hijiri (Okada Masaki). A paramedic from modern day, he spends most of his time in the Otherworld trying to heal the wounds of others, including Scarlet's foes.

Scarlet can be meandering and tedious. Even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern turn up. If the Otherworld is laid out like Scarlet's troubled conscience, the ensuing battle between vengeance and forgiveness feels dully simplified. It's all a sea of troubles. Hosoda tries to build some interiority to the story (not a small aspect of *Hamlet*) through Hijiri's backstory, telescoping Shakespeare's quandaries to contemporary times.

Hosoda grafted *Beauty and the Beast* into *Belle*, to sometimes awkward, sometimes illuminating effect. But in *Scarlet*, he struggles to bridge *Hamlet* to today. It's a big swing, the kind filmmakers as talented as Hosoda should be taking, but it doesn't pay off. Still, it's often dazzling to look at it and it's never not impassioned. Hosoda remains a director capable of reaching trembling, operatic heights. In *Scarlet*, for instance, Claudius gets a spectacular death scene, a remarkable accomplishment considering he's already dead.

Scarlet, a Sony Pictures Classics release, opened in limited release in December and has a wider theatrical release on February 6. The film, rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for violence/bloody image, is playing in both Japanese with subtitles and English dubbed versions. Running time: 112 minutes.

BTS announces comeback date

Continued from page 3

"Since it will be a group album, it will reflect each member's thoughts and ideas," they said in a statement. "We're approaching the album with the same mindset we had when we first started."

The 2026 album will mark their first since 2022's anthology, *Proof*, their 2021 Japanese compilation album, *BTS, the Best*, and their last studio album, *Be*, released in 2020.

Life begins at 59 for the globe's oldest professional soccer

Continued from page 5

He is moving on loan from Yokohama FC and spent last season on loan with fourth-division club Atletico Suzuka. He failed to score in seven matches with Suzuka.

Miura has played professionally in Brazil, Italy, Croatia, Australia, and Portugal. And of course in Japan. He made his debut in 1986 with Santos in Brazil, a club made famous by Brazilian star Pelé.

In 2017 at age 50, he became the oldest player to score in a professional match. That topped the record held by highly decorated England international Stanley Matthews.

Miura was one of the first big names in Japanese soccer. He scored 55 goals in 89 appearances and was a star with Japan's national team in the 1990s.

su|do|ku

© Puzzles by Pappocom

			6	5				
1						2	4	
				3	4		5	
	8			2				
4	2		5		3		9	8
				4			6	
	4		7	9				
	9	2						3
				6	2			

Difficulty level: Medium *#65124*

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue's puzzle

Puzzle #96528 (Easy)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

1	9	4	8	6	5	2	3	7
7	3	5	2	1	9	4	6	8
6	8	2	7	3	4	1	5	9
4	5	3	1	8	6	9	7	2
2	1	7	9	4	3	5	8	6
9	6	8	5	2	7	3	4	1
3	7	1	4	9	8	6	2	5
8	4	9	6	5	2	7	1	3
5	2	6	3	7	1	8	9	4

Wondering what's going on this month? See page 16.

Events calendar

A Tale of Portland's Historic Chinatowns"

Currently on view, 11am-3pm (Thu-Sun), Portland Chinatown Museum (127 NW Third Ave, Portland). View "Beyond the Gate: A Tale of Portland's Historic Chinatowns," a display of rare objects such as Chinese opera costumes, theatrical sets, bilingual text, audio-visual media, and more that tell a sprawling transnational story of contact and trade between China and the west, focusing on Portland's Old Chinatown (1850-1905) and New Chinatown (1905-1950). For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 224-0008 or visit <www.portlandchinatownmuseum.org>.

"Be Water, My Friend: The Teachings of Bruce Lee"

Currently on view, 10am-5pm (Wed-Sun), Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (719 S King St, Seattle). View "Be Water, My Friend: The Teachings of Bruce Lee," an interactive exhibit that invites viewers to step into the mind, body, and spirit of Bruce Lee to see how his unquenchable pursuit of knowledge informed his philosophy and life. The display follows Bruce's path, beginning with his revelations on water, through the wealth of knowledge found in his 2,800-book personal library, to his philosophy of self-understanding and self-expression. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (206) 623-5124 or visit <www.wingluke.org>.

"Oregon's Nikkei: An American Story of Resilience"

Currently on view, 10am-4pm (Wed-Sat), 11am-4pm (Sun), Japanese American Museum of Oregon at the Naito Center (411 NW Flanders St, Portland). View "Oregon's Nikkei: An American Story of Resilience," an exhibit that highlights the discrimination, resilience, and identity of the Japanese American community in Oregon. The display begins in rural Oregon and the streets of Portland's Japantown where Japanese immigrants embraced American ideals. What they built was abruptly taken away during World War II when people of Japanese descent were imprisoned in American internment camps. From early immigration through current day, the exhibit explores the Japanese-American experience and includes the rebuilding of communities and the ongoing fight for justice. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 224-1458 or visit <www.jamo.org>.

