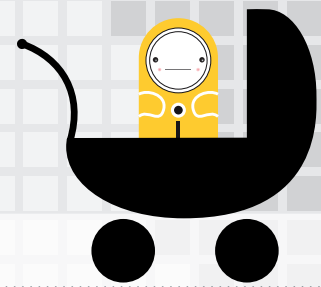


World Snapshots

As the world shrinks, many of the differences between countries and cultures have disappeared or changed. But societies around the Pacific Rim continue to face a raft of unique issues and trends

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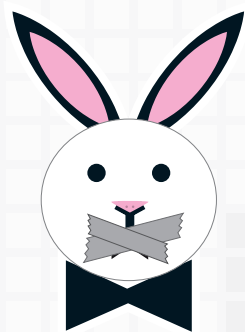


JAPAN

Japan continues to make advances in robotic engineering, using robots for runway models, pets, and even to search amongst earthquake wreckage. Following the trend is Babyloid, a robot baby designed to ease loneliness and depression in elderly people. Studies have shown that caring for the 43-centimetre-long, 2.1-kilogram doll improved the lives of elderly people in nursing homes, especially those suffering from dementia. Over 20 percent of Japan's population is over the age of 65. Researchers are hoping that Babyloid can increase the quality of life of the elderly by putting them in a caregiving role. The doll is still a prototype, developed by Masayoshi Kano from Chukyo University in Nagoya. Babyloid can move its arms, head, mouth, and eyelids while making robotic baby sounds, and has LEDs on its face that can mimic emotions such as sadness.

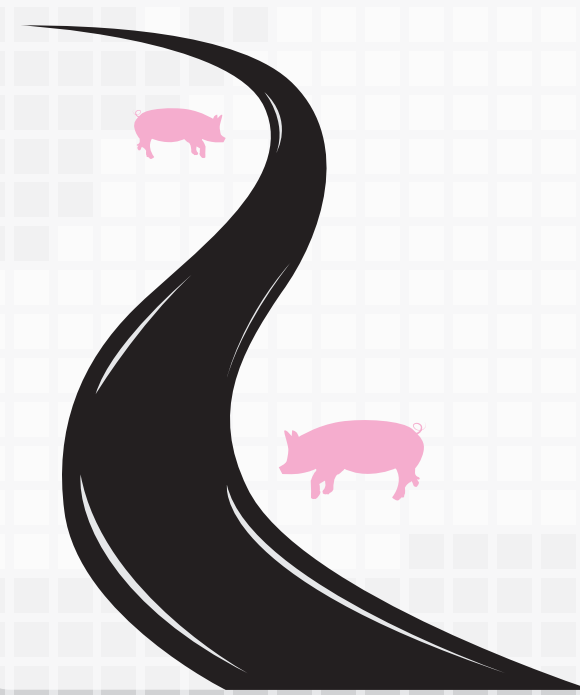
INDONESIA

Indonesia is a predominantly Muslim country with around 80 percent of the population following Islamic beliefs. With the country's strong opposition to pornography, it's not surprising that the government continues to crack down on offenders. Local rock star Nazril Ariel of the band Peterpan was recently sentenced to three and a half years in jail, following the release of two mobile-phone videos that show him having sex with two different women. The editor of *Playboy Indonesia* was also recently arrested and sentenced to two years in jail. Although the magazine contains no nudity, Islamist groups have been protesting against *Playboy Indonesia* since its creation in 2006. But the censorship doesn't stop there. In response to a request from Indonesia's communication minister, Canadian-owned smart-phone maker BlackBerry has blocked access to pornographic websites in Indonesia.



TAIWAN

Water pollution is a growing concern in Taiwan, as five of the country's 21 rivers are considered seriously polluted. One major contributing factor is the country's six million pigs, many of which are releasing their excrement into rivers that run through local farmland. In reaction to the big problem, one man has found a simple solution: piggy training. In 2009, local farmer Chang Chung-tou, of Yunlin County, demonstrated that pigs were able to be toilet trained, which resulted in less excrement entering the river. Nearly 10,000 pigs were taught to use a contained area smeared in feces and urine, which helped to attract the pigs to the "litter box." As a result, up to 75,000 tonnes of water are saved per day because 95 percent of the pig waste is being collected instead of rinsed away. The pigs, who rely on the rivers for drinking water, show fewer signs of illness and their survival rate has increased from 70 to 90 percent.



INDIA

Mumbai's property values have become so inflated that only the incredibly wealthy are able to afford real estate in much of the city. Experts say the market is likely due for a correction in 2011, but developers are reluctant to lower their prices, claiming that current building costs remain high while profit margins remain low. Even as developers push to build more housing, there are reports of tens of thousands of apartments that remain empty in the city. Prices are so high that home ownership continues to be a dream for most people, including those with a middle-class income.

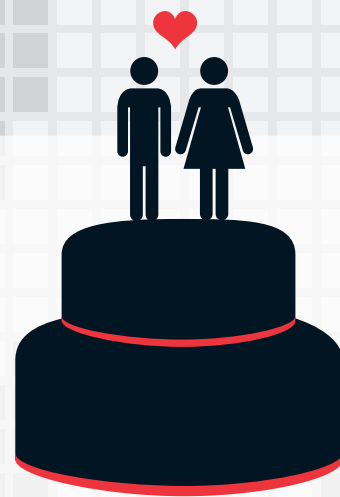
CHINA

Although China has prided itself on its recent economic growth, the country lags behind much of the world in one very notable way: life expectancy. Since 1990, life expectancy rates have increased less than in many other developing nations. Surprisingly, countries such as Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India and Sudan have seen greater increases than China. The disappointing increase is partly attributed to workplace accidents, disease and heavy pollution. While life expectancy hasn't increased as much as might be expected, China has still seen gains as a result of rising incomes and improvements in healthcare coverage.



SINGAPORE

In an attempt to boost population numbers, the government of Singapore is hoping to launch a television campaign to encourage young singles to meet, marry and have children. The 2011 campaign will target those aged 20–35, a demographic that has in recent years become marriage-averse. Marriage and birth rates in the city-state have been falling steadily for over a decade. In 2010, couples avoided having children because of a belief that children born in that year would grow up to be failures in their work and family lives. The current birth rate in Singapore is 1.23 children per woman, and immigration has so far helped to keep the population from declining further.



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