

NATION&WORLD

Panda cub is on way to China

The National Zoo in Washington has said its final goodbye to its panda cub Bao Bao. The zoo packed up the U.S.-born panda Tuesday for a one-way flight to Chengdu, China, where the 3-year-old will eventually join a breeding program. Bao Bao left the zoo Tuesday morning in a special crate and began her 16-hour flight to China on Tuesday afternoon from Dulles Airport near Herndon.

N. Korean official a suspect in slaying

By The Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Malaysia’s police chief said today that a North Korean Embassy official is among eight North Korean suspects in the death of the half brother of Pyongyang’s leader Kim Jong Un in Kuala Lumpur’s airport.

Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar said at a news conference that he couldn’t confirm whether North Korea’s government was behind the Feb. 13 death of Kim Jong Nam, but added that “what’s clear is that those involved are North Koreans.”

Khalid also said that the two female suspects in the killing were trained to wipe toxin on his face, then wash their hands.

He said that North Koreans placed the toxin on the hands of the two women, one Indonesian and one Vietnamese. The North Korean suspect who gave them

the toxin is in custody, Khalid said.

Four North Koreans suspected of involvement are believed to have fled the same day and are now back in North Korea, he said. Three are believed to be at large in Malaysia, Khalid said, including the second secretary of the North Korean Embassy and an employee of state airline Air Koryo.

Determining whether poison killed Kim Jong Nam is proving difficult for Malaysian officials, who said Tuesday that autopsy results are so far inconclusive.

More than a week has passed since Kim was approached by the two women and apparently attacked in the face with an unknown substance.

Kim did not suffer a heart



Kim Jong Nam

attack and had no puncture wounds, such as those a needle would have left, said Noor Hisham Abdullah, the Malaysian director general of health.

He did not dismiss poison as a potential cause.

“We have to confirm with the lab report before we can make any conclusive remark,” he said.

He added that medical specimens have been sent to experts for analysis.

However, Rahmat Awang, director of Malaysia’s National Poison Center in Penang, said he has not yet received any samples despite expecting them to arrive two days ago. He said with a case this high-profile, specimens are likely being sent to his lab and to facilities abroad to seek the cause of death or confirm findings already reached in Kuala Lumpur.

Identifying a specific poison can be challenging, especially if a minute amount was used and

it did not penetrate fat cells in the victim’s tissue. If the toxin only entered the bloodstream, it could leave the body very quickly. And even if a substance is found, it would need to match the symptoms Kim Jong Nam experienced before death. The more unusual the poison is, the harder it is to find.

Highly sophisticated facilities, such as in Japan or at the FBI’s crime lab in the U.S., are among those that have greater capabilities for discovering unusual toxic substances.

The case has perplexed leading forensic toxicologists who study murder by poison. They say the airport attack is one of the most bizarre cases in the books, and question how the two women could walk away unscathed after deploying an agent potent enough to kill Kim before he could make it to the hospital.

Kim, the older half-brother

of North Korea’s reclusive ruler Kim Jong Un, had spent most of the past 15 years living in China and Southeast Asia. The victim is believed to have had at least three children with two women. No family members have come forward to claim the body.

