



CPPCC MEMBERS CHANGE
Fong Chi Keong was among those who lost his position in Guangzhou's Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Standing Committee

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FRINGE DEEMED A SUCCESS
Nearly 90 percent of Fringe Festival tickets were sold, according to the Cultural Affairs Bureau

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WORLD BRIEFS



HONG KONG Mystery surrounds the whereabouts of Chinese billionaire Xiao Jianhua (pictured) reportedly taken away from his Hong Kong hotel by mainland police, in a case that has parallels with last year's disappearances of five booksellers. *More on p11*



SOUTH KOREA Former U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that he won't run for the presidency, a surprise announcement that removes a key figure from the scramble to replace impeached President Park Geun-hye and further stirs the country's already tumultuous politics.



NEW ZEALAND's recently appointed Prime Minister Bill English announced yesterday that the country will hold a national election in September in what will be a test of his popularity following the surprise resignation of former leader John Key.



AUSTRALIA's prime minister Malcolm Turnbull would not say how many refugees from Pacific island camps will be resettled in the United States after President Donald Trump's administration said "extreme vetting" would be used to check their cases.

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LIGHT POLLUTION

Macau contacts Zhuhai following complaints

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GGR growth slows in Jan

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Daniel Beittler, Julie Zhu

ENVIRONMENT

MACAU residents have complained about bright lights emitted from buildings in Zhuhai that disturb the ambience of several locations across the city, including around Sai Van Lake and parts of Taipa. The concerns, which were vocalized recently after one building began projecting messages across the river, has now prompted authorities in the MSAR to contact their environmental counterparts across the border.

Critics say that the brightness of the lights, which often surpass the neon extravaganza of Macau's casino district, constitute a form of light pollution in the territory. They say that the reason these buildings exist is due to a lack of cooperation between Macau and Zhuhai municipal authorities.

In one particular example, the light emitted from a 330-meter structure called the Zhuhai Center Tower drew complaints for dominating the night skyline. According to a report from Macau Concealers, many residents

DSPA to contact Zhuhai following

Light pollution coming from Zhuhai is very strong and could be a distraction to drivers on the bridge.

VIZEU PINHEIRO
ARCHITECT

"complained that the lights from the Zhuhai side are very strong, filling the sky with colors like green and purple."

Other large-scale buildings in Zhuhai have come under fire not only because of the brightness of



RENATO MARQUES

their lighting, but because they are also used as giant advertising structures, projecting messages such as "Hello Macau" in Chinese.

Since they are being used for advertising purposes, it seems less likely that their dominance on the Macau skyline is an incidental side effect of Zhuhai's development but rather a deliberate attempt to draw the attention of consumers and businesses in the MSAR.

However inconvenient the light pollution might be for those living in these areas, a number of local scholars and environment commentators told the Times that the issue is not nearly as problematic as that of noise and air pollution.

Richard Whitfield, an independent researcher and MDT columnist who writes frequently on environmental issues, told the Times that he doesn't see light pollution coming from Zhuhai as a serious issue.

"I don't see it being a big issue," he said. "There is a negligible influence from light pollution on the quality of peoples' lives [...] you get used to it after a while."

"There is a lot of neon here [in Macau] anyway, so I am more concerned with industrial and vehicle pollution, as well as [the promotion of] healthy lifestyles and city walkability," he added.

Lun Veng San, the chairman of the Green Environment Protection Association of Macau, said

that "light pollution can be found in any flourishing city" and "compared to other forms of pollution, light pollution is the least [problematic], because it is relatively simple to prevent."

Vizeu Pinheiro, a local architect and scholar, was in agreement that light pollution is far from Macau's biggest environmental concern but stipulated that it could present a danger to drivers in the MSAR.

"Light pollution [coming from] Zhuhai is very strong and could be a distraction to drivers on the bridge," warned Pinheiro. "But otherwise there is a lot of light pollution already in Macau – particularly at the casinos. [...] Light pollution is quite common to us."

OBTRUSIVE ARTIFICIAL LIGHT

LIGHT POLLUTION is usually defined as the presence of excessive or obtrusive artificial light, which is sometimes thought to have negative effects on an environment. Aside from obstructing natural light sources in the night sky, potentially disrupting natural ecosystems such as the birds on their migratory path through Macau, abundant light emissions can represent a significant source of energy wastage. One term used by environmentalists when discussing

light pollution is "light trespass", which refers to light falling where it is not intended, wanted or needed. This occurs whenever light shines beyond the intended target and onto adjacent areas. This would not be the case in the example of the Zhuhai Center Tower, which prompted local authorities to contact their Zhuhai environmental counterparts. As it projects a message intended for Macau audiences, it would not normally be considered unintended.

Family Hostels plan dropped by Alexis Tam

THE Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Alexis Tam, announced on Monday that the so-called "family hostels" project - that aims to establish a legal framework for the use of family houses in a "bed-and-breakfast" system - will not move forward.

According to a statement from the Government Information Bureau (GCS), the Secretary said studies carried out by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) revealed that the public's interest in such a project to create home accommodation "has decreased in comparison with past

[figures]."

Citing the same study, the statement mentions that "the population and society in general consider that home accommodations [family hostels] can eventually cause many problems," and adds that it is necessary to consider "further complementary measures and policies to these requirements."

Tam, who was speaking on the sidelines of a CNY related function, recalled that "in the past there were many houses in the city that had this type of accommodation, however, [this form of lodging] was canceled due to the need of a [proper]

regulatory framework." He went on to state that "for the time being one-, two- and three-star hotels can fulfill the basic needs of this market [of budget hotels]."

The Secretary noted that in order to put such a project into force it is first necessary to sufficiently consider its implementation, in order to guarantee that the new model "would not cause more problems than benefits."

The idea of re-creating this type of lodging was initiated by MGTO, who announced back in July 2016 the kick-off of a tracking study calling for public opinions on "residents' current

views" regarding the opening of family hostels on the peninsula.

Such a study followed on from another feasibility study, also carried out by the tourism authority on the same topic dated from 2014.

According to the results at that time, the Bureau collected a total of 2,243 samples through street surveys and online questionnaires in which over 60 percent of the surveyed residents supported the idea of family hostels, provided that a range of conditions were met, such as the criteria for the development of family hostels, as well as overall planning and



effective regulation by the government.

However, MGTO did not advance with the project at that time since there was a high proportion of interviewees that were not in favor of family hostel operations in their own commu-

nity districts, and in general they expressed concerns about public security, hygiene conditions, traffic, housing prices and other issues. As a result, it was concluded that society had not reached a general consensus on the widely discussed topic. **RM**

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light pollution complaints



PAULO BARBOSA

He also believes that “air pollution and noise pollution have a stronger impact on the health of the people.”

Meanwhile, University of Macau scholar Agnes Lam advocated that “the light pollution issue needs to be examined from a new perspective.”

“Zhuhai people also complain about our light pollution coming from Cotai and Nam Van [lake area],” she told the Times. “We need to move away from the blame game – we blame you and you blame us – and away from the idea that the mainland is invading our space again.”

“This kind of neon lighting might symbolize economic prosperity and modernity, so in Zhuhai they also want these new buildings with attractive lighting. In

Macau we have moved toward a new stage of development - we have had this sort of lighting for a long time now – and so people are more concerned with the environment,” she explained.

“Of course it is fair for Macau residents to complain, but when we complain we must also think about other issues connected between the two cities,” continued Lam. “If I was living in that area I might not be so happy, but we cannot just blame others because [in environmental terms] we are not doing a great job either!”

Macau authorities say they are taking the complaints seriously. The director of the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) has informed the public that he is aware of the situation and that his agency has communicated

the concerns expressed by Macau residents to Zhuhai municipal authorities. According to a report from Macau Concealers, Raymond Tam said that a cooperation mechanism exists between the neighboring cities and that he was confident the situation would be dealt with properly through this mechanism.

The DSPA did not reply to a request from the Times for an update to the matter by press time.

Speaking on the alleged lack of coordination, Whitfield told the Times that he is confident that there is little to no cooperation between Macau and Zhuhai authorities.

Lam also stressed that although there are regular “working meetings” between officials from Macau and Guangdong Province,

“There can exist a mechanism implemented to oversee a community-wide reduction in light emissions – for example during certain times.”

LUN VENG SAN
GREEN ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION ASSOCIATION

much more needs to be done to step up cooperation with mainland environmental agencies. The scope of this cooperation should be extended past concerns over light pollution to air quality, water treatment and recycling.

Chairman of the Green Environment Protection Association of Macau Lun Veng San told the

Times that the cooperation mechanism with Zhuhai was very important because it can be used as a platform for the negotiation of certain policies to reduce inter-territory light pollution and its effects.

“There are two ways to prevent it [inter-territory light pollution], in my opinion,” said Lun. “Firstly, we can try to use more environmentally-friendly light bulbs. Secondly, there can exist a mechanism implemented to oversee a community-wide reduction in light emissions – for example during certain times [of the day].”

“I also think that neighborhoods affected by the lighting could apply for compensation from the government. This does not need to be paid by the government; it can be paid by the light polluters,” he added.

However, Pinheiro pointed to a problem that underlines any effort from the government to seriously approach the issue: a lack of genuine intent.

“The problem is that there is no will or intent [from the government] to create more policies to protect the environment,” he commented on the issue.

BUILDINGS WITH ‘A BRUTAL SCALE, POOR QUALITY’

ARCHITECT CARLOS Castanheira, who has been working with Pritzker Prize laureate Siza Vieira, told newspaper Ponto Final in September 2014 that the scale of the buildings being constructed in Zhuhai dwarfs the scale of construction in the MSAR. “I find far more concerning what is happening close to Macau: China is nearer and nearer,” he told the newspaper. “If these buildings [casinos] in Macau

are mega, the ones on the other side of the river have a huge, brutal scale. That scale almost crumbles this euphoria [from the integrated resorts in Macau]. The extraordinary thing is the brightness of all these buildings, which shine. On the other side [of the border], in my opinion, they are building with very poor quality, and on a brutal scale. The little that remains of Macau is starting to get very, very muffled.”

SEVERAL cities in the Guangdong province recently elected their new members for the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), according to reports by mainland media. The cities Guangzhou, Zhuhai and Jiangmen all saw a change in their Macau members.

According to a docu-

New Macau representatives elected in Guangdong’s CPPCC

ment issued last month by the Central Government’s Committee of CPPCC, Macau lawmaker and SJM Director Angela Leong no longer serves as a member in the latest iteration of the Zhuhai CPPCC standing committee, as

reported last week by MDT. Besides Leong, previous Zhuhai CPPCC member Melinda Chan is also no longer serving the committee.

Only one Macau member who served in the last Zhuhai CPPCC will retain their position: Sou Chong Heng, a member of Macau’s Chief Executive Election Committee.

Six Macau residents are serving the Zhuhai CPPCC for the first time, including the president of the Associação dos Conterrâneos de Chu Hoi, surnamed Chan. Two of the six new members were born after 1980.