"Rivers, Roses, and Rip City: The Remarkable History of Portland"

Currently on view, 10am-5pm (Mon-Sat), noon-5pm (Sun), Oregon Historical Society Museum (1200 SW Park Ave, Portland). View "Rivers, Roses, and Rip City: The Remarkable History of Portland," an interactive installation that allows visitors to learn about the city's distinctive landscape, the communities that contribute to the vibrant and dynamic identity of Portland, and the history of activism that has transformed its spaces. The display includes 500 objects, images, and archival materials from the museum and research library collections. For info, call (503) 222-1741 or visit <www.ohs.org>.

"Ten Thousand Things"

Currently on view, 10am-5pm (Wed-Sun), Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (719 S King St, Seattle). View "Ten Thousand Things," an exploration of the objects that shape our identities, histories, and cultural narratives curated by podcast host and former civic poet Shin Yu Pai. Museum visitors are able to explore objects highlighted in the podcast alongside newly collected artifacts and stories from local communities. Featured artists include Pai, Anida Yoeu Al, Etsuko Ichikawa, Susie Kozawa, Serena Chopra, Tomo Nakayama, Stewart Wong, Paul Miyahara, and many others. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (206) 623-5124 or visit <www.wingluke.org>.

"Boundless: Stories of Asian Art"

Currently on view, 10am-5pm (Wed-Sun), Seattle Asian Art Museum (1400 E Prospect St, in Volunteer Park, Seattle). View "Boundless: Stories of Asian Art," a display highlighting themes central to arts and societies of Asia, such as worship and celebration, visual arts and literature, and clothing and identity. The museum's south galleries feature art inspired by spiritual life and the north galleries show art inspired by material life. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (206) 654-3210 or visit <www.seattleartmuseum.org>.

"Home for the Holidays"

Through Jan 11, 9:30am-4:30pm, Pittock Mansion (3229 NW Pittock Dr, Portland). View Portland's historic Pittock Mansion during "Home for the Holidays: The Decades Tour." Visitors are able to explore festive displays across 19 rooms and the grand foyer in the mansion as well as four in the Gate Lodge, each artfully decorated and representing five iconic decades — from the 1910s to the 1950s. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 823-3623 or visit <www.pittockmansion.org>.

"The Curio: Exhibition & Sale"

Through Jan 17, Patricia Reser Center for the Arts (12625 SW Crescent St, Beaverton, Ore.). Attend "The Curio: Exhibition & Sale," a unique marketplace spotlighting the creative works of nearly 40 local and regional artists. Presented by The Reser and the Beaverton Arts Market, the exhibit features a diverse collection of contemporary arts, crafts, and small reproductions. Attendees have an opportunity to browse the collection, which includes wearable pieces, unique works of art, and functional and decorative wares. For info, call (971) 501-7722 or visit <www.thereser.org/gallery/the-curio-2025>.

"Mark Makers: Rick Bartow and Seiichi Hiroshima, Moon and Dog Press"

Through Jan 31 (Tue-Sat), 11am-5:30pm, Froelick Gallery (714 NW Davis St, Portland). View "Mark Makers: Rick Bartow and Seiichi Hiroshima, Moon and Dog Press," a special two-person exhibit highlighting the nearly 20-year artistic collaboration between two very close friends. The show features a selection of historic paintings, prints, and drawings by legend Rick Bartow (1946-2016) and mezzotint editions by master printer Seiichi Hiroshima. Bartow and Hiroshima met in 1992 during Bartow's first exhibition in Niigata, Japan. In 1997, when Bartow returned to Tokyo for an exhibit at Hiroshima's gallery, they cemented their great friendship and printmaking collaboration and together formed Moon and Dog Press, which lasted until Bartow's passing in April 2016. The two artists had distinctly different styles and methods, and did not speak each others' languages fluently, but printmaking, art making, "mark making' brought them together. They created 191 editioned drypoint titles and almost 300 monotypes. The current show includes works they created in collaboration, and unique works created solely on their own. For info, call (503) 222-1142 or visit <www.froelickgallery.com>.

