



Aceh region bans unmarried couples at same café tables

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia (AP) — A district in Indonesia's deeply conservative Aceh province has banned unmarried couples from sitting at the same table in restaurants, cafés, and coffee shops. The head of the district's Islamic affairs office, Jufliwani, said the measure also forbids restaurants, cafés, and coffee shops from serving female customers after 9:00pm if they are not accompanied by their husbands, fathers, or brothers. He said the regulation, which was issued in August in Bireuen district, also prohibits restaurants and coffee shops from hiring lesbians, gays, bisexual, or transgender people as waiters or waitresses. Aceh is the only province in Muslim-majority Indonesia that practices Islamic Shariah law, a concession made by the central government in 2001 as part of efforts to end a decades-long war for independence.

China move points to possible end of birth limits

BEIJING (AP) — China is eliminating a trio of agencies responsible for enforcing family-planning policies in a further sign the government may be planning to scrap long-standing limits on the number of children its citizens can have. The move was part of a reorganization of the National Health Commission that creates a new single department called the Division of Population Monitoring and Family Development. Alarmed by the rapidly aging population and shrinking workforce, China abandoned the notorious one-child policy two years ago to allow two children, but the effect on the birthrate has been less than expected. There were 17.2 million births in the country last year, down from 17.9 million in 2016. Meanwhile, the proportion of the population age 60 or older increased last year to 17.3 percent.

Philippine president vents anger toward fierce critic on TV

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — The Philippine president has vented his anger toward his fiercest political critic on a TV talk show, prompting opposition calls for him to focus instead on worsening inflation, rice shortages, and an approaching powerful typhoon. President Rodrigo Duterte attempted to explain the legal offensive he launched against opposition senator Antonio Trillanes IV. He linked Trillanes' political group to an alleged plot to oust him, and said he has ordered the release of intelligence provided by a foreign government about the alleged plan. Opposition senator Risa Hontiveros responded that Duterte "should snap out of his fantasy with destabilization plots, roll up his sleeves, and start working."

DJ mounts challenge of colonial-era anti-gay law

SINGAPORE (AP) — A Singaporean disc jockey (DJ) is challenging a law that bans sex between men, a holdover from British colonial days that conservatives insist on keeping but authorities have promised not to enforce. The case brought by Johnson Ong, whose stage name is DJ Big Kid, is the first against the anti-gay law since an appeal by three people was thrown out by the Supreme Court in 2014. The law, known as Section 377A, states that acts of "gross indecency" between men are punishable with a jail term of up to two years. Homosexuality is quietly tolerated in Singapore. However, discrimination remains rife, although it is often subtle and masked under the need to protect a pro-family Asian culture.

Vietnam's capital urges residents to stop eating dog meat

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Authorities in Vietnam's capital are urging residents to stop eating dog meat because it hurts the city's image and improper raising and slaughtering of the animals could spread rabies. For many Vietnamese, dog meat is a delicacy that is thought to increase stamina. Hanoi vice mayor Nguyen Van Suu said in a message on the city's website that slaughtering and consuming dog and cat meat are disturbing to foreigners and "negatively impact the image of a civilized and modern capital." Suu instructed local governments to raise awareness of the risk of rabies when raising dog and cat meat. The move is part of a national program to stamp out rabies by 2021. Nguyen Thi Minh, who has run a dog meat restaurant in Hanoi for more than 20 years, said there are no risks of rabies because her restaurant selects healthy dogs and the meat is properly cooked. "People eat dog meat and there's no problem," she said. "I serve customers from South Korea, the United States, and other countries." Officials say there are 493,000 dogs and cats in Hanoi, of which more than 10 percent are raised for commercial purposes.

Muslim lesbian couple caned in public punishment

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Two Malaysian Muslim women convicted under Islamic laws for attempting to have sexual intercourse have been caned in a rare public whipping that was slammed by rights activists as a grave miscarriage of justice. Lawyers and activists say more than 100 people witnessed the caning in a Sharia court in northeast Terengganu state. Muslim Lawyers' Association deputy president Abdul Rahim Sinwan said the women, 22 and 32 years old, were given six strokes from a light rattan cane on their backs by female prison officers. He said the caning wasn't harsh and was meant to educate the women so they will repent. But women's groups called the caning "a form of torture" and warned it could worsen discrimination against people in Malaysia's lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgendered community. Malaysia follows a dual-track justice system. Nearly two-thirds of Malaysia's 31 million people are Muslims, who are governed by Islamic courts in family, marriage, and personal issues. The two unidentified women were discovered by Islamic officials in April and sentenced in August by a Shariah court to six strokes of a cane and a fine after pleading guilty.