Lawmaker Fong Chi Keong also lost his position in Guangzhou’s CPPCC Standing Committee, according to the list of names available

on the committee’s website. Of the Macau residents serving on the Guangzhou committee, only two members are newcomers, with the remaining eight having served in the last committee.

However, the number of representatives from Macau in Guangzhou’s CPPCC has decreased to 10 from last year’s 20.

In Jiangmen, 10 Macau residents were nominated as members of the city’s CPPCC.

Macau lawmaker Zheng Anting was nominated as a new member of Jiangmen’s CPPCC, while lawmaker Mak Sui Kun continues to serve the committee. Finally, lawmaker Ma Chi Seng has been elected as a member of Foshan’s CPPCC Standing Committee.



Fong Chi Keong



Melinda Chan



CNY second parade on Saturday

THE "Parade for Celebration of the Year of the Rooster" presented an array of performances for residents and visitors on Monday, featuring 14 floats and 688 performers in procession.

Another float parade and finale show of cultural performances will be performed on the eighth day of the Lunar New Year (Saturday, February 4).

The entertainment on Monday included a float parade, procession of performance groups, finale show of cultural performances, fireworks display and exhibition of the parade floats.

The entire parade was broadcast live on two local TV stations and on LED screens installed at nine locations across the territory.

The parade was held under the the-

me of "All Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix for the Dawn of Spring" this year, according to a statement issued by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

The procession of floats and performance groups passed through Avenida Dr. Sun Yat-Sen until they reached Sai Van Lake Square in front of the Macau Tower.

A finale show of cultural performances was then staged at Sai Van Lake Square.

Local singers Ari, Alan Tse and Viviana Lo joined hands with Hong Kong singers Fred Cheng and Joyce Cheng, followed by a fireworks display to conclude the celebrations.

MGTO director Helena de Senna Fernandes noted that the parade has

become a signature annual event for the city.

She expressed her hopes that the festive event, combining colorful dimensions of different cultures, would bestow best wishes upon local residents and visitors from around the world.

In addition, MGTO said it will make continuous efforts to take the event to new heights each year.

This year, MGTO and Macao Cultural Heritage Reinventing Studies Association have jointly organized the "Chinese New Year Parade Float Snapshot" competition.

Until February 7, residents and visitors can upload their photos of the parade on Instagram using designated hashtags for the chance to win cash prizes.

Imports, exports slip in 2016

TOTAL merchandise imports during the month of December 2016 fell by 2.9 percent year-on-year to MOP6.78 billion, according to information released by the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). Imports of motor vehicles and mobile phones declined by 52.5 percent and 46.1 percent respectively.

During the same month, total merchandise exports from Macau amounted to MOP753 million, down by 16.1 percent year-on-year, according to DSEC. Of this amount, the value of domestic exports (MOP156 million) slid by 12.2 percent, while the value of re-exports dropped 17.1 percent year-on-year.

As a consequence, the merchandise trade deficit amounted to just over MOP6 billion in December last year.

Looking at the whole of last year, the total value of merchandise imports fell by 15.7 percent to MOP71.35 billion when compared with the previous year. Meanwhile, the total value of merchandise exports for 2016 dropped by 6 percent year-on-year to MOP10.05 billion, thus the trade deficit stood at MOP61.31 billion.

Analyzed by place of origin, imports in 2016 from mainland China (MOP25.84 billion) and the European Union (MOP17.03 billion) decreased by 18.9 percent and 9.6 percent respectively year-on-year. However, imports from Portuguese-speaking countries (MOP666 million) increased by 10.7 percent.

External merchandise trade totaled MOP81.4 billion in 2016, down by 14.6 percent compared with the MOP95.36 billion registered in 2015.

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Macau's Recovery Momentum

Gambling revenue in the Chinese enclave has risen for six straight months



Sources: Macau Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau

Bloomberg

Gaming revenue grows 3.1 percent in January

Lisa Pham

CASINO revenue growth in Macau slowed in January, falling short of analysts' estimates, as the world's largest gaming hub prepares for what may be another bumpy ride in its recovery from a two-year slump.

Gross gaming receipts rose 3.1 percent to MOP19.3 billion (USD2.4 billion), according to data released by Macau's Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau yesterday. That follows an 8 percent increase in December

and compares with the median estimate of an 8.5 percent expansion by analysts surveyed by Bloomberg.

Casino stocks fell in Hong Kong. Operators in the lone legal gambling center in China are switching gears to woo tourists and casual gamblers with family-friendly resorts, including Wynn Resorts Ltd.'s Palace casino with its synchronized fountains and Las Vegas Sands Corp.'s Parisian complete with a replica of the Eiffel Tower. While a recovery of the \$30 billion industry has been gathering momentum after high-

stakes players were driven away by China's anti-corruption drive, growth at the new casinos also bring risks.

"People are still concerned about the Chinese economy and anti-corruption," said Michael Ting, a Hong Kong-based analyst at CIMB Group Holdings Ltd. "The worst is over but Macau's recovery is going to be quite volatile and choppy."

January's numbers also point to a listless Chinese New Year start, with revenue growth falling below the low end of analyst estimates that ranged from 5 percent to 12 percent. The weeklong holiday

celebration runs through Feb. 2 in China this year. In 2016, the Lunar New Year holiday fell in February.

Sands China Ltd. dropped 2.2 percent in Hong Kong, while Wynn Macau Ltd. lost 1.1 percent. Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd. tumbled 2.7 percent and SJM Holdings Ltd. decreased 2.7 percent. The Bloomberg Intelligence index of Macau gaming shares dropped 1.9 percent, compared with the 0.2 percent drop in the benchmark Hang Seng index.

Betting volume from high-stakes players may have been softer than expected during the first few days of the Chinese New Year holiday. "It is fair to say that some analysts and investors got too excited about the VIP segment, and the V-shape recovery in VIP demand is not coming through," said Nomura Holdings Inc. analyst Richard Huang.

Revenue from the baccarat card

games favored by the big bettors from China saw a 13 percent increase during the final three months of 2016, the first quarterly expansion since 2014. While Macau is reliant on the casual gamblers and holiday revelers that the new resorts are targeting, challenges include a cannibalization effect with the latest properties drawing in crowds at the expense of existing casinos.

Sands President Rob Goldstein said last week that its Parisian casino gained traffic and posted net revenue in its full quarter of operation, while denting patronage at its Sands Cotai Central property.

"Macau's latest wave of new resorts poses the classic gambler's risk-reward dilemma," Bloomberg Intelligence analyst Brian Egger wrote in a note this week. "Additions are key to Macau revenue recovery and long-term growth, yet entail challenges."

The industry also faces pressure on profitability as a hotel surplus leads to more cuts in room rates, he said.

Tourists to Macau reached 614,000 in the first five days of the Chinese New Year holiday that began Jan. 27, an increase of 5.7 percent compared with a year ago. Tourists from mainland China, which accounted for about 68 percent of arrivals, also gained 6.6 percent in the period.

Macau's bet on driving tourists and the more profitable mass gamblers to the enclave may still pay off in February, when a fuller picture of the Chinese New Year holiday revenue will emerge.

"The recovery during Chinese New Year and February can be sharper too," JPMorgan Chase & Co. analyst DS Kim wrote in a note. "We believe the disappointing January was more a blip than a trend." **Bloomberg**

Twin panda cubs celebrate Chinese Lunar New Year



Panda cubs "Jianjian" (left) and "Kangkang" frolic with each other in Macau

TWO panda cubs in Macau welcomed public visitors on Friday, the first day of their regular meetings with the public during the Spring Festival holidays.

The twin brothers were held by nurses in the Macau Giant Panda Pavilion behind the glass windows as visitors watched them with joy. The older brother Jianjian began climbing a tree in the pavilion, while the younger brother Kangkang tried his best to sit on a tree stool.

According to a member of the panda care team, Jianjian now weighs about 13 kilograms and Kangkang weighs over 12 kilograms. As Kangkang weighed only 53 grams at birth, he is now more than 240 times his ori-

ginal weight.

While the two are still in the infant stages, their behavior and motion response are at acceptable levels for regular meetings with the public, he added. Visitors will be able to meet the brothers and their parents until February 6, the 10th day of the first month of the lunar year.

The pandas' mother, a female panda named Xinxin, gave birth to the pair of male twin cubs on June 26, 2016. The cubs were named Jianjian and Kangkang by the Macau SAR government from over 1,700 names recommended by Macau citizens. In Mandarin, Jian Kang means "being healthy." **MDT/Xinhua**

ONE SHOT NEWS



According to the official figures released by the Macau Government Tourism Office yesterday, a total of 614,357 visitors arrived in the region between January 27 and 31, which represents an increase of 5.7 percent year-on-year. The Public Security Police Force forecast that the number of visitors will decrease from today onwards, as is typical for the Chinese New Year period.

ARTS

Nearly 90 percent of Fringe tickets sold



OVERALL sales for the 16th Macao City Fringe Festival have reached nearly 90 percent of available tickets, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) said in a statement.

Tickets were sought after from the opening day of sales, when tickets sold out for half of all shows, including "Antiwords", "Mobile Kitchen," "Zuò Zuò Tea House," "In Good Hands," "5 Women" and "Funeral for the Living."

Other shows, such as "The Smooth Life," Give It a Shot Series productions "I Met Cats" and "The Day Can't See the Dark Night," "Bubble," "Seven's Up" and "The Other Side of the Sacred" were also sold out.

According to the IC, a number of performances in this year's edition of the festival include interactive segments that count on the participation of the public.

In addition to the highly acclaimed shows, the outreach

activities of the 16th Macao City Fringe Festival also received numerous applications.

Among these activities, the "Workshop for Specific Social Arts Workers" was one of the most sought after.

Through puppet-handling techniques, teachers encouraged participants to explore the use of puppets as a tool for communication and the possibilities of using them in education and counseling.

The very first "Sharing Session on Asian Arts Festivals – Arts Festivals in the Cities" gave local arts professionals and groups a chance to learn about different fringe festivals and artist-in-residence schemes, and to become more aware of different regions' large-scale arts festivals.

Organized by the IC and co-organized by the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau, the 16th edition of the 10-day festival featured 23 shows, in a total of 70 performances.

According to the statement, organizers will continue to offer pioneering and interesting performances to residents and tourists to expand the development space of local arts professionals and promote the region's cultural and artistic assets.

DSPA head comments on environmental problems



Raymond Tam

THE director of the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA), Raymond Tam, said during a TDM radio show that "Macau's main source of air pollution comes from transportation."

Last year, the city passed a law implementing additional restrictions on car emissions. The director expects this new law to come into effect in July, which should help to improve Macau's air pollution situation.

"We hope that when the law comes into effect, it can positively help improve Macau's air quality," said Tam.

Tam also pointed out an issue concerning the use of plastic bags in Macau. "Society,

in general, backs the idea of charging for shopping (plastic) bags," said Tam, and added that his department is working hard to promote this topic.