GEOMETRY OF LIGHT. *"Anila Quayyum Agha: Geometry of Light," a display that invites viewers to become part of the art, is currently on view at the Seattle Asian Art Museum. Pictured is "A Beautiful Despair (Blue)," lacquered steel and halogen bulb, 60 x 60 x 60 inches, 2021, by Anila Quayyum Agha, Pakistani American (born 1965), courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, NYC, the artist, © Anila Quayyum Agha. (Photo/Steve Watson/Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas)*

"Frank S. Matsura: Portraits from the Borderland"

Through Feb 8, 10am-4pm (Wed-Sat), 11am-4pm (Sun), Japanese American Museum of Oregon (JAMO) at the Naito Center (411 NW Flanders St, Portland). View "Frank S. Matsura: Portraits from the Borderland," an exhibit of detailed portraits of Indigenous people in Washington state created by Frank Sakae Matsura (1873-1913). Matsura immigrated from Japan in 1903 to a newly incorporated Okanogan County along the U.S.-Canadian border. He had been formally trained in photography and established a studio in the small town of Okanogan, a cultural and geographic "borderland" where he, as an outsider, witnessed a time of change in the region. The display, which is organized by the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture and curated by Michael Holloman and Anne-Claire Mitchell, features more than 20 portraits enlarged to 33" by 46". For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 224-1458 or visit <www.jamo.org>.

"Thanatopsis: Meditations on Grief, Death, and Transformation"

Through Feb 14, noon-5pm (Wed & Sat), noon-7pm (Thu-Fri); Feb 14, 5-8pm (closing reception); Portland Community College, Cascade Campus, Paragon Arts Gallery (815 N Killingsworth St, Portland). View "Thanatopsis: Meditations on Grief, Death, and Transformation," an art exhibit that explores the end of life and the grief that accompanies death. For info, call (971) 722-6111 or visit <www.pcc.edu/galleries/cascade>.

"Roots and Resilience — Chinese American Heritage in Oregon"

Through March 2026, 10am-5pm (Wed-Sun), Museum of Natural and Cultural History (1680 E 15th Ave, Eugene, Ore.). View "Roots and Resilience — Chinese American Heritage in Oregon," an exhibit that explores how Chinese immigrants helped shape Oregon history. The display traces Chinese American communities across the state, showcasing artifacts recovered from archaeological digs at sites such as the Ah Heng mining site in the Malheur National Forest and a historic shop and restaurant in Eugene. Objects on view highlight the craftsmanship and expertise of Chinese workers who played vital roles in Oregon's railroad, mining, and canning industries. For info, call (541) 346-3024 or visit <https://natural-history.uoregon.edu>.

"Ai Weiwei: Water Lilies"

Through Mar 15, 10am-5pm (Wed-Sun), Seattle Asian Art Museum (1400 E Prospect St, in Volunteer Park, Seattle). View "Ai Weiwei: Water Lilies," a nearly 50-foot-long piece created with 650,000 LEGO blocks, which is being shown for the first time in the U.S. "Water Lilies," the artist's largest and most ambitious LEGO work to date, is a reinterpretation of Claude Monet's iconic triptych from the Museum of Modern Art in New York. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (206) 654-3100 or visit <www.seattleartmuseum.org>.

"Lay Your Burden Down"

Through Apr 13, 10am-5pm (Wed-Sun), Seattle Asian Art Museum (SAAM) (1400 E Prospect St, in Volunteer Park, Seattle). View "Lay Your Burden Down," an installation created by artist Carina del Rosario, recipient of the 2025 Constance W. Rice Fellowship. The original piece, which was commissioned by the museum, is on view at SAAM through April 13, 2026. The installation is a communal act of care — a community-based project that invited people to share their burdens, convened sewing circles to tend and bolster those burdens, and then turned the embroidered pieces into pillows that are on display on a luxurious hammock. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (206) 654-3210 or visit <www.seattleartmuseum.org>.

"Anila Quayyum Agha: Geometry of Light"

Through Apr 19, 10am-5pm (Wed-Sun), Seattle Asian Art Museum (1400 E Prospect St, in Volunteer Park, Seattle). View "Anila Quayyum Agha: Geometry of Light," a display that invites viewers to become part of the art. Agha, a Pakistani American artist, animates spaces with her large-scale sculptural installations. Suspended from the ceiling, the steel cubes are laser-cut with intricate designs that project geometric shadows onto the visitor. She draws on both the light and dark of her own life, using South Asian art practices to convey the gender discrimination she faced growing up as a young girl in Pakistan. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (206) 654-3210 or visit <www.seattleartmuseum.org>.

