SURVEY | 17 PERCENT OF HK MAIDS ENGAGED IN FORCED LABOR

Forced labor of domestic helpers ‘less likely’ in Macau

WORLD BRIEFS

CHINA plans to set up a commercial rocket-launch company in view of the market’s potential, the official Xinhua news agency reported. Sanjiang Space Group Co. is preparing to enter the commercial-rocket business with a launch slated for 2017. More on p11

AFGHANISTAN President Ashraf Ghani says the Islamic State group is “on the run” in an eastern border province where in recent months the militants had taken over some remote districts.
Manager discusses benefits of loyalty programs

TOURISM

THE British Business Association of Macau (BBAM) yesterday launched the BBAM Breakfast Business Briefings, a new initiative to commemorate its tenth anniversary, at The St. Regis Macau.

Invited speaker Janet McNab, managing director of Sheraton Grand Macao Hotel and The St. Regis Macau, shared her insights on how Starwood’s innovative loyalty programs maximize hotel occupancy rates and guest satisfaction, in a session titled: “Keeping loyalty sexy with today’s Generation Y travelers.”

BBAM’s Breakfast Business Briefings are a monthly initiative for Macau-based senior practitioners. Each briefing offers discussions of new business practices as well as networking opportunities, packaging local and international insights into a “compact format” for attendees.

McNab introduced the “Starwood Preferred Guests” (SPG) loyalty program to BBAM members and guests.

When asked how SPG deals with the Chinese market in both mainland China and Macau, McNab said, “The Chinese market is just as willing to participate, as you can see in the market is just as willing to participate, as you can see in the growth for us outside [of that region].” The growth for us particip, as you can see in the market is just as willing to participate, as you can see in the growth for us

“McNab also mentioned the distinctive qualities consumers look for when traveling: an aspect under consideration many businesses nowadays. “It's a real 'what's in it for me?' kind of society that we live in, and it's not age-specific,” the hotelier added.

Henry Brockman, Chairman of BBAM, believes that it is important for Macau to maintain good relationships with guests. “It is vital for Macau to keep its hotel visitors happy and entertained, and ensure that they tell their friends and come again,” he said.

“This event highlights BBAM’s members’ genuine interest in growing Macau’s reputation for excellence in hospitality. Through similar future events, BBAM will continue to provide its members with the opportunity to broaden their understanding and increase their competitive edge.” Brockman added. Staff reporter

Hong Kong teenage suicides draw local attention

A situation involving students committing suicide in Hong Kong has come to public attention in Macau. The Education and Youth Bureau (DSEJ) recently held a workshop to encourage schools to send students with potential suicidal inclinations to psychologists and counselors.

Cases of student suicide have been increasing in frequency. Twenty-two students in Hong Kong have reportedly killed themselves since last September. More than half of these cases involved high school students. Cheong Pek U, consultant senior officer at the Centre of Psycho-educational Support and Special Education of DSEJ, commented that these reports will affect Macau, particularly by putting pressure on education staff.

Macau and Hong Kong are neighboring regions; suicide is infectious. In 2014, 11,4 individuals per 100,000 tried to end their lives in Hong Kong.

Companies encouraged to step into e-commerce business

THE Youth Entrepreneurship Incubation Center organized a range of lectures on cross-border e-commerce over the weekend. The founders of several companies were invited to share their experiences, Journal Va Kio reported.

The large market surrounding online shopping in China has encouraged companies to step into the e-commerce business. The blend between traditional trading and online business is a novel way to develop industries, believes Sou Tim Peng, director of the Macau Economic Services. “It’s one of the paths young people, who want to establish their own business, might walk,” said Sou.

Since Macau has been trying to diversify its economy, the government is keeping an eye on the development of e-commerce, encouraging small and medium sized local businesses that are currently based around traditional trading to change to an online format and hence promote youth entrepreneurship. “The government hopes that through these lectures both companies and young people will gain a deeper understanding of e-commerce, and that we can also speed up the connections between traditional and online trading,” Sou informed.

Since last year, the center has received 570 inquiries, 48 applications asking for free temporary offices, two renewal applications, and a total of 30 enterprises received assistance in setting up new companies operating retail and catering businesses.

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**Local domestic workers ‘less likely’ to experience forced labor**

One in six migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong is a victim of forced labor, working an average of over 70 hours a week. According to a Justice Center survey of more than 1,000 domestic workers in the neighboring region, some work up to 20 hours a day.

More than 80 percent of the territory’s 336,600 domestic workers – the vast majority of whom are women from Indonesia and the Philippines – are exploited, the study says. Seventeen percent of the helpers surveyed were engaged in forced labor.

“Hong Kong must come clean; the government can no longer afford to simply sweep these problems under the carpet,” the report states.

The study found out that only a fraction reported a monthly salary of above the minimum wage, which recently rose to HKD4,210.

However, Paul Pun, secretary-general of Caritas Macau, told the Times that it is unlikely that Macau will experience the same ‘forced labor’ situation, as Filipino and Indonesian workers here choose to reside in premises separate from their employers.

“Most Filipinos choose to stay out [...], the situation is completely different. Exploitation is less likely to happen,” he said.

The Hong Kong labor law on domestic workers requires helpers to “stay in” (live at their boss’ home), increasing the risk of exploitation. “Macau residents don’t want their domestic helpers to live with them because they [want] to enjoy privacy,” he adds.

Pun admits that many domestic helpers have consulted with him regarding their situations, which often require them to work for more than eight hours. However, the helpers chose not to complain to the labor bureau.

“The moment we suggest that they go to the labor bureau, they become hesitant,” he explained.

A Filipino domestic helper, who declined to be identified, told the Times that she works for 12 hours every day for a meager salary of MOP3,300.

The helper, who starts work at 9:30 a.m., explained that she is forced to work for her employer and her employer’s daughter, who lives in another apartment.

“It’s tiring. I don’t want to go to another house to clean, but I have to because my employer says so,” she said.

“From 5 p.m. onwards, I’ll go to her daughter’s place to prepare dinner for the family. After that, I have to go back to my employer’s home to continue cleaning. I’ll only get home by 11:30 p.m.,” she added.

**LACK OF MINIMUM WAGE RAISES CONCERN**

Paul Pun says Macau should adjust the “minimum wage” rather than stating “not below MOP2,500 with a housing allowance of MOP500.” According to the Caritas head, “the human resources should periodically review the yearly work salary (of domestic workers) for them to have a clear reference salary, [...] a decent salary.”
Local association says non-Chinese media face hiring challenges

THE Association of Portuguese and English Press (AIPIM) yesterday met Victor Chan, the head of the Government Information Bureau (GCS) and government spokesperson, to deliver a motion about local non-Chinese media’s challenges in hiring journalists.

The motion calls for local authorities to consider speeding up the treatment of requests to hire media professionals or renew related work permits.

The motion suggests that companies need to hire journalists from outside Macau, considering that in Macau, there aren’t tertiary education institutions providing enough training for journalists able to work in the Portuguese and English media in Macau.

The association submits that local authorities have presented obstacles in the process of hiring foreign journalists.

According to AIPIM, Victor Chan received the motion and said he would pass it to the appropriate authorities, namely the Human Resources Office and the Public Security Police Force.

On a separate matter, the association announced the date of a gathering at which journalists will debate a code of ethics and their own legal status. Drafts of both documents were released to members yesterday.

The meeting will take place in the Rui Cunha Foundation headquarters at 10 a.m. April 9. The decision to hold the gathering - which is open to all journalists - was made during the last General Assembly of AIPIM, held on March 3.

The vice-chairman of the Fu Lun Youth Association of Macau, together with two members of Macau Women’s General Association (AGMM), are attending the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women that is taking place at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York from March 14 to 24.