The director noted that a survey conducted earlier by his department showed that 60 percent of Macau residents consider that the city has a problem with the overuse of plastic bags.

According to Tam, the government is considering charging one pataca per bag. This cost was widely accepted by the general public during the government's consultation period. However, the final value will be finalized when the related law is passed in town, informed Tam.

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CHINA

Manufacturing activity in January close to 2-year high



Workers eat their lunch outside a construction site wall depicting Beijing's skyline

Joe McDonald, Beijing

CHINA started 2017 on a high note according to results of a survey released yesterday that showed manufacturing expanded in January at close to its fastest pace in two years.

Heavy government spending and a boom in bank lending and real estate are helping to counter a slowdown that took growth in the world's second-largest economy to 6.7 percent last year, the weakest rate since 1990.

The National Bureau of Statistics' purchasing managers index showed manufacturing growth at 51.4 on a 100-point scale on which numbers above 50 indicate an expansion.

That was down only slightly from November's two-year high of 51.7.

Forecasters expect growth to weaken further this year, however, as regulators try to cool what analysts warn is a dangerously fast run-up in debt and rising housing costs. The International Monetary Fund is predicting this year's growth will slow to 6.5 percent.

The latest data show a "relatively strong start to the year," Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a report.

"The more important question is whether or not the current strength will be sustained," said Evans-Pritchard. "We doubt that it will be given how reliant the recent

recovery has been on support from monetary and fiscal policy that is now being withdrawn."

Manufacturers have been battered by a slump in global demand for Chinese goods and steadily declining domestic economic activity.

Exports shrank by 7.7 percent last year compared with 2015 while growth in Chinese retail sales decelerated to 9.6 percent from the previous year's 10.6 percent.

Chinese leaders have used repeated infusions of credit to prevent a sharper slowdown, which has temporarily set back efforts to reduce reliance on trade and debt-supported investment.

A decline in construction spending as Beijing tightens controls in lending should weigh on demand for steel and other manufactured goods.

The health of Chinese manufacturing is important to other Asian economies that supply raw materials and industrial components and to exporters of oil, iron ore and other commodities such as Australia and Brazil.

Some individual indicators for new orders and other factors declined slightly in January, but "industrial operations remain in the boom range," said economist Zhang Liqun in a statement released by the NBS and an industry group, the China Association for Logistics and Purchasing. **AP**

Lufthansa, Etihad cooking up bigger things after catering accord



Deena Kamel Yousef, Richard Weiss

LONG-TIME adversaries Deutsche Lufthansa AG and Etihad Airways PJSC announced deals covering catering and aircraft maintenance and said the agreements could act as a springboard to a broader alliance.

While the accords amount to contract wins for Lufthansa worth more than 200 million euros (USD216 million), the carriers said they're targeting further tie-ups in cargo, procurement, information technology and new code-share routes, and could form a full joint venture, the closest relationship open to airlines from different regions. The German carrier said its also open to cooperation with Alitalia SpA, in which Etihad has a 49 percent stake.

The companies are drawing closer as Lufthansa struggles to cut costs and add low-cost flights amid union opposition just as Abu Dhabi-based Etihad grapples with losses from European partners. James Hogan, who leads the Mideast group, said yesterday's announcements mark a "major step" and that closer ties to the German carrier would bring vital "scale," while his counterpart Carsten Spohr said talks are already underway on a deeper deal.

"This is just the beginning of something that could be of significant size," Spohr told Bloomberg Television following a joint ceremony in Abu Dhabi. "Today marks the start. I think there's room for more. A joint venture could be a potential next step, and there are other ideas."

The initial accords between the carriers are modest, with Lufthansa's Sky Chefs arm set to provide in-flight food to Etihad at 16 cities worldwide under a \$100 million contract. The Lufthansa Technik maintenance unit will also explore cooperation with Etihad Aviation Group and its partner carriers, according to Spohr, who said that deal may be worth more than 100 million euros.

Hogan, who plans to stand down later this year, said the accords with Lufthansa are "the most significant" struck by

his company outside of its investments in so-called "equity alliance" partners, and will form a "platform for a much wider strategic collaboration."

Spohr said the carriers still hold "different perspectives" on a range of topics and restated his opposition to the funding of airlines through state aid, something he has previously claimed helped Etihad and Gulf peers Qatar Airways and Emirates become major global players. All the same, the pair will be "putting these differences aside," he added.

Lufthansa is struggling to keep pace with network rivals including British Airways owner IAG SA, in which Qatar Air has a 20 percent stake, just as discount operators led by Ryanair Holdings Ltd. eat away at its market share on short-haul routes. Etihad has failed to halt losses at Air Berlin Plc and Italian flag carrier Alitalia SpA, in which it has built up holdings as part of the equity alliance tying together eight carriers spanning Europe to Australia.

Etihad and Lufthansa began working together in 2016, announcing or code-share - or joint sales - agreement covering four routes and brokering a deal for Air Berlin to lease 38 surplus planes and crews to the larger German carrier. Talks are underway about the addition of further code-share destinations as early as next winter, Spohr said, and Etihad will also relocate terminals alongside Lufthansa in Frankfurt and Munich to aid cooperation.

Both carriers have announced plans for major Europe-Mideast initiatives in the past, only for them to fail to materialize. Etihad said in 2012 that a code-share pact with Air France-KLM Group could become a "much larger strategic partnership," while Lufthansa and Turkish Airlines were exploring a deal as recently as September 2015. Under joint venture agreements, which require antitrust immunity, airlines can effectively operate as a single carrier on specified routes, coordinating timetables and sharing costs and revenue. **Bloomberg**

corporate bits

VENETIAN BRINGS 'RUNNING MAN' TO COTAI ARENA



Stars from South Korean reality show Running Man are bringing "Running Man 2017 Live in Macao" to Macao fans at the Cotai Arena at The Venetian Macao on February 18.

Fans of the hit variety show are in for a treat, as its stars, including Song Ji-hyo, Lee Kwang-soo, Kim Jong-kook, Ji Suk-jin and Haha are coming to the territory as part of the Running Man 2017 Asia tour.

Alongside the usual games in which regular hosts and celebrity guests compete in tasks ranging from obstacle courses to quizzes, audiences can expect the show's typical humor and banter, according to a press release issued by Sands China.

Created by SBS in South Korea, Running Man has been described as an "urban action variety" in which guests join regular hosts to complete missions at various landmarks in order to win the final race.

Ticket prices start from MOP480 at all Cotai Ticketing box offices.

BNU SPONSORS A CHAIR PROFESSORSHIP IN UM



Banco Nacional Ultramarino (BNU) has committed a donation of MOP 10.65 million to establish an endowment fund in the University of Macau Development Foundation (UMDF). The purpose

of the donation is to support both the teaching and academic research of a chair professor in the Faculty of Business Administration (FBA) at the university.

With this contribution, the FBA has created a chair professorship in honor of BNU. It is the first named chair professorship at the university, according to a statement issued by the local bank.

Jacky So, dean of the FBA and director of UM's Asia-Pacific Academy of Economics and Management (APAEM), has been appointed the BNU Chair Professor of Finance.

CEM HOLDS 'POWER ELITES' PROGRAM

Companhia de Electricidade de Macao (CEM) launched the "Power Elites" Program in September 2016, attracting over 50 Form 1 and Form 2 students from 12 secondary schools.

The one-year program includes visiting CEM to learn about their power generation process and its infrastructure and facilities, in order to broaden the students' understanding.

Through the program the participants will also learn about local power generation and the work of CEM engineers, as well as visit neighboring regions including Hong Kong and mainland China.

According to a press release issued by CEM, the first visit of the program was held recently. It included an introduction of the principles



and process of power generation, the different sources of energy for local power and transmission and distribution, as well as other topics.

The program was co-organized by the Chinese Educators Association of Macao and the General Association of Chinese Students of Macao.

Growing hunger for Brazilian chicken as bird flu spreads

Manisha Jha, Gerson Freitas Jr. and Isis Almeida

THE bird flu outbreak sweeping across Asia and Europe means you may soon be eating more Brazilian chicken.

The world's top exporter has been untouched by the highly contagious virus that led to widespread culling of birds - more than 30 million in South Korea alone. After some key importing nations banned poultry from infected countries, Brazil is expected to see further demand for its products.

The avian influenza outbreak is also good news for other virus-free nations that can fill the supply gap, such as the U.S., which is the second-biggest exporter and mostly evaded contamination since cases escalated in October. Because migrating wild birds carry the disease, there's a risk that it will keep spreading, Societe Generale SA said in a report earlier this month.

"The global situation has worsened since mid-December," said Nan-Dirk Mulder, an analyst at Rabobank International in Utrecht, Netherlands. "Countries like Brazil and the U.S. will indeed capture market share from European Union in international markets."

Even without the current crisis, Brazil's chicken exports will climb



as much as 5 percent to 4.6 million metric tons this year, according to the Brazil Animal Protein Association, or ABPA. The country has never been hit by bird flu and overtook the U.S. as the top poultry shipper a decade ago.

Demand may rise from nations that banned imports or culled birds to contain the virus, such as China and parts of the EU, which are among Brazil's key customers. European nations killed more than 1.5 million poultry since Oct. 19 and the figure may more than double, the World Organization for Animal Health, or OIE, said

this month.

In an effort to contain the disease, France last week widened its order to cull birds in the southwest, where about two-thirds of the country's foie gras is produced.

About half the cases of the highly pathogenic H5N8 strain found across Europe since October were in poultry and the rest in wild birds, the OIE said. Poultry exports from EU, the largest exporter after Brazil and the U.S., totaled 1.4 billion euros (USD1.5 billion) in the first nine months of 2016, Rabobank said.

Recent outbreaks haven't been

as bad as in previous years. About 16.8 million birds were culled globally because of highly-pathogenic strains in 2016, almost half the amount a year earlier, the OIE estimates. While human infections with the virus are rare, some strains have been known to result in deaths.

How the top exporters fare depends on how they get through the rest of winter, when bird flu is at its worst. While Brazil has remained immune, the U.S. has struggled in the past and this month found a case in Montana. In 2015, the worst outbreak in American

history killed 48 million birds, reduced poultry-product exports and cost the federal government almost \$1 billion.

"An outbreak in the U.S. would completely change the game," said Ricardo Santin, a vice president at Brazil's ABPA. "There is plenty of room for Brazil to increase exports even if the U.S. remains unaffected. They are more competitive than us in chicken legs, but they don't access the market as well as we do."

■ Demand may rise from nations that banned imports or culled birds to contain the virus, such as China

South Korea has been hit hardest, culling about one-fifth its chickens. China, South Africa and Hong Kong are among countries that banned imports from parts of Europe, while Chile reported its first outbreak in more than a decade. In Brazil, top poultry exporters suspended factory visits to avoid contamination after the government raised its bird flu alert status in December.

