

Thai ice cream company apologizes for gay slur

BANGKOK (AP) — A Thai ice cream company owned by Unilever has apologized for using a derogatory term for gay men in a Facebook posting marking the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on same-sex marriage, according to a spokeswoman. The post on the Facebook page of Wall's Thailand, which was quickly removed, showed black-bean-flavored ice cream with the caption #LOVEWINS — the hashtag used by supporters of the court verdict. "Black beans" is a demeaning slang term for gay men that originated from a famous pedophilia case in Thailand. The illustration, posted a day after the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriages, caused an online uproar in Thailand, with some commentators calling it "low" and "discriminatory." On Twitter, some users condemning the illustration included the hashtag #RIPWallsThailand in their tweets. Wall's Thailand replaced the post with a new picture of rainbow-colored ice cream and issued an apology, saying they were "sorry if the post created some misunderstanding" and that they "did not mean to cause discomfort to anyone." Unilever Thai spokeswoman Aranya Luepradid confirmed that the apology came from the company. Wall's Thailand is part of Unilever, the Anglo-Dutch consumer goods conglomerate that also makes Ben & Jerry's ice cream. Thailand is one of the most tolerant countries in Asia for gays and a top gay tourist destination.

North Korea says drought is worst in 100 years

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea says it has been hit by its worst drought in a century, resulting in extensive damage to agriculture. The official Korean Central News Agency said the drought has caused about 30 percent of its rice paddies to dry up. Rice plants normally need to be partially submerged in water during the early summer. "Recently in our country, there has been a severe drought with sudden extremely high temperatures and nearly no rain," Ri Yong Nam, a senior North Korean weather official, told The Associated Press. "Now the drought is causing a water shortage and great damage to agriculture, and we foresee this drought will continue for a while." He said temperatures in May were 9°-12° Fahrenheit higher than normal. Both North and South Korea have had unusually dry weather this year. South Korea's Unification Ministry said precipitation in North Korea was abnormally low in May, and food production could decline significantly if the shortage continues. However, a ministry official said he couldn't confirm North Korea's claim that it was experiencing its worst drought in a century. The United Nations said in a report in April that about 70 percent of North Korea's people face food insecurity, and more than a quarter of children under age five experience chronic malnutrition.

Vietnam waives visas for five countries to boost tourism

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Under a decision by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung that was posted on the government's website, visitors from Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain will no longer need a visa to visit Vietnam for stays up to 15 days. The decision was welcomed by tour operators. "This is very good news," Hoang Le Quyen of PeaceTours said by telephone from the southern commercial hub of Ho Chi Minh City. "It will definitely help bring foreign tourists to Vietnam." Quyen said it would be better if the visa-free period was extended to 30 days, as Vietnam competes in tourism with regional countries, such as Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia, which do offer the longer period for visitors from many countries. Currently, Vietnam gives reciprocal visa exemptions to nine countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and unilaterally gives visa-free entrance to visitors from four Nordic countries, plus Russia, Belarus, Japan, and South Korea. The communist government is considering giving visa exemptions to more countries. Last year, nearly 8 million foreigners visited Vietnam, but arrivals dropped by nearly 13 percent in the first five months of this year to about 3.3 million, according to government figures. Visitors from China saw a big drop of 30 percent after the parking of a giant Chinese oil rig near the Paracel islands last summer sparked widespread anti-China protests in Vietnam. The number of tourists from Russia declined by 16 percent while arrivals from other European countries dropped by seven percent.

North Korea claims it has cure for MERS, Ebola, and AIDS

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea says it has succeeded where the greatest minds in science have failed. The authoritarian, impoverished nation better known for pursuing a nuclear program despite global criticism has announced it has a drug that can prevent and cure MERS, Ebola, SARS, and AIDS. The secretive state did not provide proof, and the claim is likely to provoke widespread skepticism. The official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said scientists developed Kumdang-2 from ginseng grown from fertilizer mixed with rare-earth elements. According to the pro-North Korea website Minjok Tongshin, the drug was originally produced in 1996. "Malicious virus infections like SARS, Ebola, and MERS are diseases that are related to immune systems, so they can be easily treated by Kumdang-2 injection drug, which is a strong immune reviver," KCNA said. North Korea shut out foreign tourists for half a year with some of the world's strictest Ebola controls, even though no cases of the disease were reported anywhere near the country, before lifting the restrictions earlier this year. It is believed to be struggling to combat diseases such as tuberculosis, and respiratory infections are among its most common causes of death, according to the World Health Organization. North Korea trumpeted the same drug during deadly bird flu outbreaks in 2006 and 2013. The North's claim comes as rival South Korea fights an outbreak of MERS that has killed at least two dozen people and sickened more than 160 since May.