Macao Daily News reported that this is the first time that AGMM will join the event. The association will be participating as a non-government organization (NGO). The two delegates were chosen among participants from the organization’s own International Affairs Training Program, which started activities in 2014, aiming to improve personal competiveness and social skills of women in Macau.

According to one of the delegates, Ruby O, who is currently working at a local hotel, neighboring regions and countries ran a series of examinations to select the most qualified candidate to represent their country at the UN event. “I feel honored and lucky to have been chosen to speak for Macau. When I was preparing for the meeting, I realized that Macau is doing well in terms of gender equality,” she said.
Chui Sai Cheong struggles with Mandarin in Beijing

A Macau lawmaker speaking at the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in Beijing has caught netizens’ attention for his strong accent. A television clip, which has gone viral on social media, shows Chui Sai Cheong – the elder brother of Chief Executive Chui Sai On – struggling to express his opinions in Mandarin as he talked about Beijing’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative and the 13th Five-Year Plan at the meeting on Sunday, according to a report by news website hkw.com.

The Macau delegate to the CPPCC was said to have slightly changed his Cantonese pronunciation to sound like Mandarin.

Netizens were seemingly more interested in his strong accent than the contents of his speech. Other netizens who viewed the clip, which reportedly went viral after being broadcast by TV channels, admired Chui and his younger brother for being “courageous” enough to speak Mandarin on significant occasions despite their “very heavy accent.”

Ed Insight reported that one netizen said that the younger Chui seemed to be better at Mandarin than his elder brother. Other online forum participants jokingly credited Chui for showing his love for Cantonese by speaking in the dialect during the conference. Others lampooned the speech with fake Chinese “translations” in the subtitles.

Hotel Estoril ineligible for protection

The members of the Cultural Heritage Council have overwhelmingly voted in favor of the government’s decision not to list the old Hotel Estoril for protection as a cultural heritage site. The President of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), Ung Vai Meng, told TDM that 13 delegates of the 15-member council had agreed that the deteriorating building had no architectural or historical value. Ung added that throughout the Estoril’s lifetime, the building had undergone numerous architectural revisions and had now lost the cultural characteristics it once had. However, he noted that there had been not been a decision on whether the iconic façade of the building would be preserved.

Another council member, Carlos Marreiros, admitted to the broadcaster that demolishing the hotel is now the most likely course of action. The Hotel Estoril, located in Tap Seac Square, opened in the 1960s but has been in disrepair for more than two decades. Meanwhile the government is likely to move forward with its plans to transform the site into a youth center and a space of cultural and educational activities.
Infectious diseases facility ‘arranged behind the scenes,’ accuses lawmaker

Daniel Beitler

Representatives of the Macau Civil Servants Association (ATFPM) and the New Macau Association (ANM), as well as concerned residents, held a demonstration yesterday in St. Francisco Garden and on the rooftop of a residential building to protest the construction of a proposed infectious diseases facility.

The proposed building – which the government says will allow health services to act promptly and effectively to counter potential outbreaks of infectious diseases – has been slated for construction in downtown Macau near the Conde S. Januário Hospital.

The Health Bureau of Macau (SSM) has announced its intention to demolish at least two buildings and construct what demonstrators describe as “an enormous 60-meter high infectious diseases center […] in a densely populated area.”

Among those in attendance yesterday were ANM president Scott Chiang and lawmakers José Pereira Coutinho, An Kam San and Ng Kuok Cheong. Coutinho was representing ATFPM, of which he was recently re-elected president.

“We agree that the building is needed, but not here,” said Coutinho. “We are really fed up with what the government has been doing here […] it is clear that the government has arranged everything behind the scenes.”

Coutinho says that the government did not consult residents in the area over the proposed construction.

“The government has already made the decision. [The fact that there has been no consultation implies] there is dirty business behind the decision,” he told reporters on the rooftop protest also expressing their alarm at the impact of the proposed building on Macau’s cultural heritage and landscape.

A demonstrator, who identified himself solely as Mr Cheang, showed “before and after” photos of Macau’s landscape and downtown area. The ‘after photo’ featured an artist’s impression of the 60-meter-high building, which noticeably altered and obstructed parts of Macau’s landscape.

The construction of the new facility will require the demolition of at least two historic buildings in downtown Macau, including a century-old building that was used as a drug rehabilitation center.

Lawmaker Coutinho said, “Having a 100-year-old building near you is a real treasure, even if it is not included in the UNESCO [World Heritage Site] listing.”

“We will never have buildings like these again,” he added.

Cultural heritage threatened

Demonstrators at yesterday’s rooftop protest also expressed their alarm at the impact of the proposed building on Macau’s cultural heritage and landscape.

A demonstrator, who identified himself solely as Mr Cheang, showed “before and after” photos of Macau’s landscape.

The government needs to rewind and rethink.

PEREIRA COUTINHO

Alexis Tam defends project as per int’l standards

The Conde de S. Januário Hospital (CHCS) selected a group of residents, irrespective of whether or not they live near to the location of the proposed infectious disease building, and introduced to them the new facility and the Coloane hospital under construction.

During a meeting that took place after the visit, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Alexis Tam, pledged that the buildings are designed with World Health Organization (WHO) standards, they are completely safe, regardless of the facilities inside the buildings or the transportation procedures.”

Alexis Tam in addressing Mr Zhang, a resident who lives close to the proposed site of the infectious disease building, said: “We are happy that you are here today. We have been trying to invite you to talk with us on many occasions.”

Zhang posed that “if the capacity of the infectious disease buildings in the US, then on average there will be two for each state, and each state of the US is (individually) bigger than Macau.”

To this, Alexis Tam replied: “our websites provide all the needed information. [...] We thoroughly follow WHO guidelines. [...] As to the size, the US is a big country [while Macau is small. Our standards are not the same as the US standards].”

One member of ANM who was present requested the authorities to provide the public with more details of the project. In response, Alexis Tam said that they “are willing to provide the documents to the public.”

“Obviously, our government will have to explain to the public what the policies consist of […] right now, the project is under construction bidding, and for that reason we can’t publish any details at this stage.”

Staff reporter
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Investor Anbang has global ambitions
Joe McDonald, Beijing

Young, privately owned and ambitious, Anbang Insurance Group stands out in China’s staid, state-dominated insurance industry. Founded just 12 years ago, Anbang made a splash in the United States in 2014 with its USD2 billion purchase of New York City’s Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

Since then, it has plowed more billions into acquiring insurers in Belgium, the Netherlands, Iowa and South Korea. Last year, it agreed to pay $26.5 billion for Strategic Hotels & Resorts, an American hotel chain.

On Monday, it went after even bigger game, launching a surprise $14 billion bid for partly state-owned car maker Shanghai Automotive Industries Corp. The following year, a state-owned oil company, Sinopec, bought a 20 percent share.

Since then, the company says it has expanded to more than 3,000 branches with 30,000 employees worldwide serving 35 million clients. It has diversified into life insurance, banking, asset management, leasing and brokerage services.

Its global expansion coincides with encouragement from the ruling Communist Party for Chinese companies to “go abroad” to diversify away from domestic economy.

The Chinese business press has compared Wu to Warren Buffett for following the legendary American investor’s approach of using the cash flow from insurance operations to buy other businesses. But rumors also have swirled about whether Wu’s success is built at least partly on family ties or help from influential figures.

According to the Chinese press, Wu is married to Zhuo Run, a granddaughter of former supreme leader Deng Xiaoping, though the business magazine Caixin reported last year the couple had separated.

Board members have included Zhu Yunlai, the son of former Premier Zhu Rongji and a successful banker in his own right, and Yong Longtu, China’s chief negotiator in talks that led to its World Trade Organization membership, according to news reports.