"Scallion"

Through July 2026, 10am-7pm (Thu), 10am-5pm (Fri-Sun), Henry Art Gallery (15th Ave NE & NE 41st St, Seattle). View "Scallion," an inaugural mural presentation by Charlene Liu located in the Sculpture Court at the Henry Art Gallery. The work builds on her ongoing engagement with food as a means to locate culture and heritage amidst diaspora. Rendered in a fluid, multi-layered, visual language, the landscape offers a portal to reflect on how culinary traditions build belonging in place and playfully celebrates the importance of shared food experiences. For info, call (206) 543-2280 or visit <www.henryart.org>.

"The Yasui Family: An American Story"

Through Sep 6, 10am-5pm (Mon-Sat), noon-5pm (Sun), Oregon Historical Society Museum (1200 SW Park Ave, Portland). View "The Yasui Family: An American Story," a display that tells the story of the Yasui family, who were among the millions of immigrants who came to the United States seeking new opportunities during the late 1800s and early 1900s. They established roots in Oregon, started families and businesses, and shaped the social and economic fabric of the communities where they lived. Following the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor during World War II, the U.S. government forcibly removed more than 110,000 Japanese Americans — including U.S. citizens — from their homes and imprisoned them in internment camps, often in harsh, remote areas. After the war, many members of the Yasui family returned to Oregon, although some incarcerees chose not to

Continued on page 17

For timely information about upcoming events, visit <www.facebook.com/TheAsianReporter>.

Events calendar

Continued from page 16

return home due to persistent racism in their communities. While the Yasui family endured racism and incarceration, they also shared a commitment to equal justice through engagement with the local, state, and national forces that determined — and withheld — their civil rights. Through photographs, personal journals, documents, and objects, the exhibit explores how one Japanese American family's story reflects the complexity of the American story. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 222-1741 or visit <www.ohs.org>.

"From Highway 101: Images of Oregon's Most Iconic Highway"

Through Sep 20, 10am-5pm (Mon-Sat), noon-5pm (Sun), Oregon Historical Society Museum (1200 SW Park Ave, Portland). View "From Highway 101: Images of Oregon's Most Iconic Highway," an exhibit highlighting how Oregon's Highway 101 is more than a road. The stretch connecting California to Washington runs through breathtaking vistas of the Pacific Ocean, where rocky shorelines neighbor green forests, and vibrant communities are connected by the major thoroughfare — from Astoria to Brookings. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the 101 being designated a federal highway. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 222-1741 or visit <www.ohs.org>.

"Finding Home: The Chinese American West"

Through Sep 5, 2027, 10am-5pm (Wed & Fri-Sun), 10am-8pm (Thu), Tacoma Art Museum (1701 Pacific Ave, Tacoma, Wash.). View "Finding Home: The Chinese American West," an exhibit by artists Monyee Chau, Zhi Lin, and Mian Situ about the history of racism and violence against the Chinese in America — specifically Tacoma's exclusionary past — in addition to the artists' views of Chinese immigrants finding a sense of home and hope and persevering despite hardship. The display explores the spiritual, the mythical, and the laborious path of these seekers of the American dream in a counter-narrative to the conventional picture of America's history. The featured artworks were created in the 21st century, though they imagine the time of 1785 (when the first Chinese immigrants arrived) to 1912 (the end of the American frontier period). For info, or to purchase tickets, call (253) 272-4258 or visit <www.tacomaartmuseum.org>.

A Beautiful Noise

Jan 6-11, Keller Auditorium (222 SW Clay St, Portland). Watch *A Beautiful Noise: The Neil Diamond Musical*, a show that reveals the untold true story of a Brooklyn kid who became a chart-busting, show-stopping, award-winning American icon. The musical features classics such as "America," "Forever in Blue Jeans," and "Sweet Caroline." The production, which is presented by Broadway in Portland and is recommended for attendees age 8 and above, runs 2 hours, 15 minutes with one intermission. Following its run in Portland, the show heads to The Paramount Theatre (911 Pine St, Seattle) from January 13 to 18. For info, showtimes, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 248-4335, or visit <www.portland5.com> or <www.broadwayinportland.com>. To learn more, visit <www.abeautifulnoisethemusical.com>.

Shinobue flute and piano performance

Jan 9, 1:15-2:15pm, Portland Japanese Garden (611 SW Kingston Ave, Portland). Attend a shinobue flute and piano performance by Maido Mind at the Portland Japanese Garden. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 223-1321 or visit <www.japanesegarden.com>.