QUAKE AFTERMATH. Nepalese people sit on a bench in front of damaged buildings at Basantapur Durbar Square in Kathmandu, Nepal. Nepal has reopened most of the cultural heritage sites that were damaged in a pair of devastating earthquakes, hoping to lure back foreign tourists. (AP Photo/Niranjan Shrestha)

Quake-hit Nepal reopens damaged heritage sites for tourists

By Binaj Gurubacharya
The Associated Press

BHAKTAPUR, Nepal — Nepal has reopened most of the cultural heritage sites that were damaged in a pair of devastating earthquakes, hoping to lure back foreign tourists.

The April 25 and May 12 quakes killed more than 8,700 people and damaged hundreds of thousands of buildings in Nepal, including old temples, palaces, and other historical structures that are popular with tourists.

Six of the seven UNESCO World Heritage sites closed after the quakes were reopened last month, tourism minister Kripasur Sherpa said.

"We are urging people to come to Nepal for holiday to help Nepal rebuild," Sherpa said in Bhaktapur, a city outside of Kathmandu filled with ancient temples, and which is among the reopened heritage sites.

The sites were closed due to the damage from the quakes, but also over concerns about the safety of tourists.

Bhesh Narayan Dahal, chief of Nepal's

Japan aims to resume Antarctic whaling later this year

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan says it plans to resume whale hunts in the Antarctic later this year, even though the International Whaling Commission (IWC) says Tokyo hasn't proven that the mammals need to be killed for research.

The IWC's Scientific Committee said in a report that it wasn't able to determine whether lethal sampling is necessary for whale stock management and conservation. In April, an IWC experts' panel made similar comments

Department of Archaeology, said that measures have been taken to ensure that tourists are safe, and that there are plans to provide safety helmets for visitors in some places.

Some 741 heritage structures were damaged in the quakes, and it will take at least \$18 million to rebuild and restore them, Dahal said.

Nepal is hosting an international donors' meeting in Kathmandu, the capital, to seek money to help rebuild the Himalayan country following the quakes.

About 800,000 foreign tourists visit Nepal every year and the government is worried that a fear of earthquakes will stop many from visiting.

UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural heritage organization, had raised concerns about the reopening of the heritage sites, urging tourists to be extra cautious and reconsider visiting them.

The agency also asked the government to restrict tourists' access to locations where structures had collapsed and that were still considered unsafe.

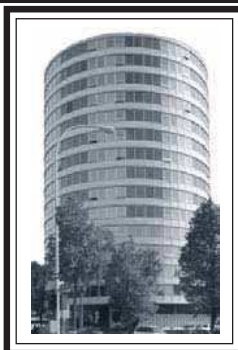
about a revised Japanese Antarctic whaling plan submitted after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled last year that Japan's earlier hunts were not truly scientific.

The IWC banned commercial whaling in 1986, but Japan continued killing whales under an exemption for research. After the ICJ's ruling, Japan sent a nonlethal expedition to the Antarctic for the 2014 season.

Japanese officials said they will submit additional data to support their argument. They said Japan still plans to resume whaling

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Hong Kong Dollar	7.7524
Indian Rupee	63.439
Indonesian Rupiah	13320
Iranian Rial	29160
Japanese Yen	122.82
Laos New Kip	8118.5
Malaysian Ringgit	3.7795
Nepal Rupee	101.93
Pakistani Rupee	101.74
Papua N.G. Kina	2.751
Philippine Peso	45.046
Russian Ruble	55.783
Saudi Riyal	3.7504
Singapore Dollar	1.3477
South Korean Won	1123.0
Sri Lankan Rupee	133.65
Taiwan Dollar	30.883
Thai Baht	33.781
Vietnam Dong	21805