

## ASIA

**The August verdict in Burma (Myanmar)** against democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi has focused new attention on general elections slated for next year as part of the country's self-professed move toward democracy. Ms. Suu Kyi – who has spent 14 of the past 20 years under house arrest – was sentenced to an additional 18 months for admitting American John Yettaw to her home after he swam across a lake to meet her. The move probably silences her ahead of a vote that few expect to meaningfully loosen the military regime's grip on power. But does it mean continued international support for current sanctions? Sen. James Webb (D) of Virginia, who met last month with Suu Kyi and obtained the release of Mr. Yettaw, argues that sanctions have served only to drive Burma toward China. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has suggested they could be eased. The Burmese government in exile, meanwhile, has urged the US to hold firm. Regardless, the junta may have greater concerns at home: Fighting between Burmese troops and rebels has caused thousands to cross the border into China recently, according to Chinese reports.

## AFRICA

**Somalia's conflict is threatening** to engulf the country as moderate and militant Islamists battle for control of the rubble-strewn streets of the capital, Mogadishu. The fighting has forced more than 1.4 million Somalis to flee their homes in the past few months in what the United Nations recently called the country's worst humanitarian crisis in 18 years of civil war. More than ever, the conflict threatens to spill into neighboring Kenya. Read the Monitor's in-depth story on how Kenya's 'Little Mogadishu' has become a hub for Somali militants at: <http://bit.ly/littlemog>.



ISLAMISTS IN MOGADISHU AP

## UNITED STATES

**US efforts to improve relations with Muslim nations** could be set back this month when the International Atomic Energy Agency takes up a resolution to ban military strikes against nuclear power plants. At least 100 nations from the Nonaligned Movement – many of them Muslim countries – have signed a letter backing the resolution, submitted by Iran for action at the IAEA's general conference Sept. 14. Tehran's initiative appears to be aimed at Israel, which has not precluded bombing Iran's nuclear installations if other international actions don't stop Iran's progress. American opposition to the stance of the Muslim countries could diminish the Obama administration's hopes for progress toward Middle East peace, for which it has labored to enlist the support of key Arab countries.

# Dispatches from all over

## FRANKFURT, GERMANY



### Fake candidate polls well

Life these days isn't easy for Angela Merkel and her social democratic challenger in the Sept. 27 elections for chancellorship, Frank-Walter Steinmeier. As the parliamentary elections near, polls reveal people feel this is one of the most boring election campaigns in memory. The Germans just don't care about their politicians.

Except, perhaps, for one. His name is Horst Schlämmer and he's hugely popular these days. Like Mr. Steinmeier and Ms. Merkel, he wants the chancellor's job – but with his own party, which stands for "Left, Liberal, Conservative, and a bit ecological," and a platform that includes free plastic surgery for all, voting age at 12, and a monthly wage of 2,500 euros from cradle to grave. According to a recent poll by Stern Magazine, 18 percent of those surveyed could see themselves voting for Mr. Schlämmer. If only they could.

But Schlämmer cannot be elected. He is a fictitious candidate played by one of Germany's best-known comedians, Hape Kerkeling, in a new film that mocks this year's campaign.

In the film, Schlämmer, the unhappy deputy editor of a daily paper in a depressed town, decides to run for chancellor. Perhaps more than his political platform, everything about him – his dialect, his ugly moustache, and his habit of burping in public – makes him unconventional. His campaign slogan: "Yes, weekend!"

Since its release in the heat of the campaign earlier this month, "I'm a candidate," has created a media buzz that's stirring up an election discourse



FRANKA BURNS/AP

Comedian Hape Kerkeling as candidate Horst Schlämmer.

observers say is devoid of substance.

"Horst Schlämmer is the right man with the right message at the right time," says Bernd Gäbler, a media specialist for the magazine Stern. "It's a liberating laughter at a time when people feel politicians don't answer major questions, he's a parody of a campaign that leaves behind a huge vacuum."

– Isabelle de Pommereau, correspondent

## CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND



### Trendy urban livestock

The biggest problem with raising cows in the city is the people. "It's just worrying about the number of people that go past them every day," says Angelika von Heimendahl, owner and proprietor of CamCattle, who for three years has been grazing her herd of 100 Red Polls for milk and meat between Cambridge's historic colleges and on the commons.

More than 500 people go by the 1,200-pound animals every day, and while most people are very



TROY MABEN/AP

Do city dwellers balk at hens?

respectful, some want to pet the cows. Or take pictures with them. Or run after them. Ms. Von Heimendahl, a veterinarian, is taking advantage of 600-year-old laws that allow individuals to graze livestock on common spaces. Her cattle live their entire lives within a 50-mile radius, going from barns in the fall and

winter to Cambridge commons in the spring and summer, and eventually to the butcher in town. Von Heimendahl says that the project has been very successful, despite the occasional grumbling about cow pies. "I think everybody likes the fact that there's something on the grass, there's something on the common, and they like the fact that you can buy the beef," she explains.

She is part of a growing trend of "urban farmers," people going well beyond the odd backyard tomato. Fueling the trend are new products designed to make such small-scale farming not only easy, but cool, too – products like the Eglu.

The Eglu, by a company called Omlet, is a sleek chicken coop designed to help space-starved city dwellers keep two to four hens in their backyards. Johannes Paul, cofounder of Omlet, says that over the past five years, more than 30,000 people have bought the coops. This year, the company is on track to double sales over last year, and they've just started marketing their latest design, a home apiary kit called the Beehaus.

And it's not just livestock. Gillie Westwood, chief executive of Britain's Garden Center Association, a trade organization that represents more than 200 garden centers, says that year to date, sales at garden centers have outstripped last year's by around 10 percent.

– Linda Rodriguez, contributor