CLOSE COLLABORATION. *"Mark Makers: Rick Bartow and Seiichi Hiroshima, Moon and Dog Press," a special two-person exhibit highlighting the nearly 20-year artistic collaboration between two very close friends, is on view through January 31 at the Froelick Gallery in northwest Portland. The show features a selection of historic paintings, prints, and drawings by legend Rick Bartow (1946-2016) and mezzotint editions by master printer Seiichi Hiroshima. Pictured at left is Seiichi Hiroshima and at right is Rick Bartow in Newport, Oregon, in 2006.*

Northwest Library opens at new location

Jan 10, 9:30am, Northwest Library (2030 NW Pettygrove St, Portland). Multnomah County's Northwest Library has moved to a new location, changing from a cramped 4,700 square-foot space on N.W. Thurman to its new 11,000 square-foot space on N.W. Pettygrove. With more than twice the space of the former library, patrons are invited to explore the large play and learning space for children and families; the teen area with space for technology, homework, and creative expression; updated technology and internet; flexible meeting spaces for community use; and more. A ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled for Saturday, January 10, from 9:30am to 10:00am. A performance by the Last Regiment of Syncopated Drummers follows from 10:00am to 11:00am. For info, call (503) 988-5123 or visit <events.multcolib.org>.

Japanese New Year celebration

Jan 11, 10am-2:30pm, Portland Japanese Garden (611 SW Kingston Ave, Portland). Ring in the incoming Year of the Horse at *O-Shogatsu*, the traditional Japanese New Year celebration. The family-friendly event includes *sumi-e*, Japanese ink-wash painting (10am-2:30pm); *Edo Kotobuki Jishi*, the celebratory traditional lion dance of Tokyo, performed by Portland Shishimai Kai (10:30am & 12:15pm); and more. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 223-1321 or visit <www.japanesegarden.com>.

Feng Shui for a Lucky New Year

Jan 16, 23 & 30, noon-1pm, Lan Su Chinese Garden (239 NW Everett St, Portland). Community members are invited to workshops to learn feng shui techniques for inviting fresh energy and supporting a calm mind, body, and spirit during the new Lunar New Year. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 228-8131 or visit <www.lansugarden.org>.

Studio Ghibli Film Festival

Jan 16-Mar 2, Oregon Museum of Science & Industry (1945 SE Water Ave, Portland). Attend the Studio Ghibli Film Festival, the Oregon Museum of Science & Industry's annual celebration featuring films created by the legendary Japanese animation company. New to the 2026 program are two pre-festival "Reel Eats" screenings of *Spirited Away* on January 14 and 15 featuring bite-sized snacks that pair with moments in the film. The festival officially begins Friday, January 16 with an opening celebration of the recent 4K restoration of the iconic *Princess Mononoke*. The event includes screenings of *Ponyo*, *The Secret World of Arrietty*, *The Wind Rises*, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Pom Poko*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Castle in the Sky*, *The Boy and the Heron*, *Porco Rosso*, *The Cat Returns*, *Tales from Earthsea*, *When Marnie Was There*, *Whisper of the Heart*, *From Up On Poppy Hill*, *Grave of the Fireflies*, *Only Yesterday*, *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*, and others. For info, times, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 797-4000 or visit <www.omsi.edu/exhibits/studio-ghibli-film-festival>.

Portland Fine Print Fair

Jan 23-25, 10am-6pm (Sat), 11am-5pm (Sun), Portland Art Museum, Mark Building, Fred & Suzanne Fields Ballroom (1119 SW Park Ave, Portland). Attend the Portland Fine Print Fair, the largest and most comprehensive print fair on the west coast. Participants are able to explore original prints from Old Masters to contemporary emerging artists. The fair has something for everyone, from first-time collectors to seasoned connoisseurs. Free talks and tours take place Saturday at 10:30am and Sunday at 1:30pm. For info, call (503) 226-2811 or visit <www.portlandartmuseum.org>.

Amache: An American Injustice

Jan 26, 6pm (doors open), 7-8:30pm (program), McMenamins Kennedy School (5736 NE 33rd Ave, Portland). Watch *Amache: An American Injustice*, a documentary screening held as part of History Pub that tells the story of the unjust incarceration of as many as 120,000 innocent Japanese Americans during World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The event includes a panel discussion with Josh Banyard, Lynn Fuchigami, John Hasegawa, and Hanako Wakatsuki-Chong. For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 222-1741 or visit <www.ohs.org/events/amache-and-american-injustice.cfm>.

"Oregon Connections: Incarceration"

Jan 29, noon-1pm, Virtual. Attend "Oregon Connections: Incarceration," a free virtual conversation with legal and historical experts Kimberly Jensen and Peggy Nagae about how the federal government has used declarations of war to curb the civil rights of Oregonians. For info, or to register (required), call (503) 222-1741 or visit <https://orhs.ejoinme.org/OregonConnections>.