"It's really important for us to preserve our sanitary status," said Francisco Turra, head of ABPA. "It wouldn't be a surprise if we double exports to some particular countries" if Brazil stays free of the disease, he said. **Bloomberg**

Trump comments on Japan, China currencies rattle markets

Elaine Kurtenbach, Tokyo

JAPAN is not deliberately weakening the yen to boost its exports, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said yesterday when asked in parliament about President Donald Trump's accusations of currency manipulation.

Abe is expected to meet with Trump in Washington on Feb. 10. He said Japan would again explain to the U.S. side its unprecedented monetary easing policies, which have pulled the yen lower against the dollar in recent years.

"The criticism that our policies are intended to direct the yen lower is undeserved," Abe

told fellow lawmakers during a budget committee hearing. Instead they are aimed at spurring inflation, he said.

During a meeting with pharmaceutical executives on Tuesday, Trump complained about U.S. drug makers shifting production overseas and said his trade policies would end unfair "global freeloading," according to a transcript of the meeting.

He blamed excess regulations and devaluations by other countries. "Every other country lives on devaluation," he said. "You look at what China's doing, you look at what Japan has done over the years. [...] They play the money

market, they play the devaluation market and we sit there like a bunch of dummies."

Trump occasionally has railed against Japan's trade surplus with the U.S., which fell 4.6 percent last year from a year earlier to USD60.2 billion, according to preliminary Japanese trade figures.

The yen's value fell steadily after Japan's central bank implemented massive monetary easing four years ago, hoping to counter deflation and get people and businesses to spend more money. Injecting massive amounts of cash into the economy through the same sorts of asset purchases used

by the Federal Reserve for "quantitative easing" caused the yen's value to fall from about 80 yen to the dollar to a low of about 125 yen to the dollar in mid-2015.

Trump is not the only critic of that trend toward a weaker yen. But Japan generally has won grudging acceptance of its unorthodox monetary policies from its major trading partners.

The dollar was trading near 100 yen in August but has surged recently, partly because the Federal Reserve is gradually raising interest rates and partly because investors are betting on bigger returns from investments under Trump's adminis-



tration.

After Trump's comments, the dollar briefly weakened against the yen. But by late yesterday in Asia, it was at 113.45 yen, above its previous close of 112.94 yen.

Trump also singled out China's currency. For many years, U.S. officials complained that Beijing was keeping the yuan artificially low to

make its products more competitive in overseas markets. But more recently, Chinese regulators have been striving to prevent the currency from weakening too quickly.

There was no immediate reaction to Trump's comments from Beijing, where financial markets and government offices are closed this week for lunar new year holidays. **AP**

AP PHOTO



Afghan women practice ancient Shaolin martial arts

Massoud Hossaini, Kabul

WHILE Afghanistan's Buddhists were carving the giant sandstone statues in Bamiyan in 500 A.D., Buddhists in China were creating martial arts in the Shaolin temple in Henan Province.

Fifteen hundred years later, 10 ethnic Hazara women and girls practice the martial arts of Shaolin on a hilltop in the west of Kabul. They are prepa-

ring for the day that Afghanistan can send its women's team to the Shaolin world championship in China.

Sima Azimi, 20, who is originally from Jaghuri, in central Afghanistan, trains nine students in the martial arts to prepare for Olympic competition, but also to protect themselves on the streets of Kabul, where women are routinely harassed. Azimi remembered an incident in which a thief

tried to snatch her purse, but with her martial arts skills she fought back and saved it.

Raihana Amiri, also 20, hopes to participate in international Shaolin competitions and bring honor and pride to Afghanistan, which is battered by decades of war.

When they aren't training on the snow-covered hills that surround Kabul, Azimi trains her students in a grungy, dark club financed by a young cine-

ma actor. Azimi said it was difficult to find all the tools needed to train. For instance, she had to order a Shaolin sword from Iran, where she had studied the art for three years. They could not find Shaolin uniforms, but, undeterred, they designed and ordered uniforms made by a Kabul tailor.

While studying in Iran, Azimi competed in two competitions where she won gold and

bronze medals. A year after returning to Afghanistan, she decided to train young girls who lived in the Hazara-dominated neighborhoods of the capital. Most of her students

They are preparing for the day that Afghanistan can send its women's team to the Shaolin world championship in China

are teenagers, while a few of the older students study in universities. Azimi charges between USD2 and \$5 a month depending on what they can afford.

"Some of my students' families had problems accepting their girls studying Wushu," she said. "But I went to their home and talked to their parents."

In religiously conservative Afghanistan, girls are often discouraged from aggressive sports. Many parents fear a sporting accident could result in a girl breaking her hymen before marriage, which is considered deeply shameful.

While strides have been made for women in Afghanistan, Azimi said there's still much to change. She firmly believes that girls and women can stand toe-to-toe with boys in Shaolin martial arts. In an Olympic Committee competition in Kabul, Azimi took first position among female Shaolin participants. AP

Chinese singer Jane Zhang gets the Timbaland touch

Mesfin Fekadu,
Ap Music Writer, New York

GRAMMY winning hitmaker Timbaland has worked with everyone from Jay Z to Justin Timberlake to the "Empire" TV series cast, but his latest muse is Chinese pop singer Jane Zhang.

Timbaland and Zhang, a global international sensation known as "The Dolphin Princess" thanks to her whispery high vocals, partnered for the song "Dust My Shoulders Off," which reached the top 10 on the U.S. iTunes' songs chart.

"Timbaland gave me such a brand new life journey; it's not just about music [...he] really makes me feel refreshed," Zhang, 32, said in a recent interview. "He's got a lot of ideas when we're doing music; some ideas just suddenly come without any reasons. I don't know, I just love those ideas."

"Dust My Shoulders Off" is an additive, beat-driven pop song. It's a departure from the sound Zhang has been known for back home, which helped her score multiple hits.

The collaboration came

about quickly: Two weeks after meeting with Timbaland's manager in a recording studio, Zhang was recording with the man behind hits for Missy Elliott and Nelly Furtado.

Zhang came to fame after competing on the popular, all-female TV singing competition "Super Girl" in China. She says though she is established outside of the U.S., she's enjoying being a new artist: "[It's] kind of another journey in my life [to] start again."

She plans to release an album this year and says artists like Mariah Carey helped her fall in love

with music, and taught her English.

"Her voice makes me think about how to sing the songs well, how to release your emotions to everyone. The first time I heard her music I didn't learn English yet so I didn't understand the lyrics... I just feel that her voice is amazing, and I can really feel the things she told," Zhang said of Carey.

"After a few years I wanted to learn English and I checked the lyrics. It just mean the same thing I felt," she added. "So I totally think her voice, her songs crossed the culture." AP

AP PHOTO



Kelvin Chan, Hong Kong

MYSTERY surrounds the whereabouts of a Chinese-born Canadian billionaire reportedly seized in Hong Kong by mainland Chinese police, in a case that could rekindle concerns about overreach by Chinese law enforcement in the semiautonomous city.

Xiao Jianhua is in mainland China, according to Hong Kong's South China Morning Post yesterday, citing an anonymous source close to the tycoon, one of China's richest individuals. Overseas Chinese news sites said earlier that Chinese police officers escorted Xiao from his suite at the luxury Four Seasons Hotel last Friday and took him away. Such news sites carry reports of political gossip and corruption scandals that can be difficult to verify in tightly controlled China.

The reports contradict a front-page ad on the same day in the Ming Pao newspaper purportedly in Xiao's name, denying he was taken against his will. That would be an apparent breach of the city's mini-constitution, which prohibits mainland Chinese law enforcement agencies from operating in Hong Kong.

"Let there be no misunderstanding!" the statement said. "It's not true that I've been abducted and taken back to the mainland."

Xiao is the founder of Beijing-based Tomorrow Group. The 46-year-old is worth nearly USD6 billion, making him China's 32nd wealthiest person, according to the Hurun Report, China's version of the Forbes Rich List.

It's unclear why Xiao was targeted, but his case has parallels with that of five Hong Kong booksellers, who disappeared in 2015 only to turn up under control of the mainland authorities, sparking fears that Beijing was eroding Hong Kong's wide autonomy and rule of law. The five sold gossipy books about China's communist leaders that were banned on the mainland but popular with Chinese visitors.

China's Ministry of Public Security and Foreign Ministry did not respond to requests for comment yesterday, a public holiday in China.

The Hong Kong police force said yesterday they have asked Chinese authorities for help in following up on the case.

In response to an inquiry about Xiao, the police force said initial investigations showed the "subject" crossed into the mainland at a border checkpoint Friday. They

Mystery over Chinese tycoon's disappearance from Hong Kong



In this file photo, Xiao Jianhua, a Chinese-born Canadian billionaire, reads a book outside the International Finance Centre in Hong Kong

had launched the investigation after receiving a request for assistance from a family member on Saturday but a day later, the relative asked to withdraw the report after getting word that he was safe.

Xiao is reported to have built his fortune in part because of close connections with the families of Communist Party leaders. In 2014, reports said he fled to Hong Kong following rumors he was the target of a graft investigation — reports he denied at the time.

A wide-reaching anti-corruption crackdown led by Chinese President Xi Jinping has snared dozens of executives at state companies. Chinese state media said in 2013 that Xiao controlled nine publicly listed companies and had stakes in more than 30 financial institutions.

The New York Times reported in 2014 that a company Xiao co-founded paid \$2.4 million to buy shares in an investment firm held by Xi's sister and brother-in-law.

Rupert Hoogewerf, the Hurun Report's publisher,

said Xiao holds the reputation of a "maverick visionary" who makes major decisions on his own and has gone to lengths to obscure Tomorrow Group's holdings, which include banks and securities companies.

"He's one of the kings of capital of China," Hoogewerf said. "There's not many people moving money in the same way."

It's unclear why Xiao was targeted, but his case has parallels with that of the five Hong Kong booksellers

According to the Ming Pao ad, Xiao was out of the country for medical treatment and would address the media once he finished his treat-

ment. It followed similar statements the company posted this week on its Twitter-like Sina Weibo account, which have since been deleted.

The ad said Xiao is a Canadian citizen and a Hong Kong permanent resident and enjoys protections of both, and also has an unspecified diplomatic passport. Xiao was named ambassador-at-large for Antigua and Barbuda in 2015, according to the Antigua government's website.

The ad cited Xiao as saying he was a patriotic Chinese businessman who "has always loved the party and the nation, and has never participated in anything that would hurt the country's interests or the government's image, let alone support any opposition forces or groups."

It's not unusual for officials, executives and other individuals detained by Chinese security to be pressured into releasing messages to their relatives or on their social media accounts claiming that all is well. Such messaging, coupled with censorship of

reporting online by domestic media, has been seen as part of the Chinese authorities' efforts to tamp down concerns about the safety of the individuals concerned.

The Canadian Consulate said it was aware of the reports and had contacted authorities "to gather additional information and provide assistance."