Last year, the newspaper Southern Weekend reported Anbang’s real owner was Chen Xiaoluo, the son of late Chen Yi, a member of the ruling inner circle that founded the communist government in 1949.

Chen, 68, told Caixin in a separate report he had no ownership stake in Anbang but served as a consultant. He said he had been Wu’s business partner for 15 years but did not intervene in company operations.

Chen told Caixin he recommended Wu buy U.S. assets because China’s economy was slowing but America’s was recovering.

Anbang’s rapid growth in a heavily regulated economy is built partly on Wu’s skill at cultivating ties with regulators, Chinese media say.

To pay for its buying spree, Anbang raised 50 billion yuan ($8 billion) from investors in 2014, taking on dozens of new shareholders.

The Reed actuaries invested in SAIC’s stake to less than 1 percent. It also increased its registered capital fivefold to 62 billion yuan ($9.5 billion), the biggest among Chinese insurers, even though the company doesn’t rank among the top 10 property insurers or in the top 30 in life insurance.

That, combined with buying the Waldorf and other assets outside its core insurance business, has prompted suggestions in the Chinese press the company acts more like an investment fund for which insurance is a sideline.

The lightning pace of acquisitions also has prompted Chinese financial analysts to question whether it is sound or sustainable.

In a rare public appearance in December, Wu stressed his responsibility to ordinary policyholders.

“Insurance money is ordinary people’s pensions and life savings. It is what he invested in the best companies,” Wu told a business conference, the newspaper China Business Journal reported on its website. He said insurers must “protect small investors.” AP
Voters will be asked in November whether to approve two new casinos in the northern part of the state under a ballot question authorized yesterday by the Legislature. It will mark the first time in 40 years that the state’s voters will have a say about expanding casino gambling in New Jersey. And it could have far-reaching consequences for Atlantic City, which has already lost more than half its casino revenue to competitors in neighboring states.

On a packed general election ballot that also will include presidential candidates, voters will be asked whether to amend the state constitution to repeal a provision that limits casinos only to Atlantic City. It would authorize two new casinos in separate counties at least 72 miles from Atlantic City. It doesn’t specify locations, but the two most-talked-about proposals are in the Meadowlands sports complex in East Rutherford, where the NFL’s Jets and Giants play, and in Jersey City, just across the Hudson River from Manhattan.

Applications would be accepted only from casino operators presently licensed in the state. The process would be open to other operators if 60 days pass without bids. The bidders must be willing to commit USD1 billion on the projects, with a portion of revenue going to public improvements in struggling Atlantic City.

The casinos would create potential new competitors for gambling resorts in Pennsylvania, New York and Atlantic City, as well as opportunity for New Jersey’s current operators.

MGM Resorts International, which co-owns the Borgata in Atlantic City with Boyd Gaming Corp., has said it is interested in such a project. Las Vegas Sands Corp., which owns a casino in nearby Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, has said it’s interested in building a large convention center and gambling complex outside New York.

Other operators include Caesars Entertainment Corp., Atlantic City’s largest casino company with three properties; and Tropicana Entertainment Corp., controlled by billionaire Carl Icahn.

“This is a very historic day for New Jersey,” said Assemblyman Ralph Caputo, an Essex County Democrat and former casino worker. “In 1976, casinos were approved for Atlantic City. It was a monopoly that existed for many, many years; many people benefited. But conditions change, and when conditions change and you don’t adapt, you become a dinosaur and you become extinct.”

Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian, a Republican, predicted that three of his city’s eight remaining casinos will close because of new in-state competition; other officials and Wall Street analysts say as many as four could go under because of the new competition.

Supporters say the new casinos will recapture gambling money that’s now going to casinos in neighboring states and help rebuild Atlantic City.

Jeff Gural, operator of the Meadowlands Racetrack, has offered to pay a 55 percent tax on revenue at a casino he would build with Hard Rock International; Atlantic City’s casinos now pay an 8 percent tax, plus an additional 1.25 percent in mandatory redevelopment contributions.

“This will provide the funds needed to rebuild Atlantic City into a first-class destination resort while at the same time provide several hundred million dollars for seniors and money to save the horse-racing industry,” Gural told The Associated Press.

The referendum is the result of a nearly decade-long decline in Atlantic City brought about by casinos opening in neighboring Pennsylvania in late 2006, and worsened by others in New York and Delaware.

In 2006, Atlantic City’s casino revenue was $5.2 billion; last year it had fallen to $2.56 billion. In 2014, four of the city’s 12 casinos went out of business. MDT/Agencies
Tobin tax rules analysts as Citi warns of foreign exodus

ECONOMY

A Tobin tax [on yuan transactions] would be a big blow to China and it may backfire if investors decide to dump yuan assets to avoid the levy.

SEAN YOKOTA
SKANDINAViska ENSKiLDA BANKEN. SINGAPoRE

CITIZEN'S draft plan for a tax on currency trading is getting a cold reception in the foreign-exchange market. Citi Private Bank said the so-called Tobin tax on yuan transactions would reduce liquidity in a currency with bid-ask spreads that can be five times wider than those of the yen. A levy would set back China's push to make the yuan a reserve currency and could heighten investor anxiety over capital outflows, according to Commonwealth Bank. The proposal is "short sighted" and would drive away foreign investors, Citi Private Bank said.

While opposition to the tax wasn't unanimous - Franklin Templeton's Mark Mobius called it a "positive" move that will help bolster China's foreign reserves - the responses reflect growing concern that efforts to prop up the yuan could do long-term damage to the nation's financial markets. Unprecedented government intervention in the Chinese stock market has led to a plunge in volumes, while failing to spark a sustained rally.

"A Tobin tax would be a big blow to China and it may backfire if investors decide to dump yuan assets to avoid the levy," said Sean Yokota, the head of Asia strategy at Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken in Singapore. The proposal "would be moving completely in the opposite direction of letting markets set prices rather than the government," he said.

China's central bank has drafted rules for a tax on foreign-exchange transactions, a plan that still needs central government approval, people with knowledge of the matter said yesterday. The initial rate may be as low as 0.1 percent to allow authorities time to refine the rules and to deter speculators by letting them know that there is a system in place, said the people, who asked not to be identified as the discussions are private.

The People's Bank of China has been fighting to drive out traders who take advantage of the difference in the yuan's rates at home and abroad. The PBOC drove the currency's offshore borrowing costs to record highs in January, increasing short-selling costs, and instructed banks on the mainland to restrict sending yuan overseas.

Among the biggest Tobin tax concerns cited by analysts is that the levy would sap market liquidity. One gauge of the ease of trading the yuan - the currency's bid-ask spread on the dollar - was about 0.05 percent on average in March, versus 0.01 percent for the dollar-yen rate, according to data compiled by Bloomberg Intelligence.

"The Tobin tax should make investors more cautious on trading the yuan," said Ken Cheung, a currency strategist at Mizuho in Hong Kong. "This will impose an adverse impact on market liquidity and development."

The proposal comes before the yuan's planned inclusion in the International Monetary Fund's reserve-currency basket this October. Daisy Wong, a spokeswoman for the IMF in Hong Kong, wasn't able to immediately provide comment.

While people familiar with the draft rules said they aren't designed to disrupt hedging and other foreign-exchange transactions undertaken by companies, costs for those trades would probably increase anyway because more documentation will be needed to differentiate between hedging and speculation, said Charlie Chan, a former Credit Suisse Group AG proprietary trader who runs the USD50 million Splendid Asia Macro hedge fund in Singapore.

Another risk is that investors would interpret a Tobin tax as a signal that capital outflows are still a major problem, said Andy Ji, a Singapore-based foreign exchange strategist and economist at CBA. Bloomberg Intelligence estimates that $1 trillion left the nation in 2015, driven by a combination of capital flight, repayment of foreign-currency debt and purchases of overseas assets by Chinese citizens and companies.

