



Official says beer bars are too hot in Vietnam

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — A ministry official is proposing that the temperature in restaurants selling beer in Vietnam should not exceed 86° Fahrenheit, a rule that will be hard to enforce considering outdoor beer parlors are hugely popular in the country's big cities. The *Tuoi Tre* newspaper quoted Nguyen Phu Cuong, an official at the Ministry of Industry and Trade which was drafting the regulation, as saying the rule aims to "protect consumers." Many drinkers, however, say the proposal shows how out of touch officials are because of the popularity of the outdoor bars. Last year, Vietnam's 90 million people consumed 3 trillion liters of beer, or 33.3 liters (8.8 gallons) per head, making them the top beer drinkers per capita in Southeast Asia.

Korean chat app vows to protect user privacy

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Popular South Korean messaging app Kakao Talk says it will stop cooperating with authorities seeking to access private messages as part of a government crackdown on online criticism. Lee Sirgoo, CEO at DaumKakao, which owns Kakao Talk, has apologized for its initial handling of privacy issues. The government's recent announcement of a crackdown on what it called online rumors prompted many South Koreans to switch to foreign messaging services. Lee said Kakao Talk will introduce new privacy features to protect the information of its users. Next year, it will begin deleting messages from its servers after they have been read by the intended recipients. Kakao Talk initially said it would collaborate with authorities and declined to disclose the number of court-approved search requests it received.

Lunar eclipse seen in Asia and the Americas

TOKYO (AP) — Evening viewers in much of Asia and early risers in parts of the Americas were treated to a stunning lunar eclipse this month, though clouds obscured it for some. Lucky ones saw the moon turn orange or red in what is known as a "blood moon." The hue results from sunlight scattering off the earth's atmosphere. Astronomer Geoff Wyatt at the Sydney Observatory in Australia called it "very spectacular." The clouds blocked the view at times, but he said the moon turned a "lovely reddish brown." In Japan, clear skies turned partly cloudy as the eclipse progressed, but people gathered on the rooftops of skyscrapers in Tokyo saw the moon turn a rusty brown when the clouds cleared.

Three Malaysian banks announce proposed merger

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Three Malaysian banks have announced plans for a merger to create Southeast Asia's fourth-biggest commercial lender and a large Islamic bank. CIMB Group Holdings Berhad, RHB Capital Berhad, and Malaysia Building Society Berhad said they have submitted the proposed merger to the country's central bank. CIMB, the country's No. 2 lender, and its smaller rival RHB, ranked fourth, will merge via a share swap, the banks said in a joint statement. The two banks' Islamic units will then acquire Malaysia Building Society to form a mega Islamic bank, it said. If approved, the combined entity would pass Malayan Banking Berhad as the country's biggest commercial bank. Analysts said it will be the fourth largest in the region after three Singapore banks — DBS Group Holdings, Oversea Chinese Banking Corp., and United Overseas Bank. "This merger is a natural step in our growth story, enabling us to become a regional financial powerhouse via the merged entity," RHB managing director Kellee Kam said in the statement. The banks said they hope to sign an agreement by early 2015 and complete the deal by mid-year.

U.S. report says China's human-rights record worsening

BEIJING (AP) — A recent U.S. report says China's human-rights record has worsened in key areas over the past year and that limits on free speech and assembly are growing. The annual report by the Congressional-Executive Commission on China said the country has tightened restrictions on civil society, rights advocates, journalists, and religious organizations. It added that President Xi Jinping has adhered "to the authoritarian model of his predecessors" since taking power last year. That model "poses a serious challenge to U.S.-China relations and China's own development," the report said. It recommended that the U.S. press for more freedoms in China, including looking at how it issues visas to Chinese officials. The independent committee is mandated to issue the annual report but does not have power to set policy.