Jean-Francois Harvey, a Hong Kong-based lawyer, said he expected the case would further alarm mainland Chinese investors and businesspeople who have closely watched Beijing's anti-corruption crackdown and the country's economic slowdown.

In the wake of the booksellers' incident, Xiao's disappearance is likely to further degrade the perception that Hong Kong, unlike China, has an independent judiciary that operates outside of the political system, he said.

"People will be questioning whether Hong Kong is a safe haven," Harvey said. "I think the answer to that question is very, very clear now, sadly." AP

INDONESIA

Trump policy dims hope for refugees seeking resettlement



Iraqi asylum seeker Khairullah kisses his daughter Rawan during an interview with AP at a temporary home in Puncak, West Java

Stephen Wright, Puncak

AFTER getting death threats from Al-Shabab militants, Mohamed Dahir Saeed and his wife fled their native Somalia with plans to seek safety in Australia. They arrived in nearby Indonesia, only to be told “the sea is closed” for anyone attempting to make the perilous boat journey south.

That was two years ago. Now another chance may be disappearing for Saeed and thousands of other asylum seekers who have made it to this Southeast Asian country with dreams of finding better lives elsewhere.

“The majority of people here, the U.S. takes them,” Saeed said. “Now the U.S. they say no Somali, no Iraq, no Syrian, no Iran, no Sudan. [...] So maybe we will go to another place. I hope,” he said, seated outside his tiny house perched above the Ciliwung River.

For thousands of asylum seekers and refugees from Iraq, Somalia and other conflict-scarred countries, Indonesia is an often years-long hiatus as they wait for the U.S. or another country to ac-

cept them. President Donald Trump’s travel ban on citizens of seven Muslim countries and suspension of the U.S. refugee program has now made their tenuous situation even more uncertain.

Indonesia is home to nearly 14,000 men, women and children seeking resettlement in other countries, according to UNHCR, the U.N. refugee agency. About 7,500 have been recognized as refugees, giving them the prized U.N. card that inches them closer to realizing their dreams of a better life. But last year just 610 were resettled in other countries such as the U.S., Canada, Germany and New Zealand.

At least 2,700 of those in limbo here are from countries listed in Trump’s 90-day travel ban: Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Syria and Libya. Asylum seekers in general are affected by his 120-day suspension of the U.S. refugee program, and by his decision to cut the number of refugees the U.S. accepts this budget year by more than half, to 50,000.

Some 3 million refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since Congress passed the Refugee

Act of 1980, according to the Pew Research Center.

Saeed, 31, said that if he had the chance he’d tell the U.S. president that as a Somalian he’s a “peace man.” He said he left Somalia after Al-Shabab militants fighting the government pressured him to join their group, and that one of the militants wanted Saeed’s wife for himself.

Indonesia is home to nearly 14,000 men, women and children seeking resettlement in other countries

“Now in Somalia there is a war from Al-Shabab and government. So these Somalis who run from Somalia, they need peace because they need to work, they need to feed their family. They are looking for a

better life.”

Indonesia, a vast but poor archipelago country of more than 250 million people in Southeast Asia, might seem an unlikely refuge. Initially, many people fled there because they believed it would be a jumping-off point to reach Australia by boat. That possibility no longer exists: Since September 2013, the Australian government has turned back the often barely seaworthy vessels.

Puncak, a small West Java city nestled beneath a mountain that tempers Indonesia’s tropical heat, is a magnet for men from the Middle East seeking sex and a pleasant climate. Because of its proximity to Jakarta, where asylum seekers can be summoned for a refugee interview, and because of the low cost of living, many families from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Pakistan and other nations also scrape out an existence there.

Saeed is waiting in Puncak for a UNHCR interview he said he was told could happen in a year. Before that, he and his wife stayed on Batam, an Indonesian island near Singapore, in accommodations overseen

by the International Organization for Migration.

It was good there, he said. Food, a room and an operation for his wife to remove a cyst that made her infertile. But when UNHCR told them there would be no refugee interviews there, they made the agonizing choice a month ago to come to Java.

They sold their mobile phones for money. His wife is sick again, but an operation is out of the question. One plus: The cool climate means they don’t to buy a fan or an air conditioner — an unthinkable expense.

Despite the meager existence in Puncak, the endless days of boredom, the frustration and the waiting, living among the general population is for many preferable to the alternative of staying in one of the Indonesian government’s overcrowded detention centers or camps.

The government of predominantly Muslim Indonesia allows asylum seekers to live in the community but they are not permitted to work and lack access to schools and public hospitals.

There is no financial support unless a nongovernmental group gets involved. If relatives or friends abroad stop sending money, surrendering to a detention center is the only option left.

Khairullah, a minority Sunni Muslim from Iraq, said he fled Mosul about two years ago with his wife and two young sons. The Iraqi city was liberated last month from Islamic State group militants who captured it in the summer of 2014.

“I want to go outside [Iraq] because there my life is very dangerous. Maybe I’m dead, maybe my wife is dead. Maybe one of my children,” said Khairullah, who ran a barbershop in Iraq.

He said he couldn’t afford to live in Turkey or Jordan, but a friend convinced him that life in Indonesia’s camps was decent, with two rooms for a family, money and food.

“When I come here to Indonesia, I go to the camp, I don’t see this. One room, small room, no money, food no good. I can’t stay there.”

Now the family, expanded to five with the birth of a daughter in Indonesia, waits to hear the outcome of a refugee interview they had five months ago. Khairullah said a sister in Iraq sends USD300 a month, but not always because of the chaotic conditions in the country.

“Now we see the Trump news. No Muslims. Don’t come, Muslims,” he said, cradling his toddler Rawan.

“You know, I don’t sleep at night, just thinking. What about my future? For me it’s OK. But what about the future of my sons? What about my daughter with no ID? What about them? I don’t know what I do.” **AP**

Robert Burns, Washington

New Pentagon chief seeks to reassure nervous Asian allies

BY visiting Japan and South Korea on his first official overseas trip, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis is seeking to reinforce key alliances after President Donald Trump's campaign-trail complaints that defense treaties disadvantaged the United States.

The visits also reflect the urgency of concerns on both sides of the Pacific about North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Mattis, a retired four-star Marine general, inherited a North Korea problem that has grown more worrisome as the communist nation's leader, Kim Jong Un, claims progress toward fielding a ballistic missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to the United States. Former Secretary of State John Kerry said in early January the U.S. may need "more forceful ways" of dealing with North Korea if it develops a ballistic missile of intercontinental range.

Mattis, who entered office hours after Trump on Jan. 20, is due to arrive today in Seoul, where he will meet with his counterpart, Defense Minister Han Min Koo, amid a swirl of political turmoil. President Park Geun-hye was impeached in December and the constitutional court is reviewing whether to formally end her rule. Later in the week, Mattis is to hold talks in Tokyo with Defense Minister Tomomi Inada and other senior Japanese go-



Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford greets Defense Secretary Jim Mattis (right) at the Pentagon

vernment officials.

North Korea is expected to be at or near the top of Mattis' agenda. Beyond its long-range missile aspirations, the North already has missiles capable of hitting South Korea as well as U.S. bases in Japan.

Trump said during the campaign that while he supports the alliances with Japan and South Korea, he would not rule out abandoning them if they refuse to pay more for their

own defense. "It could be that Japan will have to defend itself against North Korea," he told a campaign rally in August. The first foreign leader he met as president-elect was Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe; they'll meet again in Washington on Feb. 10.

Mattis has said little in public since taking office. But he has left no doubt that America's security alliances, including those in Asia, are a top priority.

He is the first recently retired military officer to serve as defense secretary since George C. Marshall in 1950-51 during the Korean War.

Pentagon chiefs regularly visit South Korea and Japan, reflecting their status as U.S. treaty allies. Chuck Hagel, who visited the heavily guarded Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea as defense secretary in September 2013, said in an interview that Mattis is making the right move.

"It was a smart decision" to visit these allies early, Hagel said. He believes officials in Tokyo and Seoul are wondering: "Can we rely on the U.S.? What is the future here?"

The U.S. has about 28,000 troops stationed in South Korea and about 50,000 in Japan.

Hagel said Tokyo and other U.S. allies in Asia have been particularly upset by Trump's decision to pull the U.S. out of a Pacific Rim trade initiative, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the centerpiece of former President Barack Obama's effort to strengthen U.S. economic ties in the region.

Kent Calder, director of Asia programs at Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies, said Mattis could

bolster Japan's confidence by explicitly reaffirming that disputed East China Sea islands are covered by the U.S.-Japan defense treaty. The islands are controlled by Japan, which calls them the Senkaku, but also claimed by China, which calls them the Diaoyu.

China's regional role and military modernization will also loom over Mattis's meetings in Seoul and Tokyo. All are hoping to persuade China to use its influence over North Korea to contain or curtail Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs.

Mattis said at his Senate confirmation hearing the U.S. should do whatever it takes to stop North Korea from acquiring a nuclear-capable missile of intercontinental range.

"It's a serious threat," he said.

Anthony Ruggerio, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a foreign policy think tank, said Mattis could advance U.S. security interests by encouraging Tokyo and Seoul to improve their bilateral relations, which are strained by disputes.

"While the two of them may have issues with each other, they need to be unified against North Korea," Ruggerio said. **AP**

TRUMP ADVISER

Peter Thiel became New Zealand citizen in California in 2011



PayPal founder Peter Thiel, right, listens as Donald Trump speaks during a meeting with technology industry leaders at Trump Tower in New York

SILICON Valley billionaire and President Donald Trump adviser Peter Thiel was able to gain New Zealand citizenship in 2011 despite never having lived in the country, because a top lawmaker decided his entrepreneurial skills and philanthropy were valuable to the nation,

documents reveal.

Thiel didn't even have to leave California to become a new member of the South Pacific nation. He was granted citizenship during a private ceremony held at the New Zealand Consulate in Santa Monica.

The New Zealand Department of Internal Af-

airs yesterday released 145 pages of partially redacted documents detailing how Thiel became a citizen.

His status was first reported by The New Zealand Herald newspaper last month and raised questions because Thiel didn't fulfil the usual criteria requi-

ring people to live in the country.

In his application, Thiel wrote that he owned a home in New Zealand but if he was granted citizenship, he would need to continue residing in the U.S. to manage his California-based companies.

He said he realized his circumstances wouldn't usually qualify him for citizenship, but that he believed he was an exception.

"In the course of pursuing my international business opportunities, my travel, personal philosophical commitments and benefaction, I am happy to say categorically that I have found no other country that aligns more with my view of the futu-

re than New Zealand," he wrote.

He said that as part of his study into how he could contribute to the local entrepreneurial environment, he had consulted with John Key, who was New Zealand's prime minister at the time.

Thiel wrote that "it would give me great pride to let it be known that I am a New Zealand citizen."

However, Thiel's citizenship status only became publicly known following last month's newspaper report. The 2011 documents show that Thiel also remained a citizen of Germany, where he was born.