"The levy will hurt market sentiment and make investors more panicked, as this shows that existing capital controls are not enough to curb outflows," Ji said. "Now is not a good time to roll out a Tobin tax as the market is already concerned about the likelihood that China will be able to increase capital account convertibility in the coming years, and this is another step backward to achieve that goal."

Not everyone thinks the tax is a bad idea. Mobius, the executive chairman at Templeton Emerging Markets Group, said in an interview in Kuala Lumpur that the move would help stabilize the onshore and offshore markets, which will be good for the economy.

Market reaction to the reported proposal was muted yesterday, with the yuan slipping about 0.1 percent against the dollar in both onshore and offshore trading.

"I don't think that China will end up implementing the tax," said Tommy Ong, managing director for treasury and markets at DBS Hong Kong Ltd., who cited a history of unsuccessful or aborted attempts to implement such levies in countries around the world. The Tobin tax takes its name from U.S. economist James Tobin, who in 1972 suggested a tax on financial transactions to restrict currency speculation.

In the European Union, plans for a tax on financial trades fell into disarray in December as member states argued about its impact on world markets. Brazil's embattled President Dilma Rousseff has been pushing to revive a tax on financial transactions to shore up the government's budget, but the proposal faces stiff opposition in Congress.

For Ken Peng, a Hong Kong-based Asia investment strategist at Citi Private Bank, a Tobin tax would just add to the list of reasons for foreign investors to avoid Chinese assets. Confidence in mainland markets has already been damaged by the government's attempt to prop up equities, a campaign that has failed to prevent a 19 percent slide in the Shanghai Composite Index this year.

"A main side effect is that foreign investors just won't participate in the yuan market in the future," Peng said. "When they invest in the yuan market when the economy is slowing, capital is leaving, and the system is getting more and more tightly controlled?" Bloomberg

Stocks rise for third day amid suspected state-fund buying

CHINESE stocks rode out a gain in late trading amid speculation state-backed funds intervened to support the market during annual policy meetings.

The Shanghai Composite Index rose 0.2 percent at the close, erasing a loss of as much as 1.4 percent amid turnover that was 18 percent lower than the average for PetroChina Co., long considered a target of government buying because of its large index weighting, climbed for a second day. The Shenzhen Composite Index, the fifth-most heavily weighted stock, jumped to a two-month high. China's central bank has drafted rules for a levy on foreign-exchange trading that would help curb currency speculation, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

China is stepping up intervention in its financial markets after stocks extended last year's US$5 trillion selloff and the yuan fell to a five-year low in February. The Shanghai Composite has risen 6.6 percent this month amid suspected buying by state-backed funds in some of the nation's biggest companies as policy makers gather in Beijing for the National People's Congress that closes today.

"As expected, the market staged a rebound toward the close as state institutions emerged to buy," said Castor Pang, a head of research at Core-Pacific Yamaichi Hong Kong. "The market is also waiting for some policy signals from the NPC today (Tuesday)." The Shanghai gauge climbed to 2,864.37 at the close, capping a third day of advances. Gauges of consumer-staple and utility companies rose at least 1.4 percent on the CSI 300 Index, which advanced 0.3 percent. The Hang Seng China Enterprises Index declined 0.9 percent in Hong Kong, while its benchmark Hang Seng Index lost 0.7 percent.

The yuan traded in Hong Kong fell 0.18 percent to 6.5081 a dollar, heading for its biggest two-day retreat in four weeks. The Shanghai Composite has lost 19 percent this year at yesterday's close, still the most among 93 global peers tracked by Bloomberg, Bloomberg.

Bloomberg

"A main side effect is that foreign investors just won’t participate in the yuan market in the future. When they invest in the yuan market when the economy is slowing, capital is leaving, and the system is getting more and more tightly controlled?"
**Beijing reaffirms its commitment to North Korea sanctions**

China, North Korea’s most important ally, has reaffirmed its commitment to fully implement United Nations sanctions against Pyongyang over its recent nuclear tests and missile launches.

In a phone conversation with his Japanese counterpart, Fumio Kishida, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi also called for new talks with North Korea on nuclear disarmament, China’s Foreign Ministry said yesterday.

Since agreeing to the new sanctions, China has redoubled calls for a two-track solution aiming to resolve the nuclear issue while forging a permanent peace agreement to replace the armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War.

While China remains North Korea’s biggest source of economic assistance and diplomatic support, it agreed to the imposing new measures out of frustration at Pyongyang’s defiance of both previous U.N. resolutions and Beijing’s persistent calls to avoid provocations.

The latest tensions began in January, when North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test before launching a long-range rocket.

“In discussing the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue, the two sides agreed that [...] the sanctions must be fully and completely implemented, while during the process of implementing the resolution, ways be explored into how to restore a means of resolving the peninsula nuclear issue through negotiations,” the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

In their phone conversation earlier in the week, the two foreign ministers also discussed the often-strained relations between their countries, with Wang urging Japan to make “constructive efforts” to improve ties, the ministry said.

Wang told reporters at a news conference last week that he saw “little ground for optimism” in the outlook for China-Japan relations. While giving no specifics other than Japan’s “wrong approach to history and other issues,” he accused Japanese leaders and politicians of “making trouble for China at every turn.”

Relations between the two neighbors have been generally cooling since Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe marked a restoration of high-level contacts, ties have since moved at a glacial pace. **AP**

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**China plans first commercial rocket-launch company, Xinhua says**

China plans to set up a commercial rocket-launch company in view of the market’s potential, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

China Sanjiang Space Group Co. is preparing to enter the commercial-rocket business with a launch slated for 2017, Xinhua reported yesterday, citing the company’s chief engineer Hu Shengyun.

Some Internet companies have expressed interest in collaborating on commercial launches, Hu said.

The Kuaizhou-11, translated as “fast vessel,” rocket is being developed by the Fourth Academy of China Aerospace Science & Industry Corp., a major missile supplier to the People’s Liberation Army, according to China Daily.

China, India and other Asian countries are spending billions of dollars on their space exploration projects. Asia’s growth is set to increase competition for commercial rocket-launching companies such as Arianespace as countries invest more to develop their own technology to launch satellites and spacecraft. **Bloomberg**

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**Former finance minister named future premier**

China, North Korea’s most important ally, has reaffirmed its commitment to fully implement United Nations sanctions against Pyongyang over its recent nuclear tests and missile launches. **Bloomberg**

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**Aerospace**

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**TAIWAN**

Former finance minister named future premier

**President-elect Tsai Ing-wen yesterday named a former finance minister as Taiwan’s next premier, tasked with reviving the island’s struggling economy and stabilizing relations with neighbor China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory.**

Introduced by Tsai at a news conference, Lin Chuan said his "economic and finance Cabinet," will not be just an "economics and finance Cabinet," since challenges come from all sides. Lin and Tsai will take office on May 20.

China has responded skeptically to Tsai’s January landslide election that also saw her independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party gain a decisive parliamentary majority.

Tsai has pledged no change to the status quo of tense but-stable peace and robust economic exchanges between the sides. However, China says it isn’t satisfied with that stance and insists she endorse Beijing’s claim that the two are part of a single Chinese nation.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said earlier this month that China won’t budge on that demand, regardless of political changes on the island of 23 million. China would “resolve to contain Taiwan independence secessionist activities in any form,” Xi told delegates to China’s ceremonial legislature on March 5.

Tsai takes over from China-friendly Nationalist Party President Ma Ying-jeou, who oversaw the signing of a series of agreements during his eight years in power, establishing closer economic ties between the sides. Her election was seen as a rejection of closer economic ties between the sides that many younger Taiwanese see as threatening their economic futures.