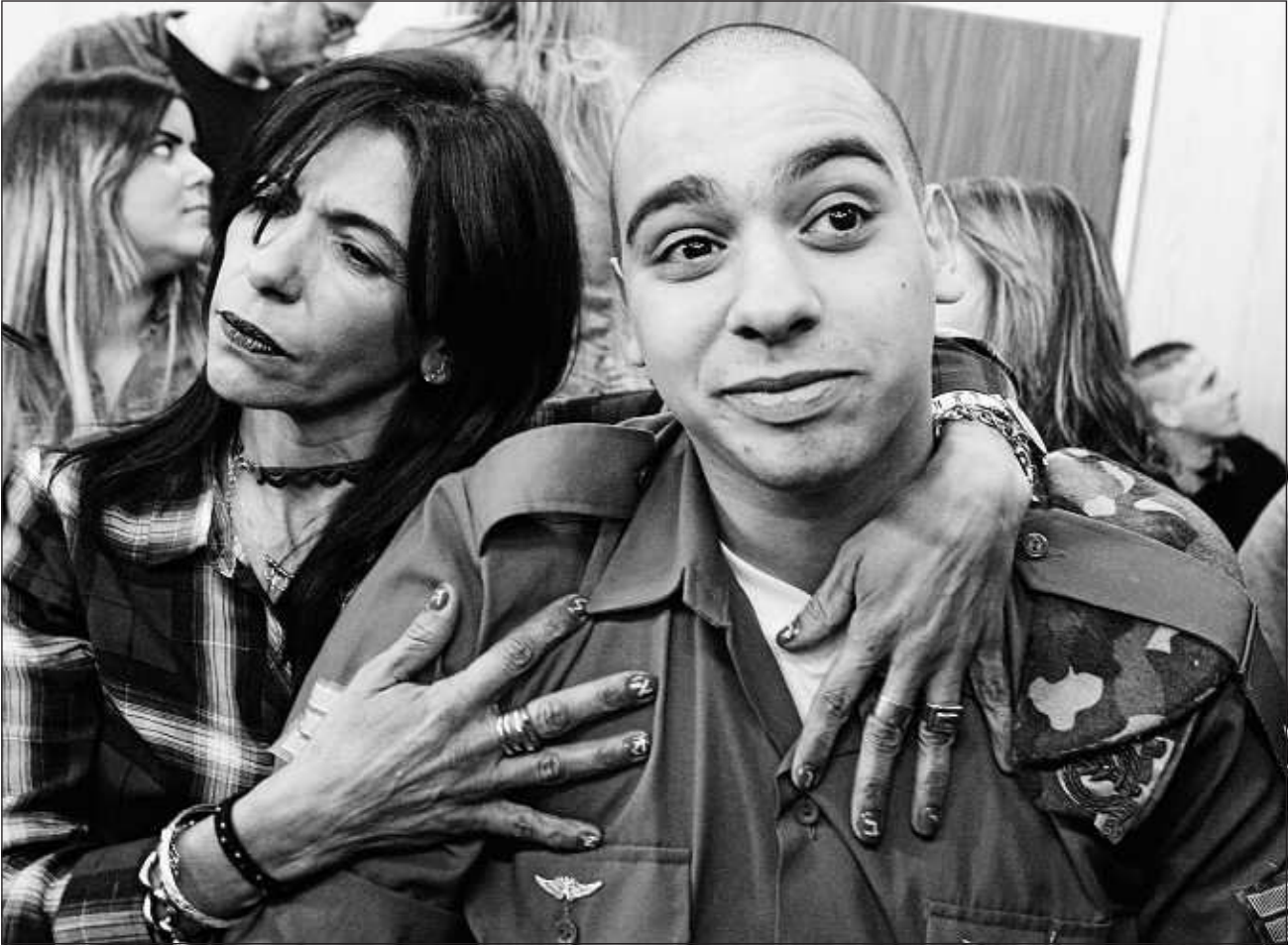
The attack spiraled into diplomatic fury when Malaysia refused to hand over Kim Jong Nam’s corpse to North Korean diplomats after his death, and proceeded with an autopsy over the ambassador’s objections.

One of the women, Doan Thi Huong, is from Nghia Binh, Vietnam, a farming and largely Catholic village about 80 miles south of Hanoi. Her father, Doan Van Thanh, said Tuesday he can’t believe she would do such an “earthshaking” thing.

The Indonesian woman who was arrested has said she was tricked into taking part in the attack, believing it was part of a TV stunt.

“Even if he erred, Elor should not sit in prison. We will all pay the price.”

Naftali Bennett, Israeli education minister



VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Israeli soldier Elor Azaria was embraced by his mother at the start of his sentencing hearing Tuesday in Tel Aviv, Israel. The court sentenced Azaria to 18 months in prison for the fatal shooting of a wounded Palestinian assailant.

Divisions worsen after Israeli soldier sentenced

By The Associated Press

JERUSALEM — An Israeli soldier was sentenced Tuesday to 18 months in prison for killing a badly wounded Palestinian assailant as he lay on the ground, in a landmark decision that deepened fissures in Israeli society and drew Palestinian criticism for being too lenient.

Leading nationalist Israeli politicians called any jail time unfair and urged an immediate pardon, while Palestinians called Israel’s justice system a joke.

The sentencing of Sgt. Elor Azaria culminated a nearly yearlong episode that has bitterly divided the country. While Israel’s top generals pushed for the prosecution of a soldier they say violated the military’s code of ethics, large segments of the public, including politicians on the nationalist right, sided with Azaria. Even Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave only lukewarm support to his armed forces.

