

## Japan officials warn people to chew rice cakes slowly

By Yuri Kageyama  
The Associated Press

**T**OKYO — At least nine people reportedly choked to death on New Year's rice cakes in Japan, causing officials to urge people to chew slowly on the treats.

Sticky rice cakes, or *mochi*, are an essential part of the Japanese New Year's holiday menu. But the glutinous *mochi* — grilled or cooked in broth or with sweet beans — can get stuck in people's throats, blocking breathing.

The *Yomiuri* newspaper reported that at least 128 people were rushed to hospitals after choking on *mochi*, with nine dying.

The department advised people to cut *mochi* into small pieces, chew slowly, and learn first aid.

In addition to three deaths in Tokyo, three people died in Chiba prefecture, while one each died in Osaka, Aomori, and Nagasaki prefectures, the



**RISKY RICE CAKES.** A boy eats a freshly pounded rice cake, or *mochi*, wrapped in a sheet of seasoned laver, or *nori*, at a park during a rice-pounding gathering, part of the annual preparation for the New Year's celebration at a park in Yokohama, near Tokyo. Officials are urging people to chew slowly on the treats, as at least nine people in Japan have reportedly choked to death on the New Year's rice cakes. (AP Photo/Tetsuya Saruta)

*Yomiuri* reported. In the Nagasaki case, an 80-year-old man choked on *mochi* that was in sweet bean soup served for free at a Shinto shrine.

Japanese customarily visit shrines and temples to welcome the new year, and *mochi*, saké, and other treats are sold or given out.

## Myanmar Catholics pleased to welcome first local cardinal

By Esther Htusan and Aye Aye Win  
The Associated Press

**Y**ANGON, Myanmar — Church colleagues proudly welcomed home Archbishop Charles Maung Bo after his appointment by Pope Francis as Myanmar's first Roman Catholic cardinal.

Bo, the archbishop of Yangon, was one of 20 new cardinals whose appointments were announced this month and who assume their new jobs in February. They are from 18 countries, including two others that never before had a cardinal: Cape Verde and Tonga.

The 66-year-old clergyman smiled broadly and exchanged pleasantries with friends and followers after returning from abroad to his residence in Myanmar's largest city.

When he afterward went to the Missionary Sisters and Brothers of St. Paul's school, which he helps support, about 60 students and priests presented the archbishop with roses and came one by one to greet him and kiss his ecclesiastical ring. They serenaded him with a congratulatory song before holding a religious service.

He said he was happy to become the representative of Myanmar. "The pope just made the world know about Myanmar and this is really good for our country," he said.

Bishop Felix Lian Khen Thang, president of the country's Catholic Bishop Conference, said Bo's appointment was a crowning achievement of the church's mission activities in Myanmar.

About one percent of predominantly Buddhist Myanmar's 51 million people are Catholics. The church has been active in Myanmar — also known as Burma — for five centuries.

Bo's appointment comes as the country grapples with major problems of religious intolerance, particularly by members of the Buddhist majority toward Muslims of the Rohingya ethnic minority. Related violence has taken several hundred lives in the past few years.

The archbishop wrote in a commentary for *The Washington Post* last year that: "If Burma is to be truly free, peaceful, and prosperous, the rights of all ethnicities and



**PRINCE OF THE CHURCH.** Newly appointed cardinal Charles Maung Bo, foreground, prays during a religious service at St. Paul's Missionary school in a suburb of Yangon, Myanmar (also known as Burma). Archbishop Bo was one of 20 new cardinals whose appointments were announced by Pope Francis this month. Bo's appointment comes as Myanmar grapples with major issues of religious intolerance, particularly by members of the Buddhist majority toward Muslims of the Rohingya ethnic minority. (AP Photo/Gemunu Amarasinghe)

religious faiths must be protected. A movement that has grown in volume and influence threatens this: extreme Buddhist nationalism."

Bo declared "there is a need for all of us — religious, civil, and political leaders — to speak up to counter hate speech with good speech, as well as for the government to bring to justice those who incite discrimination and violence."

Benedict Rogers of the British-based religious freedom advocacy group Christian Solidarity Worldwide described Bo as "a man of enormous quality: courage, wisdom, compassion, humility, humor, hospitality, and generosity."

"In particular, he has been one of the most outspoken religious leaders in Burma on issues of human rights, religious freedom, democracy, poverty, human trafficking, and other injustices," said Rogers, who added that the archbishop inspired him personally to become a Catholic.

Associated Press writer Grant Peck in Bangkok contributed to this report.

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## Nepalese women's team is first to scale world's highest peaks

By Binaj Gurubacharya  
The Associated Press

**K**ATHMANDU, Nepal — A group of Nepalese climbers have returned home after becoming the first all-woman team to climb the highest mountains on all seven continents.

The team started their quest in 2008 by climbing Mount Everest and ended by scaling Mount Vinson in Antarctica on December 23.

The women received a rowdy welcome at the airport, where team leader Shailee Basnet said they would continue to climb even after achieving their goal.

Only four of the seven team members were able to make the last journey to Antarctica because of lack of funding. They have been paying for the trips using personal savings, sponsors, and fundraising events.

They scaled Everest in Asia, Kosciuszko in Aus-



**PEAKING INTEREST.** Nepalese climbers (L-R) Nimdoma Sherpa, Maya Gurung, Asha Singh, Chunu Shrestha, Pema Dikki, and Shailee Basnet pose for the media at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu. A group of Nepalese climbers have returned home from Antarctica after becoming the first all-woman team to climb the highest mountains on all seven continents. (AP Photo/Niranjan Shrestha)

tralia, Elbrus in Europe, Kilimanjaro in Africa, Aconcagua in South America, Denali or McKinley in North America, and now Vinson in Antarctica.

Ang Tshering of the Nepal Mountaineering Association confirmed it was the first all-woman team to scale all the peaks.

Nepal has eight of the 14 highest mountains in the world, but few mountaineers from the Himalayan

country are female. Of the more than 4,000 climbers who have scaled Mount Everest, more than half are Nepalese, but only two dozen of those are women.

The team aimed to change the all-male image of mountaineering in their country. Nepalese women have rarely had a chance to climb because they were confined to their homes while their husbands led

Continued on page 16