A Japanese colony by China in 1945. It then split away again after Chiang Kai-shek’s defeated Nationalists moved their government to the island in 1949 after the Communist seizure of power on the mainland. Apart from occasional criticism in state media, China has largely held its fire over Tsai’s election.

Wearing a black turtleneck and dark jacket, Lin promised to respond to all questions from the island’s freewheeling media, in keeping with the accessible and down-to-earth image of Taiwanese politicians that contrasts starkly with the secrecy and aloofness of China’s communist leadership.

However, Lin asked for some degree of privacy, saying: "If you all call me at home, I’ll never get any sleep." **AP**
Skeptics of North Korea’s nuclear threat, and there are many, have long clung to two comforting thoughts. While the North has the bomb, it doesn’t have a warhead small enough to put on a long-range missile. And it certainly doesn’t have a re-entry vehicle to keep that warhead from burning up in the atmosphere before it could reach a target like, as it has suggested before, Manhattan.

North Korea yesterday suggested it will soon show off the world it has mastered both technologies. That would require a huge jump in the North’s suspected nuclear capabilities, so it may be just the latest case of Pyongyang’s military powers, sed by a few countries styling themselves as military powers, taking North Korea’s claims as true. It will put to rest one of those “several kinds of ballistic explosion test” and test-firings for a “nuclear warhead re-entry vehicle.”

The report said Kim ordered the commencement of preparations for a “nuclear warhead explosion test” and test firings of “several kinds of ballistic rockets able to carry nuclear warheads” to be conducted soon.

As with all such reports, it’s hard to separate Pyongyang’s wishful thinking from the current reality. North Korea’s most likely candidate for an intercontinental ballistic missile is generally known as the KN-08 — in Korea it’s called the Hwasong. The three-stage rocket has an estimated range of 5,000-6,000 kilometers (3,000-3,700 miles), longer if modified further.

That range would be ample for attacks on U.S. military bases in Japan, but not the U.S. mainland. A militarized version of the rocket used to put a North Korean satellite into orbit last month is believed to have — potentially — a much longer range that could reach the U.S.

A new version of the KN-08 was displayed at a military parade in October. IHS Jane’s Defense weekly said it featured a smaller and lighter warhead shape “that could confirm U.S. intelligence assessments and North Korean claims of success in miniaturizing its nuclear warheads.”

But the Pentagon has often expressed incredulity over the reliability of the KN-08 because North Korea has never tested it “end-to-end” — meaning from launch through re-entry and warhead delivery — to prove it works.

Just last week, photos of Kim, splashed across the front page of the ruling party’s Rodong Sinmun newspaper, showed him standing in a hangar filled with ballistic missiles and looking happily down at a silver orb about the size of a disco ball.

Experts say the object looks very much like a credible nuclear weapon, though it was clearly a mock-up of whatever device the North may have. Kim and his scientists certainly wouldn’t have stood so close to the real thing without radioactive protection gear. Nor would Kim, a chain smoker, likely have been holding a lit cigarette right next to it.

The message, however, was obvious: We know what you think our weaknesses are, and you might consider thinking twice.

“Every time the North Koreans test another bomb or a missile, I get calls asking what message the North Koreans are trying to send,” wrote Jeffrey Lewis, director of the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, in a recent op-ed in the influential Foreign Policy magazine.

“Well, let’s see. They’ve paraded two different ICBMs through Pyongyang, conducted four nuclear tests, showed us a compact nuclear design sitting next to a modern re-entry vehicle in front of one of those ICBMs, and hung a giant wall map of the United States marked with targets and titled ‘Mainland Strike Plan,’” he wrote. “Here’s a wild guess: They are building nuclear-armed ICBMs to strike the United States! Why is this so hard to grasp?”

The timing of Pyongyang’s recent moves is crucial.

As with all [N. Korean media] reports, it’s hard to separate Pyongyang’s wishful thinking from the current reality.

It’s facing a new U.N. sanctions package after its Jan. 6 nuclear test — which it claimed was of an H-bomb — and has significantly upped its rhetoric amid unprecedentedly large-scale war games between the U.S. and South Korean militaries. Those exercises continue through April.

The country is also conducting a 70-year “loyalty campaign” ahead of a once-in-a-generation ruling party congress in May. The congress could be something of a coming-out party for Kim, a venue to emerge from the shadows of his father and grandfather and more firmly establish himself at home and abroad as North Korea’s supreme leader. He could also lay out his own long-term domestic and international agenda.

Kim presumably wants to face these challenges from a position of power — and making noises his cause celebre serves that purpose.

Standing firm on nukes bolsters his credibility with hardliners in the military and reinforces his regime’s defiant, dangerous reputation with Washington and its allies.

It also has domestic propaganda value, showing how North Korea, singlehandedly and against all odds, can make breakthroughs few countries have accomplished.

Of course, that logic breaks two ways: If the country hasn’t made major advances, exaggerating them is the next best thing, since its technology is notoriously difficult to evaluate. But Lewis and other experts have expressed concern that Washington, in particular, has a pattern of not taking the North’s purported capabilities seriously enough until a successful test proves their complacency to have been misplaced.

While it might declare success prematurely — most outside experts doubt the recent H-bomb claims — it has an established track record of eventually getting there.

Seoul, meanwhile, was holding to its skeptical line. Its Defense Ministry said yesterday it remains unconvinced the North has achieved re-entry vehicle technology. Spokesman Moon Sang Gun said the assessment is based on South Korea and U.S. intelligence. He refused to elaborate. AP
Bank chief quits amid USD101 million hacking uproar

Julhas Alam, Dhaka

The head of Bangladesh’s central bank resigned yesterday after hackers managed to divert USD101 million from the country’s account with the Federal Reserve Bank in New York.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman’s resignation was accepted, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s spokesman Ibnul Karim. Rahman, who held the bank’s top post for seven years, told reporters it was a difficult decision.

“I submitted my resignation to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ... tears rolled out from her two eyes,” he said. Earlier he had said, “If my resignation is better for the Bangladesh Bank, I have no hesitation.”

The finance minister canceled a scheduled news conference without explanation. Last week he said Bangladesh was considering suing the U.S. bank over the loss of the funds, which were thought to have been transferred to the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

However, the New York Fed said there was no evidence its own systems were compromised, and attention increas-

ing in the trafficking industry, says its lead police investigator, Maj. Gen. Popee Pongsirin, told to Australia and told media there he feared for his life.

after his findings implicated “influential people” in Thailand who wanted to silence him. Pawaen Several defen-

dants, including an army captain and local politicians. The 92 defendants have been
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charged, dozens of po-
lice officers in southern
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syndicates.

The case came to light after more than 30 bodies were discovered last year in shallow graves in southern Thailand, exposing networks that trafficked Rohingya Muslims fleeing persecution in Myanmar and held them for ransom in jungle camps before granting them passage to Malaysia.

The case drew more at-

tention when its lead poli-
ci investigator, Maj. Gen. Pawaen Pongsirin, fled to Australia and told media there he feared for his life.

Rahman, the son of a landless herdsman, was a Dhaka University economist before joining the Bangladesh Bank. He said leaving the bank post was a difficult decision.

Such cyberattacks are happening across the world,” Rahman said. “We have to be careful, very careful. It’s like an earthquake, when it will come, very difficult to predict. We are new in facing such attacks. We lack experience.”

Since the hacking scandal emerged earlier this year, Rahman said he had increased the bank’s online security and hired international experts to oversee the work.

“After the incident I took some time and attempted to fix the loopholes so that the remaining amount is secure,” he said.

In Manila, Philippines, a Senate committee opened an inquiry yesterday into how about $81 million of Bangladesh’s stolen funds were transmitted online to four private accounts at a branch of the Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., or RCBC, and who could be criminally liable.