South Korea cuts interest rate to record low

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's central bank lowered its key interest rate to a record low as it tries to bolster a fragile economic recovery. The bank also downgraded its growth forecasts for Asia's fourth-largest economy. The Bank of Korea trimmed the key rate by a quarter of a percentage point to two percent for October. It was the second rate cut this year after the central bank lowered lending costs in August following a deadly ferry disaster, the shock of which dented retail sales and other spending. It also revised down its growth forecast for South Korea. It said the economy will likely expand by 3.5 percent this year, not the 3.8 percent it forecast three months earlier, citing slower-than-expected improvements in capital expenditure and consumer spending. Next year, South Korea's economy will grow 3.9 percent, instead of four percent. The 2015 growth forecast takes into account the government's big budget plan for 2015, which is expected to add 0.2 of a percentage point to the growth, the bank's governor, Lee Ju-yeol, said. Lee said growth momentum is "not sufficient" without the government's expansionary budget. In February 2009, the bank lowered its policy interest rate to two percent in the wake of the global financial crisis.



HISTORICAL HEADGEAR. Myat Ko, an ethnic Naga member of Myanmar's Upper House, representing the governing Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), adjusts his Naga hat in Naypyidaw, Myanmar. The hat is made with a cane bowl adorned with wild boar tusks, hornbill feathers, a mountain goat's red mane, and the fur and claws of a sun bear. It is about two feet tall, more than a century old, and attracts insects. Myat Ko's ancestors hunted the animals themselves. The Nagas, which comprise about 66 different tribes inhabiting the mountainous highlands straddling the Myanmar-India border, are known as fearsome, headhunting warriors who until very recently lived in primitive conditions. (AP Photo/Gemunu Amarasinghe)

In Myanmar parliament, colorful hats cap divisions

By Gabrielle Paluch
The Associated Press

NAYPYITAW, Myanmar — The only question opposition lawmaker U Win Htein asked parliament last session was for permission to remove his silk turban, saying it was causing him headaches and hair loss. The 72-year-old, known for his irreverent sense of humor, admits he was just teasing. But the speaker shot him down just the same.

The civilians elected to Myanmar's legislature are required to wear hats when taking the floor. The appointed military members are not.

Hats hold meaning here, embodying political allegiances, accomplishments, and failures of a nation transitioning from a half-century of dictatorship to democracy.

The dress code in parliament's two chambers, based on old laws of the bygone king's courts in Mandalay, reflects the major political camps and the legislature's ethnic makeup.

Military members distinguish themselves from their civilian counterparts with a conspicuous absence of both headwear and elections. Men in uniform are appointed to a quarter of the 664 seats by armed forces chief Min Aung Hlaing.

The Burman majority don a silk-wrapped, cane-frame turban known as a *gaun baung*, which has come to symbolize the nascent civilian government. Ethnic minorities wear everything from feathers and claws to tea towels on their heads. The most famous legislator, Aung San Suu Kyi, wears simple white flowers.

Like the hats, political allegiances in parliament are as complicated as they are colorful.

Suu Kyi, leader of the opposition and Nobel Peace laureate, spent decades under house arrest. She now sits alongside her former captors, in turns scolding or praising the military. It concerns some members of her National League for Democracy party, who quietly observe her tone shifting with her presidential prospects, which were never bright thanks to a law that was designed to keep her out of the top elected office.

Meanwhile, the military is even better represented than the 166 hatless heads would suggest.

Many of those wearing the *gaun baung* of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party are retired men of uniform. But while the heavy influence of the armed forces has drawn cynicism, the party has not always voted in lockstep with the military.

The military, viewed abroad as being responsible for driving the country into decades of poverty, war, and dysfunction, sees itself as the glue that binds the country and, perhaps counterintuitively, the arbiters of peace in the world's longest running civil war involving a number of armed ethnic groups. The posting to Naypyitaw's parliament is seen as unglamorous, as it's not well-paid and offers no chances for promotion.

The most brightly colored headgear belongs to ethnic politicians from conflict-stricken

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Fijian Dollar	1.9416
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7581
Indian Rupee	61.443
Indonesian Rupiah	12110
Iranian Rial	26519
Japanese Yen	106.58
Laos New Kip	8060.1
Malaysian Ringgit	3.274
Nepal Rupee	98.853
Pakistani Rupee	102.85
Papua N.G. Kina	2.5028
Philippine Peso	44.914
Russian Ruble	40.749
Saudi Riyal	3.7513
Singapore Dollar	1.2743
South Korean Won	1065.8
Sri Lankan Rupee	130.65
Taiwan Dollar	30.401
Thai Baht	32.4
Vietnam Dong	21245