Thiel, 49, co-founded PayPal and was the first professional investor in Facebook. He secretly bankrolled a lawsuit against the news and gossip site Gawker which led to its bankruptcy and closure. Forbes estimates his net worth at USD2.7 billion, which makes him one of New Zealand's

wealthiest citizens.

He has been an important adviser to Trump, who has vowed to put "America first."

When considering Thiel's application, New Zealand officials noted that he had established a venture capital fund in New Zealand which had invested in a Wellington-based online accounting business, Xero.

"Mr. Thiel has demonstrated his philanthropy through making a million-dollar donation to the Christchurch earthquake relief fund," officials wrote as part of a letter recommending his application be approved.

His citizenship was granted through a special approval by lawmaker Nathan Guy, who at the time was the Internal Affairs minister.

Opposition lawmaker Iain Lees-Galloway tweeted yesterday that the decision was "entirely about money" and that citizenship shouldn't be for sale. **AP**

Inna Varenysia & Jim Heintz, Avdiivka

Heavy fighting continues in eastern Ukraine, 10 killed

FREEZING and nerve-shattered residents of an eastern Ukraine town battered by an upsurge in fighting between troops and Russia-backed rebels flocked to a humanitarian aid center to receive food and warm up.

Heavy shelling of government-held Avdiivka, just north of the rebel stronghold city of Donetsk, began over the weekend and persisted into yesterday. Donetsk city also was hit.

At least 10 people have been killed since Monday and dozens wounded.

Separatist rebels have been fighting government troops and volunteer brigades in eastern Ukraine since April 2014 in a conflict that has killed more than 9,700 people. A pact reached nearly two years ago in Minsk, Belarus, called for a cease-fire, for heavy weapons to be pulled back from the front lines and for a political resolution of the conflict, but the agreement has been observed only fitfully and skirmishes and artillery fire have persisted.

In a worrisome sign, an Associated Press reporter saw rebel artillery positions in the center of Donetsk city yesterday.

What sparked the recent escalation is unclear. But each side could find negotiation benefits in it.

The Ukrainian government, concerned that the new U.S. administration might take a comparatively soft line on Russia, could point to the escalation as evidence that Russia cannot be trusted.

That prospect was acknowledged by President Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov. "Kiev is trying to use the fighting it provoked itself as a pretext to refuse to observe the Minsk agreement and blame Russia," he told reporters.

But by showing the strength of the rebels and their Russian backers, the fighting could send a signal to Washington that Moscow holds power in the region and the United States should offer concessions to Moscow if it wants peace in Ukraine.

The escalation "seems to be another reason for the soonest possible resumption of dialogue and cooperation between Russia and America," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

In the late morning, shelling subsided; there were unconfirmed reports the sides had agreed

to a cease-fire to restore electricity and water supplies.

The power outage hit amid a strong cold snap, with temperatures in Avdiivka as low as minus 18 Celsius. Hundreds of city residents streamed to a stadium where aid agencies were distributing food, and to warming stations.

The Ukrainian government's press office for the military operation in the east reported one soldier killed, and nine soldiers and one civilian injured yesterday.

In Makiivka, the rebel-controlled northeastern suburb of Donetsk, two coal miners were injured by shelling as they were walking to work, the rebels' Donetsk News Agency reported.

An Associated Press reporter outside Avdiivka saw a transporter carrying Grad multiple missile launcher with empty rounds drive away from the front line yesterday.

Grad is among the heavy weaponry that both warring parties committed to pull back when they signed a cease-fire agreement in Minsk in 2015. AP



AP PHOTO

AD

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Thursday, 23/02/2017

Connected Consumers: Innovate or Die

Speaker: **Mr. Anson Bailey**, Head of Consumer Markets & member of the High Growth Tech & Innovation Group, KPMG

FMBA Breakfast Meeting

Introduction: We are seeing a rapidly changing landscape in the retail consumer space and its relationship with technology being the key driver. **Mr. Anson Bailey** will give you an insight into the future consumer and the latest innovation trends that are impacting the traditional business sectors.

Date: Thursday, 23rd February 2017
Time: 9:00-10:30 am (Reception: 8:45am)
Venue: Sofitel Macau at Ponte 16 Promenade Meeting Room (6th floor)

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USA

Trump's secretary of state pick headed for Senate approval

Richard Lardner, Washington

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's nomination of Rex Tillerson for secretary of state is headed toward Senate confirmation after several Democrats crossed party lines to back the former Exxon Mobil CEO.

The vote on Tillerson, scheduled for today [Macau time], comes as tension continues to build among congressional Republicans and Democrats over Trump's executive order on immigrants and refugees. Minority Leader Chuck Schumer declared the order a litmus test for Trump's remaining Cabinet choices. Any that refuse to publicly reject the "horrible" new policy should be opposed, the New York Democrat said.

But the Democrats just don't have the numbers to block Tillerson from becoming the nation's chief diplomat. Republicans hold a four-seat advan-



Secretary of State-nominee Rex Tillerson testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington

tage in the Senate and during a procedural vote Monday on the nomination, three Democrats — Joe Manchin of West Virginia, Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota and Mark Warner of Virginia — cast their ballots for Tillerson. They're unlikely to change their minds.

Sen. Angus King, a Maine independent who caucuses with the Democrats, also supported Tillerson. The nomination needs only a simple majority to be confirmed.

The opening days of the Trump administration have seen little of the honeymoon period new

presidents usually experience. The chief battleground has been Trump's executive order temporarily blocking refugees worldwide and anyone from seven Muslim-majority nations.

With liberal groups pressing them to fight Trump, Democrats used delaying tactics on Trump

nominees yesterday. It's one of their limited weapons as the congressional minority to hamper the GOP.

Several other votes are planned today to get Trump nominees approved by committees, clearing them for confirmation in the full Senate.

Republicans said they would try anew to push two Trump nominees through the Senate Finance Committee, a day after Democrats said both men had lied to Congress about their financial background and blocked those votes.

Rep. Tom Price, R-Ga., is Trump's pick for health secretary, a post that would place him at the lead of Republican efforts to erase former President Barack Obama's health care overhaul. Democrats cited a newspaper report that officials of an Australian biomed company said Price received a special offer to buy their stock at reduced prices, despite Price's congressional testimony that the offer was available to all investors.

Democrats said a bank run by wealthy financier Steve Mnuchin, Trump's designee for treasury secretary, used a process for handling home foreclosures that critics have associated with fraud.

Both men and congressional Republicans said they'd done nothing wrong. **AP**

AD

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what's ON

SPRING BREEZE TO THE SOUTHERN GREENLY LAND – EXHIBITION OF THE LUNAR NEW YEAR TRADITIONS OF GUANGDONG PROVINCE, HONG KONG S.A.R. AND MACAO S.A.R.

TIME: 9am-7pm

UNTIL: February 19, 2017

VENUE: Temporary Exhibitions Gallery of IACM

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8988 4100

LOVE OF MACAU – PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEE KUNG KIM

TIME: 10am-7pm (Last admission at 6:30pm, closed on Mondays)

UNTIL: July 9, 2017

VENUE: Macao Museum of Art, Av. Xian Xing Hai, s/n, NAPE

MUSEUM ADMISSION: \$5 (Free on Sundays and public holidays)

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8791 9814

AD LIB- RECENT WORKS BY KONSTANTIN BESSMERTNY

TIME: 10am-7pm (no admission after 6:30 pm, closed on Mondays)

UNTIL: May 28, 2017

VENUE: Macao Museum of Art, Av. Xian Xing Hai, s/n, NAPE

ADMISSION: MOP5 (free on Sundays and public holidays)

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8791 9814

KUNG FU PANDA ACADEMY

TIME: 11:30am-1pm & 2pm-15:30pm

UNTIL: February 5, 2017

VENUE: Level 4, Tian Shan Ballroom, Sheraton Grand Macao Hotel, Sands Cotai Central

ADMISSION: MOP200 per child (complimentary entry for one adult and MOP100 for each additional adult)

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8113 0000

Offbeat

HUMMINGBIRD EGG GETS IN WAY OF UPGRADES TO CALIFORNIA BRIDGE



A tiny unborn hummingbird is getting in the way of a big bridge project in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The discovery of a nest and egg in a tree is stalling the start of upgrades on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge about 30 miles north of San Francisco, officials said.

The species, Anna's Hummingbird, is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that forbids the removal of the egg and offers other protections to birds.

The nest — about half the size of a fist — was discovered about a week ago when work was set to begin.

It was found on the Richmond side of the \$70 million bridge project, in one of about two dozen trees that were to be removed to widen the freeway, officials said.

Under the protection act, the tree must stay put until the hummingbird baby is gone.

The goals of the act are to protect, restore and manage migratory bird populations to ensure long-term sustainability.

"We've dealt with this on all sorts of things on every project we've worked with in the Bay Area," Metropolitan Transportation Commission spokesman Randy Rentschler said.

Audubon California spokesman Garrison Frost said cliff swallows were building their intricate nests beneath an overpass in Petaluma, and cormorants held up deconstruction of the old Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge.

Some work on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge could be delayed a few weeks by the discovery of the egg.

TV canal macau

13:00	TDM News (Repeated)
13:30	News (RTPi) Delayed Broadcast
14:50	RTPi Live
17:40	Happy Endings Sr.3
18:20	Precious Pearl (Repeated)
19:10	Non-Daily Portuguese News (Repeated)
19:40	Soap Opera
20:30	Main News, Financial & Weather Report
21:00	TDM Talk Show
21:30	Castle S6
22:10	Precious Pearl
23:00	TDM News
23:30	Miscellaneous
00:05	Main News, Financial & Weather Report (Repeated)
00:40	RTPi Live

cinema

CINETEATRO

2 FEB -3 FEB

RESIDENT EVIL: FINAL CHAPTER

ROOM 1

2:30, 9:30, 11:30pm

Director: Paul W. S. Anderson

Starring: Milla Jovovich, Ali Larter, Shawn Roberts, Ruby Rose

Language: English

Duration: 103min

RESIDENT EVIL: FINAL CHAPTER

ROOM 1 (3D)

7:30pm

Director: Paul W. S. Anderson

Starring: Milla Jovovich, Ali Larter, Shawn Roberts, Ruby Rose

Language: English

Duration: 103min

THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE

ROOM 1

4:30pm

Director: Chris McKay

Starring: Jenny Slate, Will Arnett, Ralph Fiennes

Language: Cantonese (English)

Duration: 104min

POKEMON: THE MOVIE 19

ROOM 2

2:15, 4:00, 5:45pm

Director: Kunihiko Yuyama

Starring: James Cathcart, Kiyotaka Furushima, Megumi Hayashibara

Language: Cantonese (Chinese)

LA LA LAND

ROOM 2

7:30, 10:00pm

Director: Damien Chazelle

Starring: Ryan Gosling, Emma Stone

Language: English

Duration: 128min

MOANA

ROOM 3

2:00, 4:05, 6:10, 8:15pm

Director: Ron Clements, John Musker

Starring: Auli'i Cravalho, Dwayne Johnson, Rachel House

Language: Cantonese

Duration: 103min

THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE

ROOM 3

10:15pm

Director: Chris McKay

Starring: Jenny Slate, Will Arnett, Ralph Fiennes

Language: Cantonese (English)

Duration: 104min

MACAU TOWER

28 JAN - 15 FEB

JOURNEY TO THE WEST: THE DEMONS STRIKE BACK

2:30, 4:30, 7:30, 9:30pm

Director: Hark Tsui

Starring: Bei-Er Bao, Mengke Bateer, Kenny Lin

Language: Cantonese

Duration: 109min

this day in history



1979 Sid Vicious Dies From Drugs Overdose

Sex Pistols' bass player Sid Vicious has died of a heroin overdose in New York.