Julia Bacay-Abad, executive director of the government’s Anti-Money Laundering Council, told the court that Bangladesh’s central bank governor called to notify his Philippine counterpart on Feb. 11 about the transfer and requested that the funds be frozen.

An investigation by the anti-money laundering council showed the transfers occurred Feb. 5. Shortly afterward, a bulk of the money was moved to another RCBC account whose owner then sent the funds through a remittance company to two Philippine casino companies. The remittance company also made cash deliveries to a certain Weikang Xu.

The anti-money laundering council later moved to freeze the funds and filed criminal complaints against RCBC branch manager Maia Santos-Deguito and the supposed owner of the four RCBC accounts where the stolen Bangladesh funds were deposited, before the Department of Justice in Manila, Philippine justice officials said.

The council alleged that Deguito approved the opening of the four RCBC accounts on May 15 last year based on what appeared to be fake documents of the owners, who were later also able to withdraw some of the funds in one of the largest money-laundering scandals in the Philippines.

Deguito has denied any wrongdoing and offered to provide details during the Senate hearing in a closed-door executive session. RCBC’s President and chief executive officer, Lorenzo Tan, said he was unaware of the alleged money laundering and refused to answer many questions, invoking bank secrecy, irritating committee chairman Sen. Teofisto Guingona III.

“This was stolen and a foreign government is asking us to help them,” Guingona said, asking the RCBC officers why the funds were withdrawn up to Feb. 9 when the Bangladesh Bank already alerted RCBC and asked for a stop payment on Feb. 8. Guingona later told reporters it was clear there was a conspiracy but it was not clear at what level. He said it probably could not have happened if casinos were covered by the country’s anti-money laundering law.

"The trail ends at the casinos, call it a black hole," he added. Bangladesh Ambassador John Gomez, who observed the hearing, said he was satisfied with the investigation and that he would request he be allowed to also observe closed-door, executive sessions.

He said Bangladesh is working with the Philippines to recover the funds.

In Sri Lanka, police spokesman Ruwan Gunasekara said no police investigation was being conducted in the matter. Officials at the Sri Lanka’s Central Bank declined to comment.

AP

Prosecutors in Thailand cast their first witnesses yesterday in a major human trafficking trial with 92 defendants, including an army general, implicated in smuggling, kidnappings and the deaths of dozens of people.

The case came to light after more than 30 bodies were discovered last year in shallow graves in southern Thailand, exposing networks that trafficked Rohingya Muslims fleeing persecution in Myanmar and held them for ransom in jungle camps before granting them passage to Malaysia.

The case drew more attention when its lead police investigator, Maj. Gen. Pawaen Pongsirin, fled to Australia and told media there he feared for his life.

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The Obama administration yesterday loosened rules on travel to Cuba and the Cuban government’s use of the dollar, removing obstacles to closer ties between the two countries five days before President Barack Obama makes a historic trip to Havana.

The administration announced that Americans can now take “people-to-people” trips to Cuba on their own instead of on expensive group tours. That means any American can legally go to Cuba as long as they fill out a form asserting that their trip was for educational purposes instead of tourism. The measure is expected to help fill demand for commercial flights that U.S. airlines hope to launch in coming months.

The new measures also allow U.S. banks to process Cuban government transactions that pass even momentarily through the U.S. banking system. A ban on those transactions crippled Cuba’s ability to buy and sell goods internationally and become one of Cuba’s biggest complaints about the U.S. trade embargo on the island.

Yesterday’s action is the fifth round of measures aimed at punching holes in the embargo on Cuba through executive action while Congress leaves the embargo itself in place. More than a year after Obama and President Raul Castro announced the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, U.S. companies can now manufacture goods in Cuba, export to the Cuban government and fly regularly scheduled flights to Cuba. The Starwood hotel chain says it soon expects to get U.S. approval to manage hotels in Cuba.

"Today’s steps build on the actions of the last 15 months as we continue to break down economic barriers, empower the Cuban people and advance their financial freedoms, and chart a new course in U.S.-Cuba relations," Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew said. Rather than swiftly responding to Obama administration measures with matching openings in Cuba’s state-controlled economy, the Castro government has moved slowly enough to raise questions about whether there will be significant trade between the two countries before Obama leaves office.

Although the Obama administration has legalized exports of badly needed goods ranging from constructions materials to tractor parts, no such trade has begun. And while European cruise ships now make regular appearances in Havana harbor, U.S. lines have yet to receive Cuban approval months after getting the OK from the Treasury Department.

While Cuba’s lack of cash reserve and labyrinthine bureaucracy to any new business here, many experts believe that the Communist government is delaying trade with the U.S. in order to build pressure on Congress to do away with the embargo entirely.

At least 45 Kurdish rebels were killed in Turkish air strikes against suspected militant targets in northern Iraq following the suicide car bombing in Ankara, the military said yesterday, while clashes in the mainly-Kurdish city of Diyarbakir left a police officer and three Kurdish militants dead.

Turkish F-16 and F4 jets struck Kurdish Workers Party, or PKK, positions across the border in Iraq on Monday, a day after the attack which killed at least 37 people and wounded dozens of others. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the Ankara attack, which authorities say was carried out by a female bomber and a possible male accomplice. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said there were “almost certain” indications that the PKK carried out the attack.

The attack escalated tensions with the Kurds and further complicated Turkey’s place in the region as it battles a host of enemies across its borders including the Syrian government, Kurdish rebels in both Iraq and Syria, and the Islamic State group. Turkey also has been forced to absorb 2.7 million refugees from the conflict.

Authorities yesterday declared a curfew in Diyarbakir’s low-income Baglar neighborhood early after clashes erupted overnight between Kurdish militants and the security forces. A police officer and three militants were killed in the clashes which also injured 10 other policemen, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported. Many residents were seen fleeing the neighborhood.

Turkey this week also declared 24-hour curfews and launched large-scale operations against Kurdish militants in the towns of Nusaybin and Yuksekova and the city of Sirnak, in the mostly Kurdish southeast region. Police meanwhile pressed ahead with a security sweep across Turkey, detaining 55 people suspected of being members of a group that is considered the youth wing of the PKK in six provinces, Anadolu reported.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the aim of the Ankara attack was to sow fear among the public and “deter Turkey from its aims, its path and aspirations.”

“They will not be successful,” Erdogan said. “They will not bring Turkey to its knees; on the contrary they will be the ones kneeling.”

He was speaking at a joint news conference with visiting Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev who arrived in Ankara in a show of solidarity.

The military said Monday’s air strikes in the Qandil mountains, where the PKK’s leadership is based, killed 45 rebels and destroyed two arms depots and two rocket launcher positions. The claim could not immediately be verified.

The PKK is fighting Turkey for Kurdish autonomy in the southeast. The fragile two-year peace process collapsed in July, re-igniting the conflict. The PKK is considered a terror organization by Turkey and its allies.

Meanwhile, the military denied a claim by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov who said Moscow has information that Turkey’s military is entrapping a few hundred meters (yards) in Kurdish territory to prevent Kurdish groups from strengthening their positions.

A brief military statement on the issue said: “The claims are untrue.”

WASHINGTON TO BLOCK OIL DRILLING IN ATLANTIC

A taxi driving a classic American car passes a billboard that reads in Spanish: “Long live free Cuba” in Havana

In a major reversal, the Obama administration says it will not allow oil drilling in the Atlantic Ocean.

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell made the announcement yesterday on Twitter, declaring that the administration’s next five-year offshore drilling plan “protects the Atlantic for future generations.” The announcement reverses a proposal made last year in which the administration floated a plan that would have opened up a broad swath of the Atlantic Coast to drilling. The January 2015 proposal would have opened up sites more than 80 kilometers off Virginia, North and South Carolina and Georgia to oil drilling no earlier than 2021.

