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Public Diplomacy in the News: Golden Monkey Diplomacy, KPop Demon Hunters, & Dubai Chocolate ^[1]

“Public Diplomacy in the News” is a CPD Blog series by Andrew Dubbins that spotlights noteworthy stories on public diplomacy topics such as cultural diplomacy, nation branding, exchange programs, international events and conferences, digital diplomacy, and strategic global communications.

Golden monkeys join China’s diplomatic roster. China has expanded its tradition of “panda diplomacy” by loaning endangered golden snub-nosed monkeys (pictured above) to European zoos, marking their debut outside Asia. Three monkeys were sent to France’s

Beauval Zoo and another trio to Belgium's Pairi Daiza Zoo in 2025 as part of long-term conservation and cultural exchange agreements celebrating China's diplomatic ties. While officials highlight prospects for scientific collaboration and awareness of endangered species, some experts warn that such programs may prioritize geopolitical image over animal welfare. Like pandas before them, the golden monkeys embody China's soft power, blending conservation efforts, cultural symbolism, and strategic diplomacy to project a positive national image abroad.

Christina Larson / Associated Press

K-pop as Korea's global power play — *CS Monitor's* Lindsey McGinnis reports from Seoul that South Korea is leveraging its cultural exports—from K-pop and film to animation and fashion—as a potent tool of national influence and security. At the 2025 Seoul Hunters Festival, inspired by the hit Netflix film *KPop Demon Hunters*, global fans celebrated Korean creativity, reflecting how “Hallyu,” or the Korean Wave, has transformed the nation's global standing since the 1990s. President Lee Jae Myung's administration is formalizing this cultural momentum with new initiatives linking soft power to diplomacy, while scholars note that Korea's artistic vitality, shaped by its history of invasion and resilience, continues to win trust, build alliances, and strengthen the country's global influence far beyond military might.

Lindsey McGinnis / Christian Science Monitor

Dubai chocolate becomes a sweet symbol of soft power — *Time's* Bobby Ghosh argues that the viral global success of “Dubai chocolate,” a pistachio-filled confection rooted in Middle Eastern tradition, has accomplished more for the United Arab Emirates' cultural image than decades of lavish spending on museums, skyscrapers, and sports sponsorships. Popularized by TikTok influencers and adopted by global brands like Ghirardelli and Lindt, the treat has become a mainstream favorite that reshapes perceptions of authenticity in the Gulf. By appealing directly to taste rather than geopolitics, writes Ghosh, Dubai chocolate demonstrates that true soft power arises not from wealth or image management, but from genuine cultural confidence and shared enjoyment.

Bobby Ghosh / Time

Countdown to Milan Cortina: 100 storylines to watch — With just 100 days until the 2026 Winter Olympics, NBC spotlights the athletes, rivalries, and firsts set to define the Milan-Cortina Games. From Lindsey Vonn's comeback bid and Mikaela Shiffrin's redemption arc to Norway's biathlon dynasty ending and NHL stars returning to Olympic ice, the Games promise both nostalgia and fresh drama. New events such as women's large-hill ski jumping and mixed skeleton debut alongside rising American hopes in speed skating, bobsled, and freestyle skiing.

NBC Olympics

Visa revocation sparks outcry over free expression — PEN America has condemned the U.S. government's abrupt cancellation of Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka's multiple-entry visa, calling the move “deeply troubling” and harmful to the nation's reputation as a champion of free speech and cultural exchange. The organization warned that arbitrary visa restrictions under the guise of reform could deter other global writers and thinkers from engaging with American audiences. Soyinka, a celebrated playwright and outspoken critic of

political leaders, had his visa revoked after new U.S. rules limited Nigerian nationals to short-term single-entry visas, a decision seen as undermining open dialogue and the international exchange of ideas.

PEN America