His mother, Anne Beverley, found him dead in bed with his sleeping girlfriend in an apartment in Greenwich Village this morning.

There had been a party in the flat to celebrate Mr Vicious' release on \$50,000 bail yesterday pending his trial for the murder of his former girlfriend, Nancy Spungen, last October.

The precise details of his death are unknown but party guests say Sid Vicious - real name John Simon Ritchie - took some heroin at midnight.

His mother, once a registered addict, said: "He knew the smack was pure and strong and took a lot less than usual."

Shortly after taking the drug Mr Vicious, 21, collapsed, went into seizure and displayed the symptoms of overdose.

He revived 40 minutes later and went to bed with his girlfriend, Michelle Robinson, at about 0300 local time.

The first police officer on the scene later in the morning was Robert Zink who discovered "a syringe, a spoon and what is probably residue near the body."

The troubled punk musician - renowned for his violent behaviour - had been on a detoxification, methadone programme in prison, but he had developed a £40 a day habit since meeting Miss Spungen last year.

It was the second time Virgin Records - the Sex Pistols' label - had to bail out Sid Vicious.

He was re-arrested after his initial bail for assaulting Patti Smith's brother, Todd, in a New York disco and had just served another 55 days in prison.

A spokesman for Virgin boss Richard Branson said: "In retrospect he was obviously far safer in jail where the temptations that ultimately killed him were not present."

Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren - who was planning a comeback for the band - also blames the person who gave him the heroin at the party.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The autopsy confirmed Sid Vicious died from an accumulation of fluid on the lungs, characteristic of heroin abuse.

Anne Beverley and Malcolm McLaren were involved in a wrangle over where Vicious should be buried.

Mr McLaren thought he should be buried in London, his home town, but Vicious' wish was to be buried with Nancy Spungen in Philadelphia.

Ms Beverley scattered her son's ashes in the Jewish graveyard where Ms Spungen had been interred, without seeking the family's permission.

The Sex Pistols re-formed for their 20th anniversary in 1996 with original bassist Glen Matlock taking the place of Sid Vicious.

YOUR STARS

Aries

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

What's all the fussing and fighting about? You bring your much-needed sense of calm to the center of a fracas. Frankly, some people just enjoy getting in a tizzy - which is fine for them.

Taurus

April 20-May 20

A certain amount of frustration may be present in your life right now, much as you would like to avoid it. Try to work solo as much as possible to duck any negative energy around you.

Gemini

May 21-Jun. 21

Recent events have you feeling like you're walking on a tightrope, and you're troubled about how, exactly, you're supposed to make it through. Remain calm and remember to be open to possibilities.

Cancer

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

It might be the time to yank yourself out of fantasyland and plant your feet firmly in reality. The longer you put off dealing with the situation, the more frustrating it will become.

Leo

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Straight answers may be hard to come by right now, especially if the questions themselves are as complicated and twisty as any maze. The astrological lesson here is that you need to learn how to make up your own mind.

Virgo

Aug. 23-Sept. 22

Making mistakes is normal, so please, no beating yourself up for something that was an absolutely understandable misunderstanding. Nobody's perfect, and what's more, nobody should be.

Libra

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Before your friends and neighbors file a missing persons report, reassure them that you're still here - you just need some time to yourself to tackle a few weighty matters before they get even bigger.

Scorpio

Oct. 23 - Nov. 21

You're a firm believer that two heads are better than one, so put your money where your mouth is. The stars present you with someone out of your usual comfort zone.

Sagittarius

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

'Expect the unexpected' is your current mantra, and a very wise one at that. Some conflicting celestial energies cause a hoopla that needs your wise and discerning eye.

Capricorn

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You have a wonderful chance to revamp your image from the outer details to the inner. That goes double when it comes to matters financial. Keep a close eye on your wallet now.

Aquarius

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Get out and about. Your social energy is at an all-time high, and you need only the company of other people to shine. It doesn't matter what the setting is - but you might just make a connection that will lead to a lifelong relationship.

Pisces

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Are you being asked to commit countless hours to a difficult task in the workplace that you sure as heck didn't volunteer for? Before you cross your arms and say no, think about it.

THE BORN LOSER by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

Easy

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Easy+

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WEATHER

Table with columns: CHINA, MIN, MAX, CONDITION. Rows include Beijing, Harbin, Tianjin, Urumqi, Xi'an, Lhasa, Chengdu, Chongqing, Kunming, Nanjing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Hangzhou, Taipei, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and WORLD cities like Moscow, Frankfurt, Paris, London, New York.

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- t's laid down on a diamond; 5- It beats rock; 10- "... you dare!"; 14- Seldom seen; 15- The Merciful; 16- Bacchanalian cry; 17- Property; 19- Greek cheese; 20- Singer John; 21- Egyptian god of the underworld; 23- Account books; 26- Unintelligent; 27- Vigor; 28- Fingerless hand cover; 29- Postpone; 30- Greek goddesses of the seasons; 31- Her partner would be a buck; 34- Barbershop request; 35- Catlike Asian carnivore; 36- Dinner faux-pas; 37- Suffix with ball; 38- Female horses; 39- Kate & ...; 40- Thrills; 42- Orbital extreme; 43- Tressed; 45- Plastering tools; 46- Tin plate; 47- Acute; 48- Final notice; 49- Assigns; 54- Ancient Greek coin; 55- Ornamental coronet; 56- Splotchy; 57- Pit; 58- Exodus origin; 59- K-12, in the ed biz;

DOWN: 1- I'm freezing!; 2- Persian Gulf fed.; 3- Heston's org.; 4- Message with frequent stops; 5- Danish, e.g.; 6- Choir section; 7- Scheme; 8- Grab a bite; 9- Adjustable resistor; 10- Specific; 11- Indulge to excess; 12- Out; 13- Tantalize; 18- Adona's, Thanatopsis, or In Memoriam; 22- Web locale; 23- Resulted in; 24- Diciembre follower; 25- Sketch; 26- Buenos ...; 28- Shifts; 30- Took on; 32- Corbeled bay window; 33- Fencing swords; 35- Link together; 36- Blowtube; 38- Created; 39- Opposite astarboard; 41- Tiny; 42- Turkey's highest peak; 43- Plant flower; 44- Temple leader; 45- Hamlet; 47- Neuter; 50- Hog; 51- Texas tea; 52- O.T. book; 53- Star Wars letters;



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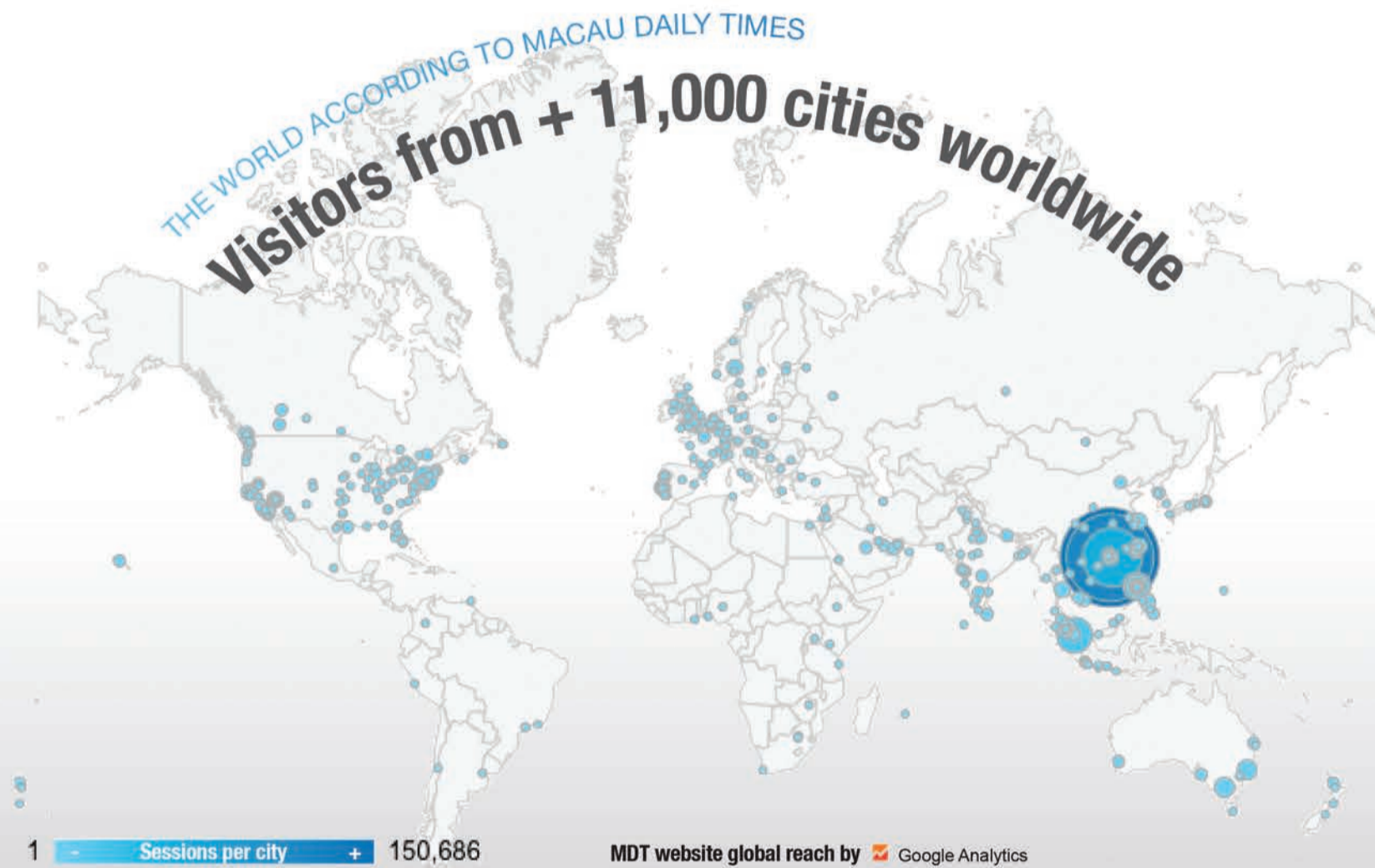
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Steve Douglas

RUGBY | SIX NATIONS PREVIEW

England, Ireland set to slug it out for title

PICTURE the scenario: Ireland vs. England for a Grand Slam decider in the final match of the Six Nations on St. Patrick's weekend in Dublin.