The Interior Department said the latest decision responds to strong local opposition and conflicts with competing commercial and military ocean uses.
Macau Arts Window – Restrained Hugs
Installation by Ella Lei
Time: 10am-7pm (no admittance after 6.30 pm, closed on Mondays)
Until: April 10, 2016
Venue: Macau Museum of Art, Av. Xian Xing Hai, s/n, NAPE
Admission: MOP5 (Free on Sundays and public holidays)
Enquiries: (853) 8791 9814

“Getting into Salon” – Exhibition of Photographic Works by Kong Iii Lam and His Students
Time: 9am-10pm (Institute for Tourism Studies, Colina de Mong-Ha); 12pm-10pm (Educational restaurant, Institute for Tourism Studies, Colina de Mong-Ha)
Until: April 30, 2016
Admission: Free
Enquiries: (853) 2856 1252

One Century of Austrian Art 1860–1960
Time: 10am-7pm (Closed on Monday, no admittance after 6:30 pm)
Until: April 3, 2016
Venue: Macau Museum of Art, Av. Xian Xing Hai, s/n, NAPE
Admission: Adult MOP5 (Free admission on Sundays and public holidays)
Enquiries: (853) 8791 9814

Ma-Boa / Lis-Cau, Drawing and Lithography Exhibition
Time: 2pm-7pm (Closed on Sundays)
Until: March 19, 2016
Venue: G/F Macau Cultural Centre Building, Xian Xing Hai Avenue, Macau.
Free Admission
Enquiries: (853) 2875 3282

Heart Carving – Xue Yihan’s Scenes of Macau Printmaking Exhibition
Time: 10am-7pm (Closed on Sundays); 3pm-8pm (Monday, open on public holidays)
Until: April 22, 2016
Venue: Abergue SCM – A2 Gallery, Calçada da Igreja de S.Lázaro No.8, Macau Gallery A2
Admission: Free
Enquiries: (853) 2852 2550 / 2852 3205

Offbeat

Etisalat removes iconic building ‘golf balls’ after storm

The iconic “golf balls” on Etisalat buildings are coming down. The Emirates telecommunications company has taken down the spheres atop their buildings at their headquarters in Abu Dhabi and in Dubai.

The move came after a major thunderstorm struck the United Arab Emirates last week, bringing strong winds and rainfall that caused flooding. The state-run WAM news agency reported late Friday that the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority asked Etisalat to remove the sphere from its Abu Dhabi headquarters as it was “severely damaged by strong winds.” Etisalat is one of two telecommunications companies in the UAE. It is 60 percent government-owned and opened its shares to foreign investors in September.
upswing starts tomorrow. But the good news is that the
at a low-point of personal energy, illness or anything else. You’re just
you should — but it’s not a sign of
You feel more exhausted than
59- Coloured part of the eye; 60- Writer
56- Drop ___ (moon); 57- Belonging to us;
push; 55- Roman emperor after Galba;
49- occupant; 52- omigosh!; 54- Gentle
42- Good-looking; 43- i ___ vacation!;
Sal; 36- ____ beaver; 38- ___ island Ferry;
34- Minor mistakes; 35- “Exodus” actor
Paraphrase; 32- Chinese martial arts;
master; 28- Scout unit; 29- Cave; 30-
domestic feline; 26- Heavy; 27- Vixen’s
10- Hot tub; 11- overfill; 12- Rent-___;
brothers; 8- Lyric poet; 9- Snap course;
1- Lavish affection (on); 2- Russian range; 3- Trifling; 4- Voting group; 5-
family; 73- That’s ___!; 69- Chinese dynasty;
70- Sportscaster Albert; 71- Boots; 72- Ferrara
motor vehicle; 66- Toward the mouth; 67- Yours, in Tours; 68- Goddesses of the
James; 51- Colored; 53- Break off; 55- Siouan speaker; 58- Suggestive; 64- Large
Home on the range; 47- Copycat; 48- Hardware fastener; 50- Belgian painter
sch.; 40- inter ___; 41- in spite of; 44- Mower brand; 45- Sigh of satisfaction; 46-
20- Lightning; 23- Trauma ctrs.; 24- Peer Gynt’s mother; 25- Carbonized fuel; 27-
15- Without purpose; 16- Swiftly; 17- Poi source; 18- Fulda tributary; 19- The devil;
across:
YOUR STARS
Taurus
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
You are emotionally centered today — as much so that you may
finally decide to confront that one friend or family member over their
recent behavior. Things may heat
up quite a bit!
You’re part of a bigger system, and you should find that everyone
that’s part of that is having something to
add today. It’s a good idea to ask for
help, but also to offer it whenever
you’re asked.
Taurians are great and you
need to keep these
people happy. You’re
making a good effort now,
and you should find that
everyone is making a good
effort now too.
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
It’s a good time for reflection —
your energy is turned inward
right now. Make the most of it,
whatever you do. You are feeling quite energetic
today — which means you could
got a lot done, or you could just
enjoy yourself and party all night
long. Make the most of it, whatever
you do.
You need to put some of those
distractions.
You are enthusiastic about your
new commitment to health, be it
through exercise, diet, meditation
or whatever. Just keep it private and let others ask
about it.
You are feeling quite energetic
today — which means you could
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FOLLOWING THE MAP ISN’T YOUR STYLE

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From Syria to Sudan: Refugee athletes train for the Refugee team

Stephen Wilson, London

They’ve fled war and violence in the Middle East and Africa. They’ve crossed treacherous seas in small dinghies and lived in dusty refugee camps. They include a teenage swimmer from Syria, long-distance runners from South Sudan and judo and taekwondo competitors from Congo, Iran and Iraq.

They are striving to achieve a common goal: To compete in the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Not for their home countries, but as part of the first ever team of refugee athletes. A group of 43 displaced men and women, who range in age from 17 to 30 and have escaped conflicts in their homelands, are being considered for selection to the team called “Refugee Olympic Athletes.”

Prompted by the plight of millions of migrants and refugees across the world, the International Olympic Committee is creating a small team of refugees who will compete in Rio under the Olympic flag. In what will surely be one of the emotional highlights of the opening ceremony, the team will march together into the Maracana Stadium on Aug. 5 behind the white flag with the five Olympic rings. They will walk in just ahead of the team from Brazil, the host nation that was last among the 206 national Olympic committees in the athletes’ parade.

The refugee athletes will live in the Olympic Village with the other teams. The IOC will supply them with team uniforms and other technical officials. The Olympic anthem will be played if any of the athletes wins a gold medal.

The plan was first announced by the IOC at the United Nations last October amid the still-continuing influx of migrants and refugees, many from Syria, into Europe. The IOC set up a USD million fund to help these displaced athletes in their countries. The money was meant to enable them to reach Olympic standard.

Pere Miro, the IOC’s deputy director general for relations with the Olympic movement, has been the point man in creating the team. Of the 43 athletes selected as contenders for the team, more than half are runners from central and western Africa, Miro said.

“I was touched by the personal story of each one,” he said in an interview with The Associated Press. “But I also was really touched by how much sport means in their lives, not only for the 43, but for all those I met.”

IOC President Thomas Bach said he expects between five and 10 athletes will make the team. Miro put the figure at between five and seven. The final selection will be announced by the IOC at its next executive board meeting in June.

“We want to send a message of hope to all the refugees of the world,” Bach said.

Miro said 23 of the candidates fled conflicts in Africa, including South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Mali. A handful of others left Syria, with a few from Iran and Iraq. In addition to track and field, some of the athletes compete in swimming, judo, taekwondo and shooting.

The IOC has already publicly identified three athletes under consideration: 17-year-old Syrian swimmer Yusra Mardini, female Iranian taekwondo athlete Raheleh Asemani, and male judoka Popole Misenga of Congo. Mardini is training in Germany, Asemani in Belgium and Misenga in Brazil.