The Wiz

Feb 3-8, Keller Auditorium (222 SW Clay St, Portland). Watch *The Wiz*, a musical offering a groundbreaking twist on *The Wizard of Oz* as Dorothy journeys to find her place in a contemporary world. The show infuses ballet, jazz, and modern pop, and features a score packed with soul, gospel, rock, and '70s funk. The production, which is presented by Broadway in Portland and is recommended for attendees age 5 and above, runs 2 hours, 20 minutes with one intermission. Following its run in Portland, the show heads to The Paramount Theatre (911 Pine St, Seattle) from February 10 to 15. For info, showtimes, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 248-4335, or visit <www.portland5.com> or <www.broadwayinportland.com>. To learn more, visit <www.wizmusical.com>.

Modern kintsugi workshop

Feb 7, 9:30am-12:30pm or 1:30pm-4:30pm, Portland Japanese Garden (611 SW Kingston Ave, Portland). Attend a modern kintsugi workshop with Portland-based kintsugi restorer and instructor Emi Joyce. Kintsugi is the Japanese craft of repairing ceramics. In the centuries-old practice, fractures transform from hidden weak points into beautiful golden elements worth celebrating. The philosophy of kintsugi teaches us to embrace imperfections in our life and appreciate the beauty of human flaws. Two workshops are offered, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, and beginners are welcome. The cost of supplies is included in the registration fee (includes a broken ceramic vessel). For info, or to purchase tickets, call (503) 223-1321 or visit <www.japanesegarden.com>.

HOLLYWOOD ASPIRATIONS. *South Korean actor Julian Shin talks to The Associated Press about his career and efforts to break into Hollywood, in Seoul. (AP Photo/Juwon Park)*

More South Korean actors seek Hollywood dream after global success of Korean entertainment

Continued from page 20

ble to have an accent because the accent is part of who you are."

She focuses on intonation. "When native Korean speakers are trying to read English lines, it sounds like they're reading. That's the hardest thing to break," she said.

But consultants aren't pushing actors to erase their identity. Shin recalled Dumbell advising him not to sound too "American-ish." "She said people would prefer my genuine pronunciation," he said.

Push factors

For Shin, the pivot came as opportunities in South Korea contracted.

"Starting three years ago, I realized this industry was getting harder," he said. "Since the Korean market was struggling, I thought I should broaden my horizons to international markets."

Age discrimination is also driving some actors abroad. Youm, 29, said in South Korea "30 isn't considered young."

"There are some limitations when it comes to finding an agency or auditioning for a role," she said.

Shin, in his 40s, was given a chance to audition for a 20-something character for an international production. "In Korean audition tapes, you usually say your age," he noted. "In the U.S. … they don't."

Actors see a shift

Baik, who got a minor role in the Netflix teen romantic comedy "XO, Kitty," now sees her features as assets abroad.

After feedback from American casting directors, she said she learned "I could do action roles and break free from the 'cute' image."

She also found working with an international crew an eye-opening experience, and came to appreciate aspects of the American work culture. "In Korea, overtime was routine. In the American market, you clock in and clock out like an office worker," she said. "It was more efficient."

She said her ongoing journey to Hollywood has taught her to trust herself.

"At first, everyone said it would be impossible ... 'Only famous Korean actors can do this,'" she recalled. "But after watching me fly overseas and make everything happen with my own hands … I can say with certainty from my experience that Hollywood is ready to open its doors to anyone."

Shin, who hopes to play a villain in American productions, sees a shift.

"There was a time when it seemed like you had to roll your Rs and act like an American … But now it feels like you can be yourself — be Korean if you're Korean," Shin said. "Stereotypes are gradually crumbling."

NORTHWEST JOB MARKET

Fax your advertisement to (503) 283-4440!

BIDS, SUB-BIDS & PUBLIC NOTICES

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Metro

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CONSULTING AND FACILITATION SERVICES

RFP 4554

The Communication's Department of Metro, a metropolitan service district organized under the laws of the State of Oregon and the Metro Charter, located at 600 NE Grand Avenue, Portland, OR 97232-2736, is hereby requesting sealed proposals Public engagement consulting and facilitation services.

DEADLINE

Sealed proposals are due no later than 2:00pm, January 21, 2026, via electronic response to BidLocker.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

Metro is seeking proposals for public engagement consulting and facilitation services. Work would include planning and facilitating focus groups, stakeholder discussions, and workshops (in person and online); and recommending and implementing strategies and approaches for inclusive and impactful public engagement among other things.

WHERE TO FIND DOCUMENTS

RFP documents can be viewed and downloaded from BidLocker at:

<https://www.bidlocker.us/Home/bidlockerus>

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Metro may accept or reject any or all proposals, in whole or in part, or waive irregularities not affecting substantial rights if such action is deemed in the public interest.

Metro extends equal opportunity to all persons and specifically encourages minority, women-owned, emerging small businesses and service disabled veteran owned businesses to access and participate in this and all Metro projects, programs and services.

