

News from Taiwan, Germany and Philippines

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The aim of the legislation is to protect young people by stopping them from using electronic devices for more than 30 minutes at a time (Photo: Sean Sprague/Alamy)

TAIWAN – Government orders parents to limit children’s time with electronic games

Parents in Taiwan are now legally obliged to stop their children from spending too much time using “electronic products” such as video games and televisions.

Under rules passed last Friday [Jan. 23] by Taiwanese politicians, children under the age of two should be completely banned from using electronic devices, Xinhua, China’s official news agency reported.

Meanwhile under-18s should not be allowed to “constantly use electronic products for a period of time that is not reasonable.” It means electronic products are now listed alongside cigarettes and alcohol as potentially dangerous vices.

The new regulation is the brainchild of **Lu Shiow-yen**, a Taiwanese member of parliament who said his intention was to protect young people by stopping them from using electronic devices for more than 30 minutes at a time.

Parents who break the rules can be hit with fines of up to about £1,000 (\$1,503) although it remains unclear how authorities will determine what amount of time is unreasonable.



Taiwan is not the first Asian country to take action against the apparent [dangers] of addiction to the internet and online games.

China, which now has 648 million internet users, at least 24 million young “web junkies” and a rocketing number of internet addiction camps, has spent years trying to devise measures to help goggle-eyed children.

In 2010, Beijing introduced rules requiring games companies “to develop techniques that would limit the gaming time of minors in order to prevent addiction”, according to Xinhua.

Those steps have included penalizing those playing online role-playing games by reducing their characters’ abilities if they play for more than a certain period of time.

In December 2013, Shanghai’s government introduced laws stating that, “parents or other custodians should prevent and stop minors from smoking, drinking alcohol, roaming the streets, or being overindulgent with online and electronic games.”

In the neighboring province of Zhejiang, parents are told to follow guidelines by which they must “instruct and educate minors to correctly choose and use internet material and not to be overindulgent” with their use of such systems.

ZIMBABWE – Robert Mugabe, 90, becomes African Union chairman

Ninety-year-old **Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe**, one of Africa’s most *divisive* figures, ascended to the rotating chairmanship of the **African Union (AU)** on Friday, January 30, casting a shadow over the continental body’s relations with the West.



Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, Africa's oldest president at 90, took over the rotating post of African Union chairman on Friday.

The only leader Zimbabwe has known since independence from Britain in 1980 assumed the largely ceremonial role when he was handed the AU flag and gavel at a summit in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

In his acceptance speech, Mugabe, Africa's oldest head of state, spoke of the need to guard against foreigners exploiting the continent's mineral wealth and called for more assistance for African farmers.

"African resources should belong to Africa and to no one else, except to those we invite as friends. Friends we shall have, yes, but imperialists and colonialists no more," he said, to applause from his peers.

In some corners, Mugabe is feted as a *nationalist hero* who triumphed over colonial power Britain on the battlefield and at the ballot box, and who remained steadfast in his commitment to the promotion of black African power in the 34 years since.



“Zimbabwe is an important member state, a very committed country,” Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra told Reuters on the sidelines of the summit.

In other corners, however, he is seen as a *despotic pariah* responsible for **human rights abuses, rigged elections and turning one of Africa’s most promising nations [known as the “bread basket” of Africa] into a basket case.**

“Mugabe has trashed democracy in Zimbabwe and he and his party have ruined the economy,” said Obert Gutu, a spokesman for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the Zimbabwean capital Harare. “He lacks the political legitimacy to lead an Africa that should be looking to consolidate democracy and good governance.”

It is a view shared in the European Union and United States, which imposed travel and financial sanctions on Mugabe and his acolytes after election victories over the MDC in 2002 and 2008 marred by violence and charges of vote-rigging and intimidation.

Mugabe denies any wrongdoing.

Some Western nations were “not thrilled” about Mugabe’s appointment, a Western diplomat who follows African affairs said, though adding that it would not disrupt relations with the AU. “We are working with the African Union regardless of the president,” the diplomat added.

As AU chairman, Mugabe can influence topics for debate although other leaders and commissions also frame discussions.

Piers Pigou, southern Africa director for the International Crisis Group think tank, *said the continent needed to show it was improving the quality of its democracies*, but that it was not only Mugabe who was likely to dodge such questions. “Which African leader, if they were made chairperson of the AU, would stick their neck out and push such an agenda?”

PHILIPPINES – President vows justice for police but warns on anger

Philippine President **Benigno Aquino** on Friday, January 30 promised justice for 44 policemen killed in a clash with Muslim rebels but, underscoring his calls for the violence not to derail peace efforts, warned against an angry response to the violence.

The government has described the clash on Sunday, which shattered a three-year ceasefire, as a “misencounter” during a bid by police to arrest two wanted militants who had taken refuge with **Moro Islamic Liberation Front** fighters.



A 2009 photo of one of the 44 policemen killed in a clash with Muslim rebels on Sunday January 25th, 2015.

Aquino has urged legislators not to abandon a plan for an *autonomous* Muslim region in the south of the mainly Catholic state, the next step in ending the rebels’ 45-year insurgency which has killed 120,000 people.

He told relatives and colleagues of the dead that an inquiry would uncover the truth and determine who was responsible.

“We will do our utmost to gain justice for all those who perished and for the loved ones they left behind,” Aquino said in a eulogy for the dead at a police camp.

But he cautioned against any rash decisions.

“As President, even if I want to be angry, I cannot allow myself to be carried away by my emotions. If I were to let my anger dictate my actions, then perhaps instead of resolving the problem, I would only exacerbate it.”

Aquino said this week he was committed to peace with the rebels and many more people would die if the peace process was derailed.



Hundreds of policemen demanding justice marched to the police base where Aquino spoke. Retired generals have called for the peace talks to be suspended.

The rebels have agreed to disband and give up their weapons in exchange for autonomy. They have justified their action against the police as self-defence but said they remained committed to peace.

Earl Parreno, an analyst at Institute for Political and Electoral Reforms, said it was not clear how Aquino could keep his promise for justice and keep the peace. “I really don’t know how the president will exact justice without affecting the peace talks,” he said. “I’m sure the rebels would resist it.”

Aquino said a prayer at each of 44 flag-draped caskets, and met relatives of the dead. He presented families with a medal and promised financial help.

“All I ask right now is justice, not only for my husband, but for everyone who fought and fell,” said widow Erica Pabalinas. “Please, sir president. Please help us.”

(The news briefs above are from wire reports and staff reports posted at London’s Daily Telegraph on Jan. 28 and Reuters on Jan. 30.)