CLIMATE-CONTROLLED CROPS. Choi Jae Bin, the head of NextOn, talks about his farm's crop cultivation system next to sesame leaves growing on vertically stacked styrofoam at the tunnel-based vertical indoor NextOn farm in Okcheon, South Korea. The high-tech farm inside a former tunnel in South Korea is seen as a potential solution to the havoc wreaked on crops by the extreme weather linked to climate change, and to shortages of land and workers as the country ages. (AP Photo/Han Myung Oh)

As temperatures rise, farmers plant crops in S. Korean tunnel

By Jung-Yoon Kim
The Associated Press

OKCHEON, South Korea — Behind a blue wall that seals a former highway tunnel stretches a massive indoor farm bathed in rose-tinted light.

Fruits and vegetables grow hydroponically — with no soil — in vertically stacked layers inside, illuminated by neon-pink LEDs instead of sunlight.

Operators of the high-tech facility in South Korea say it is the world's first indoor vertical farm built in a tunnel. It's also the largest such farm in the country and one of the biggest in the world, with a floor area of 25,000 square feet, nearly half the size of an American football field.

Indoor vertical farming is seen as a potential solution to the havoc wreaked on crops by the extreme weather linked to climate change and to shortages of land and workers in countries with aging populations.

The tunnel, about 120 miles south of Seoul, was built in 1970 for one of South Korea's first major highways. Once a symbol of the country's industrialization, it closed in 2002. An indoor farming company rented the tunnel from the government last year and transformed it into a "smart farm."

Instead of the chirrups of cicadas, Claude Debussy's "Clair de Lune" resonates in the tunnel in hopes of stimulating the crops' healthy growth.

"We are playing classical music because vegetables also love listening to music like we do," said Choi Jae Bin, head of NextOn, the company that runs the vertical farm.

Sixty types of fruits and vegetables grow in optimized conditions using NextOn's own growth and harvest systems. Among them, 42

are certified as no-pesticide, no-herbicide, and non-GMO products, said Dave Suh, NextOn's chief technology officer.

He said the tunnel provides temperatures of 10° to 22° Celsius (50° to 72° Fahrenheit), enabling the company to optimize growing conditions.

High-tech smart farms, used also in places like Dubai and Israel where growing conditions are challenging, can be a key to developing sustainable agriculture, experts said.

"Society is aging and urbanization is intensifying as our agricultural workforce is shrinking," said Son Jung Eek, a professor of plant science at Seoul National University. Smart farming can help address that challenge, he said, as well as make it easier to raise high-value crops that are sensitive to temperature and other conditions.

Only slightly more than 16 percent of South Korea's land was devoted to farming in 2016, according to government statistics. The rural population has fallen by almost half over the past four decades, even as the overall population has grown nearly 40 percent.

The Agriculture Ministry announced earlier this year that it will invest in smart farm development nationwide, expanding their total area to 17,000 acres from the current 9,900 acres.

Turning a profit can be challenging for indoor vertical farms given the high cost of construction and infrastructure. NextOn cut construction costs in half by using the abandoned tunnel and developing its own LED lights and other technologies.

The proprietary technologies reduce water and energy use and the need for workers, cutting operation costs, Suh said. Sensors in

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Hong Kong Dollar	7.8439
Indian Rupee	71.869
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Japanese Yen	111.98
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Nepal Rupee	115.85
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Papua N.G. Kina	3.263
Philippine Peso	53.971
Russian Ruble	67.925
Saudi Riyal	3.7578
Singapore Dollar	1.371
South Korean Won	1117.9
Sri Lankan Rupee	163.77
Taiwan Dollar	30.776
Thai Baht	32.604
Vietnam Dong	23273