Metro and its contractors will not discriminate against any person(s), employee or applicant for employment based on race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, political affiliation or marital status. Metro fully complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes and regulations in all programs and activities. For more information, or to obtain a Title VI Complaint Form, see <www.oregonmetro.gov>.

BIDS, SUB-BIDS & PUBLIC NOTICES

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

CITY OF MILWAUKIE

ON-CALL WASTEWATER COLLECTIONS ENGINEERING SERVICES

Proposals Due: January 29, 2026

The City of Milwaukie is seeking qualifications from qualified and experienced businesses for on-call engineering assessment, design, and construction support services for the wastewater collection system. Services requested contain varying levels of engineering services and disciplines to be completed by the selected proposer including: project management, condition assessments and evaluations, concept planning and engineering, preliminary and final design tasks, bidding support services, construction engineering and field services, and project funding and wastewater system rate support. Proposers should possess strong qualities in competency, communication, and timeliness.

City utilizes Bonfire Interactive for its eProcurement solution. To access the solicitation documents, be added to the distribution list for this solicitation's automatic notices, and to submit proposals electronically, please visit <https://milwaukieoregon.bonfirehub.com/> to login or register.

Proposals are due by 2:00pm PST, on Thursday, January 29, 2026. Proposals submitted after the deadline will not be accepted. There will be no formal opening of proposals.

INVITATION TO BID

METRO

TONQUIN TRAIL ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

ITB 4538

Metro is inviting bids to make ADA-accessibility upgrades at Graham Oaks Nature Park as per plans, specifications at location: 11825 SW Wilsonville Road, Wilsonville, Oregon 97070.

Bids are due no later than 2:00pm, January 8, 2026 in Metro's business offices at 600 NE Grand Avenue, Portland, OR 97232-2736, Attention: Yvette Lock, Procurement Analyst, ITB 4538. Responses will be opened publicly at that time.

A Voluntary Pre-Bid Conference is scheduled for all potential prime and sub-contractors on December 17, 2025, at 9:30am at 11825 SW Wilsonville Road, Wilsonville, Oregon 97070. Meeting in the parking lot. Per Metro's Subcontractor Equity Program, Contractors that submit a bid for this project must solicit a sub-bid from ALL COBID certified businesses who attend the pre-bid conference.

Solicitation documents can be viewed and downloaded from Bid Locker, <bidlocker.us>.

All bidders submitting a bid for public improvements over $50,000 certify that they will pay and comply with the minimum prevailing wage requirements of ORS 279C.800-279C.870 and if applicable 40 U.S.C.276a.

Metro may accept or reject any or all bids, in whole or in part, or waive irregularities not affecting substantial rights if such action is deemed in the public interest.

Metro extends equal opportunity to all persons and specifically encourages minority, women-owned, emerging small businesses and service-disabled veteran owned businesses to access and participate in this and all Metro projects, programs and services. Metro Local Contract Review Board Rules require all Bidders to follow and document a specific outreach effort to State-certified Minority, Emerging. Women-owned and Service-Disabled Veteran owned Businesses. Certification of good faith compliance and a declaration of any actual utilization pursuant to both programs are required at the time of Bid Opening.

Metro and its contractors will not discriminate against any person(s), employee or applicant for employment based on race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, political affiliation or marital status. Metro fully complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes and regulations in all programs and activities. For more information, or to obtain a Title VI Complaint Form, see <www.oregonmetro.gov>.

Read The Asian Reporter online at <www.asianreporter.com>!

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THE ASIAN REPORTER CAN BE PICKED UP ON THE FIRST MONDAY EACH MONTH AT MANY LOCATIONS, INCLUDING:

Uwajimaya	Nam Phuong	H Mart	Lily Market	Lao Vieng Market	Hong Phat Supermarket
10500 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy., Beaverton	6834 NE Sandy Blvd. Portland	13600 SW Pacific Hwy., Tigard	11001 NE Halsey St. Portland	1032 N Killingsworth St., Portland	11655 SW Pacific Hwy., Tigard

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PORK FOR SALE
Pigs raised on our family farm in Newberg, Oregon, are for sale. Meat is available in half or whole pig and processed by our butcher in Portland, Oregon. For pricing & details, please call (503) 980-5900.

GRASS-FED BEEF FOR SALE
Cattle raised in Yamhill County at our family farm in Newberg, Oregon. Beef is available in ¼, ½, or whole cow & processed by our butcher in Portland. For pricing & details, please call (503) 980-5900.