Although the sentence was lighter than expected, those divisions showed no signs of easing following Tuesday’s sentencing at a Tel Aviv military court. Dozens of people demonstrated outside in support of Azaria, and hard-line politicians called for his release.

“Even if he erred, Elor should not sit in prison. We will all pay the price,” said Education Minister Naftali Ben-

nett, leader of the nationalist Jewish Home Party.

Human rights groups praised the conviction but dismissed Tuesday’s sentence as far too lenient. Prosecutors had sought three to five years.

“Azaria’s light sentence of 18 months is an expression of disregard for the value of Palestinian life and likewise fails to serve as a deterrent,” said Hassan Jabareen, general director of Adalah, an Arab rights advocacy group in Israel.

Azaria, an army medic, was recorded on a cellphone video last March as he fatally shot a badly wounded Palestinian who had stabbed a soldier in the West Bank city of Hebron. The Palestinian, Abdel Fattah al-Sharif, was lying on the ground unarmed when Azaria shot him in the head.

Azaria was convicted of manslaughter last month in a rare case of a military court ruling against a combat soldier for lethal action taken in the field. But the soldier enjoyed wide public support.

In Israel, military service is compulsory for most Jewish men, and soldiers enjoy widespread sympathy. A Channel 2 TV poll taken after the conviction found that 67 percent of respondents supported clemency. The poll questioned 666 people and had a margin of error of 4.4 percentage points.

Asa Kasher, a philosopher who

wrote the Israeli army’s code of ethics, said the case has unleashed dangerous trends in the country.

“One shot by one soldier took on the shape of a war between right and left,” he told Channel 2.

He said “extremists” initially took up Azaria’s cause, and hard-line politicians followed suit. “Anyone with right-wing sentiments enlisted, and everyone in the end rallied behind a soldier who harmed the values of the Israeli army,” he said.

Politicians’ support for the soldier was behind the resignation last year of Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon, a former military chief of staff. He was replaced by Avigdor Lieberman, a hard-line politician who had earlier visited Azaria in court during the trial. Lieberman has since toned down his language, and on Tuesday, he urged the public to respect the court’s decision.

Kasher said a pardon would be devastating for the military. “It means you can throw commanders’ inquiries out the window. You can throw the military court and its decisions out the other window and the racist atmosphere that says you may kill terrorists even if they are neutralized will rule,” he said.

President Reuven Rivlin is not expected to consider a pardon until appeals are complete.

Lawmakers join to tout the benefits of vaccines

By Tribune News Service

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan group of lawmakers is stressing the need to highlight benefits of vaccines amid reports of local outbreaks of infectious diseases.

“The science is clear: FDA-licensed vaccines are proven to be safe and effective, and save the lives both of those who receive them and vulnerable individuals around them,” the lawmakers wrote in a letter sent to their colleagues Tuesday.

“As Members of Congress, we have a critical role to play in supporting the availability and use of vaccines to protect Americans from deadly diseases.”

The leaders of each chamber’s health committees authored the letter, including Senate Health Education and Labor Pensions Chairman Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., and ranking member Patty Murray, D-Wash. House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Greg Walden, R-Ore., and ranking member Frank Pallone Jr., D-N.J., and Health Subcommittee Chairman Michael C. Burgess, R-Texas, and ranking member Gene Green, D-Texas, also wrote the letter.

The letter comes amid what the lawmakers described as “increasing trends around the country that have led to lower vaccination rates in some communities.”

The debate over vaccines seeped into last year’s presidential campaign, with President Donald Trump linking vaccine to autism in children, a theory that has been widely debunked.

Trump appeared to bring up the connection again at an education meeting Feb. 14.

“What’s going on with autism? When you look at the tremendous increases, it’s really — it’s such an incredible — is it really a horrible thing to watch the tremendous amount of increase. Do you have any idea?” Trump asked a special-education principal.

The principal replied with a statistic of the rate of autism diagnosis, and Trump replied, “Just amazing. Well, maybe we can do something.”

The Washington Post fact checker gave Trump’s claim that there has been an increase in autism “three Pinnochios,” signaling it was not true.

But the exchange was reminiscent of Trump’s earlier claims, and a reminder that he reportedly would ask Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a proponent of the theory that vaccines cause autism, to head a vaccine commission.

But the people in charge of health policy on Capitol Hill are presenting a united front on the benefits of vaccines. The lawmakers came together, writing in no uncertain terms, “Vaccines save lives.”