



Indian company buys famous U.K. toy retailer Hamleys

LONDON (AP) — An Indian company says it has agreed to take over the famous toy retailer Hamleys. Reliance Brands in Mumbai said in a statement that it would buy Hamleys Global Holdings, the owner of the Hamleys brand, from C Banner International of Hong Kong for an undisclosed sum. The deal would include the flagship Hamleys store on London’s Regent Street, which opened in 1881 and remains a tourist attraction in the British capital. Hamleys was founded in 1760 and has 167 stores in 18 countries. Reliance Brands already had the franchise for 88 Hamleys stores in India. Reliance Brands chief executive Darshan Mehta said the acquisition places the company in the “forefront of global retail.” It is part of Reliance Industries, whose chairman is Indian tycoon Mukesh Ambani.

Malaysia cuts interest rate for first time in three years

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Malaysia’s central bank has cut interest rates for the first time in nearly three years to help support growth and counter risks from a global slowdown, trade tensions, and extended weakness in commodity prices. Bank Negara Malaysia said it decided to reduce its overnight policy rate, used by banks to calculate interest rates, to 3.0 percent from 3.25. The rate was last cut by a quarter-basis point to 3.0 percent in July 2016, but was raised back to 3.25 percent in January 2018. The central bank forecast the economy will expand between 4.3 and 4.8 percent this year. It said in a statement that there are signs of tightening of financial conditions and that the rate adjustment was to “preserve the degree of monetary accommodativeness.”

World’s biggest beer maker looks to list shares in Asia

BRUSSELS (AP) — AB Inbev, the world’s biggest brewer and the owner of brands like Bud and Stella Artois, is considering listing some of the shares of its Asian business on the Hong Kong stock exchange. The company, which is based in the Belgian town of Leuven, said the move would lower its high debt levels and allow it to consider more acquisitions in the region. AB Inbev is worth about \$172 billion and its Asian operations are reportedly worth as much as a third of that. It owns massive brands like Bud from its takeover of Anheuser-Busch in 2008, as well as Corona, Becks, and Fosters. It further established its dominance in the market in 2015 when it bought its next biggest rival, SABMiller.

Perdue barbecues to sell Japan on buying more U.S. beef

TOKYO (AP) — U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue has picked up his barbeque tongs to convey his message to Japan: Buy more American beef. Perdue said that as a top consumer of U.S. beef, Japan should treat the U.S. fairly. He said he hoped U.S. President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will strike a trade deal during his boss’s visit to Japan. Japan’s limits on imports of meat and other farm products have been a recurring issue in years-long trade talks with the U.S. The Trump administration worries that Japan will buy more from other nations that have signed trade deals with Japan in recent years, such as Australia and Europe. Japan, a country of 126 million, is the fourth largest market for U.S. agricultural products.

Philippines recalls envoys in Canada over trash shipments

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — The Philippine foreign secretary says the ambassador and consuls in Canada are being recalled over Ottawa’s failure to take back truckloads of garbage that Filipino officials say were illegally shipped to the Philippines years ago. President Rodrigo Duterte threatened to forcibly ship the containers of garbage back to Canada and dump some at its embassy in Manila. More than 100 containers of household trash, including plastic bottles and bags, newspapers, and used adult diapers, were shipped from 2013 to 2014.

Malaysian PM says no timetable for handing over power

PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia (AP) — A year after his election victory, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has defended his government’s record but gave no timetable for handing over power to his successor, Anwar Ibrahim. Mahathir says there were hiccups in pushing through some reforms because of insufficient support in parliament for the required constitutional changes. The 93-year-old Mahathir has said he needed two years to fix the country’s problems after ousting a scandal-plagued government. Uncertainties over the timing of the handover rattled some investors who fear it could disrupt the economy. Mahathir told foreign journalists that he is an “interim prime minister,” but there was no fixed period for him to leave. He said the transition will be smooth as any changes by Anwar will “not be radical.”