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BETHANY MEADOWS,
an affordable apartment community in Washington County, is currently accepting applications for the waitlist. This beautiful community is located off Highway 26 near Bethany & Cornell and offers spacious 1 & 2 bedroom units affordable to individuals and families earning 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

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Income restrictions apply. Equal Housing Opportunity.

For more information, please call (503) 533-1000, e-mail <bethanymeadows@bridgehousing.com> or you can visit our website at <www.bethanymeadowsapartments.com>.

REAL ESTATE

For Sale/For Lease

SUBSCRIPTION COUPON

Have *The Asian Reporter* delivered directly to your home or office and receive a $4.00 discount. See page six for subscription options and an order form. Expiration date: January 31, 2026. *Discount applies to new subscribers only.*

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$25.00 per column inch; Text/Fax deadline: Friday prior to the next issue by 2:00pm

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The Asian Reporter

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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****.*

More South Korean actors seek Hollywood dream after global success of Korean entertainment

By Juwon Park
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — When actor Amy Baik was cast in a South Korean commercial last year, she thought she had landed a promising gig.

But after filming wrapped, she was shocked to learn that both the director and advertiser had cut her scenes — not because of her performance, but because she lacked a facial feature prized in South Korean beauty standards.

"The reason was that I don't have double eyelids," said Baik, 26.

"After receiving that feedback, I started to reconsider what kind of appearance Korea wants," she said, adding it "made me wonder how I can survive as an actor in South Korea."

That experience pushed her toward a different market. The global success of *Parasite*, *Minari*, and "Squid Game" has opened doors for South Korean performers in Hollywood — and spawned a cottage industry of consultants helping actors navigate American casting.

"Hollywood's the dream ... the ultimate pinnacle of acting accolades," said Julia Kim, a Korean American casting director who worked on *Minari*, Amazon Prime's "Butterfly," and *KPop Demon Hunters*.

While established stars like Park Hae-soo and Lee Byung-hun have both South Korean and American representation, most aspiring Korean actors lack such connections. That gap is what talent agencies like Los Angeles-based Upstage Entertainment are trying to bridge.

Alison Dumbell, a co-founder of Upstage with experience in Bollywood and Los Angeles, said she has noticed more demands for "characters that are specifically Korean" than generic "East Asian" ones from western producers. She attributes that shift partly to the global popularity of South Korean entertainment.

ACTING IN AMERICA. *Actor Misun Youm performs a scene for an English-language demo reel she plans to submit to Hollywood casting directors, in Seoul. The American and Korean film industries operate differently. For most South Korean actors without connections or know-how, Hollywood is still uncharted territory. (AP Photo/Juwon Park)*

Still, stereotypes persist. "The one that irritates me is the nerdy tech programmer," Dumbell said. "Sometimes I just won't even submit my actor for that because I know that they're much more nuanced as actors."

Multiple challenges

For most South Korean actors without connections or know-how, Hollywood is still uncharted territory.

Kim, who typically casts high-profile stars and works with local casting directors for co-productions, also finds actors via social media. "I usually put out an open call on my Instagram," she said.

But for actors without major agency backing, the right contacts are hard to find. The American and Korean industries operate differently, and U.S. casting information rarely reaches those outside established networks.

Kim said South Korean talent faces a steep learning curve. "I would get questions — should I change my Korean name to a western name? Do I pay to get an agent? Can I look into the camera when I'm doing an audition?" she said. Even name consistency is an issue: Kim recalled a K-pop artist turned actor whose name appeared five different ways online.

Technical standards also differ. Actor Misun Youm noted American audition tapes require clean white backgrounds, while "in Korea, it doesn't matter."

Headshots diverge too: South Korean profiles feature model-like images, while American headshots match character types.

"In Korea, you shoot profile photos like a fashion magazine model," said veteran actor Shin Ju-hwan, who goes by Julian Shin. He played a masked soldier in the second and third seasons of "Squid Game," and stars in "Taxi Driver" Season 3.

Shin found Upstage by chance — his wife, a producer, discovered them on LinkedIn.

His Hollywood dream was partly motivated by colleagues at his former agency — Han Yeri in *Minari* and Jung Ho-yeon in "Squid Game."

"Even though I wasn't a main character — I was just a 'soldier' — people who saw even that brief appearance started leaving comments on my Instagram," Shin said. "The impact of that show was truly unparalleled."

Language and accents

Shin took an intensive approach to English, transcribing over 30,000 English words and expressions from the internet, then using AI to check if any phrases were outdated. "Idioms are really fun," he said. "'Break a leg' or 'hold your horses' — learning those makes you feel closer to being native."

The accent question looms large.

Devin Overman, another co-founder of Upstage who coaches English line delivery, said "it's perfectly fine, even prefera-

Continued on page 18