Mardini and her older sister, Sarah, were on an inflatable boat with other refugees making the perilous trip from Turkey to Greece a few months ago when their small dinghy started taking on water in the Aegean Sea. Most of the refugees on the overcrowded boat couldn’t swim. So the sisters and three others who were also good swimmers jumped into the water. For three hours, they clung onto ropes hanging from the side and helped guide the boat to the Greek island of Lesbos.

The Mardini sisters eventually made it to Germany, where a local charity put them in touch with the Wasserfreunde Spandau 04 swimming club in Berlin, based near their refugee center. They have been training at the pool, which was built for the 1936 Olympics, and Yusra — a butterfly specialist — was selected as a possible member of the Olympic team.

Asemani left Iran in 2012 for France to compete as a possible member of the French Olympic team. She said she expects eight to qualify for the Olympics and will accompany them to Rio for the occasion.

“The is something special,” Loroupe said. “Everyone can be a refugee, now they have this incredible opportunity to stand out. They want to be ambassadors.”

Miro said he doubts any of the refugee athletes will win medals in Rio, though that is not really the main point. The powerful symbolism of the refugees’ mere presence at the games is what counts the most.

“They will raise attention around the world,” Miro said. “We hope the world will get the message. We can show that sport and the Olympic principles are something to believe in.” AP
Villain Hitting

Lately, if you pass Kun Iam Temple, you may bump into some middle-aged or elderly ladies squatting at a corner outside the temple, hitting a paper on the ground as a service for customers. Well, we have entered Jingzhe 慶緒 – the time for ‘da siu yan’ (打小人, hit the little man), better known in English as ‘villain hitting’. Jingzhe falls in spring, usually in the first two weeks of March. What is so special about this time that makes people go and ‘hit the little man’? And what exactly does ‘hit the little man’ mean?

Jingzhe, meaning awakening and hibernation, refers to the time when insects and animals wake from hibernation and start searching for food. One story of the origin of ‘hitting the little man’ comes from the practice of sending away the mythical tiger, Bai Hu 白虎, and animals wake from hibernation and make their men return to them. Later, instead of sending Bai Hu away, people started using this ritual to send away people whom they considered as having brought bad luck to their lives by hitting a man-shaped paper.

We often see in movies that people ‘hit the little man’ when they have someone they hate in mind. The actual tradition was not used to wish ill on anyone specific, but for sending away people who may be in the way of achieving what one desires. It is believed that after ‘hitting the little man’, one will have good luck and life will be smooth sailing. Sometimes, it does not really have anything to do with other people. According to a few “professional” villain hitters and service users, the act is supposed to bring good luck.

However, there are many people with the misconception that ‘hitting the little man’ is a way to curse people they dislike. It is for this reason that many people think of going, or actually go to, ‘da siu yan’ – which may be the result of how this practice is depicted on TV and in movies.

In most depictions, we see angry people taking photos of people they hate to the ‘service providers’, paying them to hit their enemies. The service providers would first attach the photo to a man-shaped piece of paper and then, squatting down on the street, exert a lot of effort to beat a small piece of paper with a slipper while shouting curses. This is no easy job, especially since these service providers are often elderly women. That makes me wonder, have we become so lazy that we even need to outsource the cursing of our enemies? Wouldn’t it be more cathartic if we perform the act ourselves? (Not that hatred and cursing don’t work.)

According to an article about a ‘villain hitting service provider’ in Hong Kong many years ago, most customers do not have anyone specific in mind. It’s just a practice for good luck. But there are often women who bring photos of other women for hitting, usually ‘rivals in love’, hoping that the ritual will make their men return to them. So this tradition, be it for bringing good luck or casting away people who have brought bad luck, has evolved into some voodoo love spell we see in witches’ stories. But whatever the intention, just be careful what you wish for before you try ‘hitting the little man’.

Site of 1503 shipwreck tied to Vasco da Gama found off Oman

The 500-year-old wreck of Portuguese ship piloted by an uncle of explorer Vasco da Gama has been found off the coast of Oman, archaeologists said yesterday, a discovery that included the recovery of an incredibly rare coin. The Esmeralda sank during a violent storm near al-Hallaniyah Island in the Indian Ocean in May 1503, killing commander Vicente Sodre and all those aboard.

Beginning in 2013, a team from the British company Blue Water Recoveries and the Oman Ministry of Heritage and Culture explored a site in the island’s Ghubbat al Raibh Bay. They later determined the debris found there came from the long-missing ship, one of two lost in the storm from da Gama’s second voyage to India.

“The bay where the site is located was almost a perfect geographical match for where the ships’ [the Esmeralda and the São Pedro, another ship in the fleet] wrecked,” the study says. Among the stone shot, ceramics, a bell and other debris, divers discovered an incredibly rare silver coin called an Indio, of which only one other is known to exist today, said David L. Mears, the director of Blue Water Recoveries. The coins were forged in 1499 after da Gama’s first voyage to India, which helps date the wreckage, he said.

“That was an amazing discovery,” Mears said. “It was like a thing you read about in a Hollywood story.”

The archaeologists announced their findings in an article published yesterday by the International Journal of Nautical Archaeology.

Ayoub al-Busaidi, the supervisor of marine archaeology at the Oman Ministry of Heritage and Culture, said this marked the first underwater excavation carried out by his country. He said it inspired officials to continue to explore the waters around the sultanate for other finds.

“Oman is now looking at outside archives to read about the relationships and trade between Oman and the outside world,” al-Busaidi said. AP

A rare silver coin called an Indio discovered from the debris of the explorer Vasco da Gama’s ship, Esmeralda

Jon Gambrell, Dubai

The expedition ship is seen at the Ghubbat al Raibh bay, the excavation area of the wreck site of the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama’s ship, Esmeralda

Divers excavate the wreck site

A Chinese company said yesterday it will resume construction of a USD3.5 billion port city project in Sri Lanka, about a year after it was suspended because of questions about its environmental impact.

CHEC Port City Colombo said it welcomed the Sri Lankan government’s decision to allow the project to continue. The city is to be built on reclaimed land off Sri Lanka’s west coast and include a golf course, marinas, apartments, hotels and malls.

The project created disquiet in neighboring India over the possibility China might be allowed outright land ownership.

THAILAND Prosecutors called their first witnesses yesterday in a high-profile human trafficking trial with 92 defendants, including an army general, implicated in smuggling, kidnapping and the deaths of dozens of people. More on p13

THAILAND Police file negligence charges against two executives of a fire safety company after a system being installed at the headquarters of one of the country’s largest banks was malfunctioning, killing eight people.

MALAYSIA-AUSTRALIA Malaysian authorities will not charge two journalists from Australia’s state-owned broadcaster who attempted to interview Malaysia’s minister over corruption allegations, deciding to deport them instead.

USA In a major reversal, the Obama administration said yesterday it is about to approve oil drilling in the Atlantic Ocean. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell (pictured) made the announcement yesterday on Twitter, declaring that the administration’s next five-year offshore drilling plan “protects the Atlantic for future generations.” More on p16

ITALY The family of an Italian al-Qaeda hostage killed in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan is appealing to Barack Obama to provide details about the January 2015 operation. A lawyer for Giovanni Lo Porto’s family said that they have yet to receive operation details despite Obama’s orders for a full review of the counter-terrorism operation.

EUROPEAN UNION leaders will boost support to Greece so that thousands of migrants can be sent from there back to Turkey under a plan that is viewed as either being shot down in Ankara. In a draft text prepared for discussion tomorrow, EU leaders promise to use “all means to support the capacity of Greece for the return of irregular migrants to Turkey.”