Two climbers die, one missing on Mount Kanchenjunga

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Two Indian climbers on Nepal’s Mount Kanchenjunga fell sick and died during attempts to rescue them while a Chilean climber is missing, according to an expedition organizer. Pasang Sherpa of Peak Promotion in Kathmandu said one of the Indian climbers had scaled the world’s third tallest peak while the other was on the way up but fell sick and died. They were believed to be suffering from high altitude sickness and had frostbites, he said. The climbers identified as Biplab Baidya, 48, and Kuntal Kanrar, 46, fell ill just below the 8,586-meter (28,160-foot) summit. Other details were not available but Sherpa said attempts would be made to bring their bodies down — a difficult and exhausting task because of the steep icy slope and low levels of oxygen. Chilean Rodrigo Vivanco was also reported missing around the same area. Sherpa said they are searching for him. Hundreds of foreign climbers and their guides attempt to scale high Himalayan peaks during the popular spring climbing season in Nepal that begins around March and ends this month.



LOVE WINS. Same-sex marriage supporters gather outside the Legislative Yuan in Taipei, Taiwan. Taiwan’s legislature has voted to legalize same-sex marriage, a first in Asia and a boost for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights activists who have championed the cause for two decades. The signs in the photo read “Vote Can’t Be Defeated.” (AP Photo/Chiang Ying-ying)

Taiwan approves same-sex marriage in first for Asia

By Ralph Jennings
The Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — Taiwan’s legislature has voted to legalize same-sex marriage, a first in Asia and a boost for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights activists who have championed the cause for two decades.

Lawmakers pressured by LGBT groups as well as church organizations opposed to the move approved most of a government-sponsored bill that recognizes same-sex marriages and gives couples many of the tax, insurance, and child-custody benefits available to male-female married couples.

That makes Taiwan the first place in Asia with a comprehensive law both allowing and laying out the terms of same-sex marriage.

“It’s a breakthrough, I have to say so. I could not imagine that could happen in just a few years,” said Shiau Hong-chi, professor of gender studies and communications management at Shih-Hsin University in Taiwan.

“Taiwan’s action today should sound a clarion call, kicking off a larger movement across Asia to ensure equality for LGBT people and pro-active protection of their rights by governments throughout the region,” Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch, wrote on Twitter. “No more excuses!”

Thousands of people, including same-sex couples, demonstrated in the rainy streets outside parliament before the vote. Many carried rainbow-colored placards reading “the vote cannot fail.” About 50 opponents sat under a tent outside parliament and gave speeches favoring marriage between only men and women.

Taiwan’s Constitutional Court in May 2017 said the constitution allows same-sex

marriages and gave parliament two years to adjust laws accordingly.

The court order mobilized LGBT advocacy groups pushing for fair treatment, as well as opponents among church groups and advocates of traditional Chinese family values that stress the importance of marriage and producing offspring.

Religion, conservative values, and political systems that discourage LGBT activism have stopped momentum toward same-sex marriage in many Asian countries from Japan through much of Southeast Asia, although Thailand is exploring the legalization of same-sex civil partnerships.

Taiwan’s acceptance of gay and lesbian relationships began in the 1990s when leaders in today’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party championed the cause to help Taiwan stand out in Asia as an open society.

Although claimed by China as its own territory, Taiwan is a self-governing democracy with a vibrant civil society dedicated to promoting rights for sexual and ethnic minorities, women, the handicapped, and others.

Ruled by the authoritarian Communist Party, China remains much more conservative and officials have repeatedly discouraged even the discussion of legalizing same-sex marriage.

Opponents in Taiwan raised fears of incest, insurance scams, and children confused by having two mothers or two fathers. Both sides of the issue have held colorful street demonstrations and lobbied lawmakers.

In November 2018, a majority of Taiwan voters rejected same-sex marriage in an advisory referendum. However, legislators favoring the bill, and voting separately on each item largely along party lines, said it followed the law as well as the spirit of the referendum.

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Units per U.S. dollar as of 5/17	
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Cambodian Riel	4049.9
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Fijian Dollar	2.1358
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8496
Indian Rupee	70.278
Indonesian Rupiah	14484
Iranian Rial	42024
Japanese Yen	109.87
Laos New Kip	8630.4
Malaysian Ringgit	4.175
Nepal Rupee	113.05
Pakistani Rupee	147.5
Papua N.G. Kina	3.377
Philippine Peso	52.635
Russian Ruble	64.711
Saudi Riyal	3.7497
Singapore Dollar	1.3766
South Korean Won	1192.8
Sri Lankan Rupee	175.83
Taiwan Dollar	31.321
Thai Baht	31.83
Vietnam Dong	23221