The Irish going for a third title in four years. The English seeking a second straight title and a world-record 19th straight win.

There are six weeks, 14 matches, and likely a whole load of drama before that could happen, and it's often dangerous to make too many long-range predictions ahead of the northern hemisphere's annual rugby tournament.

The prospect is enticing, nevertheless.

And current form suggests it's a distinct possibility.

England and Ireland have been the standout teams in the European game over the past year, emerging as genuine rivals for the superpowers of the southern hemisphere approaching the midway part of the Rugby World Cup cycle.

England is on a 14-match winning run, 13 of which have come under the stewardship of Eddie Jones since the 2015 Rugby World Cup, while Ireland beat New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa in a memorable second half of 2016.

No wonder all roads are leading to Dublin on March 18.

"I would think that England would still be favorites," Ireland coach Joe Schmidt said, assessing the Six Nations contenders, "but I am sure our odds would have shortened as compared to last year because I think there has been some visible growth in the team."

England starts out as odds-on favorites with all British bookmakers, with Jones having injected self-belief and a street-wise edge to the team

AP PHOTO



From left to right, Italy captain Sergio Parisse, Ireland captain Rory Best, Scotland captain Greig Laidlaw, England captain Dylan Hartley, France captain Guilhem Guirado and Wales captain Alun Wyn Jones pose next to the Six Nations trophy

that was in crisis after its elimination from its home World Cup at the pool stage. Injuries have hit the English going into the tournament — No. 8 Billy Vunipola and flanker Chris Robshaw have been ruled out of the whole thing, for example, and winger Anthony Watson will miss the first two rounds at least — but such is the titleholders' strength in depth that it might not show. Jones is promising a "daring" brand of rugby.

"It's a big part of how we want to develop our game because we want to be a side that has the courage to play our sort of rugby from the very first game of the tournament," the Australian said.

"Daring doesn't mean flair. ... Daring to me is having the mindset of going out to win the game, not relying on the opposition to make mistakes."

After all, England totaled 159 points in successive wins over South Africa, Fiji, Argentina and Australia in the autumn internationals, and averaged 35 points in its series sweep of the Wallabies Down Under in June.

Only Ireland's players look close to the level of their English counterparts. And they won't be short of confidence either, having ended New Zealand's 18-match winning streak in Chicago in

November.

The emergence of tighthead prop Tadhg Furlong has given the Irish strength in an area where they've previously been light, while the impressive form of Leinster and Munster in the European Champions Cup suggests Ireland is ready to hit the ground running against Scotland in the tournament opener on Saturday.

Hopes that the French might rise as potential title contenders on the back of an encouraging autumn series — they thrashed Samoa 52-8 and pushed Australia and New Zealand all the way in defeat — were hit by an Achilles tendon injury to Wesley Fo-

fana that rules the dynamic center out completely. That could affect coach Guy Noves' ambitions of France rediscovering its running game out wide.

The Welsh have a new captain in Alun Wyn Jones, as well as a temporary head coach in Rob Howley while Warren Gatland focuses on his role as British and Irish Lions coach. It is Italy's first Six Nations under coach Conor O'Shea, whose reinvigorated side beat South Africa for the first time in November to boost hopes of avoiding the wooden spoon for the 12th time in 17 editions of the tournament, especially given its three home matches.

As for improving Scotland, Vern Cotter will look to end his coaching stint on a high before his return to club rugby with Montpellier. It is the most competitive Scottish team for some time, but early losses to Ireland and France might see doubts return to a team that often doesn't live up to expectations.

Two other factors provide extra intrigue to this Six Nations.

For a one-season trial, bonus points will be on offer for teams either scoring four tries or more, or losing by fewer than seven points. Organizers hope this experiment, bringing the Six Nations in line with the scoring system in the Rugby Championship and most other leagues, will deliver more tries and place the emphasis on an attacking style of play. Jones, though, is among those thinking it will make little difference.

And then there is the carrot of the Lions tour to New Zealand in June. Gatland will be watching intently and there'll be no better stage for players from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales to prove themselves. **AP**

FOOTBALL

Premier League teams spent USD270m on signings in January

THE bottom six clubs accounted for almost half of the Premier League's January transfer spending of 215 million pounds (USD270 million) as they grapple to stay in the world's richest soccer competition.

The analysis by accountants Deloitte published yesterday highlights the contrast with the offseason transfer window when 60 percent of spending was by teams now in the top six. Spending by Premier League

clubs across the two transfer windows soared 32 percent from the previous season to almost 1.4 billion pounds — the highest in world soccer.

The bottom six — Hull, Sunderland, Crystal Palace, Swansea, Leicester and Middlesbrough — are separated by five points and collectively spent 110 million pounds in January. The need to stay in the top division has never been more financially significant for teams. This is the first season of television

contracts generating 8.3 billion pounds over three seasons for the league.

"It is clubs in the bottom half of the table who have driven expenditure this January, investing in their squads in an attempt to secure survival," Dan Jones of Deloitte said. "This is no surprise given clubs' reliance on the revenues generated from the Premier League's broadcast deals."

Despite the influx of broadcast revenue, Deloitte reports Premier League

clubs collectively making a profit of 40 million pounds from transfers for the first time in a window, fueled by four deals, including two to China: Oscar (Chelsea to Shanghai SIPG for about 60 million pounds); Dmitri Payet (West Ham to Marseille for 25 million pounds); Memphis Depay (Manchester United to Lyon for up to 25 million euros); and Odion Ighalo (Watford to Changchun Yatai for about 20 million pounds). **AP**

AP PHOTO

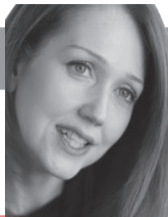


Crystal Palace's new signing Patrick van Aanholt

opinion

Girl About Globe

Linda Kennedy



SQUIRE FOR HIRE

China's rented boyfriends have a role in eroding Donald Trump's support base. Here's how.

During Chinese New Year, millions of workers travel home to their families, and some singles put safeguards in place. Those Tiger Moms and Dads back in the village are tenacious with questions: 'why aren't you married, or at least engaged?' Any female over 27 in China gets stigmatized as a 'leftover woman' and so, the practice of leasing a short-term lunar love has sprung up. Before Chinese New Year, more than 300 boyfriend rental adverts were on Taobao, the online shopping platform. China's independent dames could surf, hire a squire and then present their 'faux beau' in the village, after using the journey as tutorial time to learn about each other and devise a relationship history. Tiger Mom/Dad is satisfied, the family visit goes well, the gent-for-rent gains cash without losing honour (a rented partner will stay the night but most stipulate 'no special services'), and the slowing Chinese economy has some stimulus.

This custom is recent but not new. What makes it more interesting still this year is the small print reported in some of the contracts. The daily rate for a rented boyfriend advertising on Taobao ranged from about RMB800 to RMB2,000. But, note, that figure was just to show up. Many rented boyfriends charge extra for specific activities. Some of the additional charges: shopping cost an extra RMB15 per hour; watching a movie 10 extra (double that for a horror film); and drinking cost an additional 50 per 100 millilitres of wine. (A male merlot tax? In reality, it would be charging for enduring the hangovers, because of the hard drinking expectation placed on men at Chinese banquets. Anyway, this is one supplement the 'girlfriend' should be happy to pay, as the more her 'boyfriend' drinks, the likelier he is to blurt out his rented Romeo status. Re which: can she get a refund for any errors that blow her cover? Does he offer insurance?)

The additional price list is what inspired me to see the global potential in this Lunar New Year trend. It's currently very clear that Donald Trump isn't one for looking East, or indeed anywhere outside the US, to discover new customs, but I wonder if there is something in this rental model that could work in America. Specifically in rust-belt Trump-voting bastions.

There are plenty of women looking for love in the USA. How about unemployed white male non-college-educated Trump voters rent themselves out to these women to go shopping, or as company for a cocktail? (Consumption of pink drinks would presumably carry a higher rate, in a macho reimagining of the scale of extras.) It would be money for said young man. And a new place in the world - he might not have an education but he's now a bachelor in economics.

Why, though, would American women pay to do this? The obvious immediate benefits are to have someone to carry the shopping bags, and to stand in the queue at the bar. But there's a longer-term angle here.

Unemployed male voters are a crucial part of Trump's support. If rented out as described, they would get used to a woman as the boss (or 'big gun', their real turn-on), realize 'hey it's not so bad', and gradually become less mentally opposed to whichever woman one day tries to do what Hillary Clinton couldn't.

Trump can't complain - it's 'hiring American'.

Asia, its feathers ruffled after Trump abandoned the Trans-Pacific Partnership, feels flattered.

And a new global hashtag is born: less #girlboss, more #girlfriendboss.

THE RIGHTS GROUP SAYS PHILIPPINE KILLINGS ARE EXTRAJUDICIAL

Most of the thousands of killings of poor suspected drug offenders during Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's crackdown appear to be extrajudicial executions and may constitute crimes against humanity, Amnesty International said yesterday.

The London-based human rights group urged Duterte's government to adopt an approach that

respects human rights in its fight against drugs and crime, and called on the police and judiciary to prosecute officers involved in unlawful killings.

After investigating the deaths of 59 people, the group said it concluded "the vast majority of these killings appear to have been extrajudicial executions."

Lawsuit: Depp USD2m monthly spending to blame for money woes



Anthony McCartney, Los Angeles

JOHNNY Depp's former business managers countersued the actor claiming his lavish lifestyle that cost more than USD2 million a month to maintain caused his recent financial troubles and that the star ignored their repeated warnings.

The countersuit filed in Los Angeles Superior Court by The Management Group comes about two weeks after Depp sued the company alleging it grossly mismanaged his earnings.

The lawsuit said Depp paid more than \$75 million to buy and maintain 14 homes, including a French chateau and a chain of islands in the Bahamas.

Depp also spent heavily to buy a 150-foot yacht,

fly on private jets and cultivate collections of fine art and Hollywood memorabilia requiring 12 storage facilities to maintain, the lawsuit said.

Depp was repeatedly warned by the company that his spending was out of control but ignored his former advisors' advice to control his spending, the lawsuit said.

"Depp, and Depp alone, is fully responsible for any financial turmoil he finds himself in today," the lawsuit stated.

Depp sued The Management Group on Jan. 13 seeking more than \$25 million he contends was mismanaged. His lawsuit also alleged the company failed to file Depp's taxes on time, costing him \$5.7 million in penalties.

The countersuit said Depp's tax returns were always filed on time, and

taxes were paid when the star had money available to pay them.

The company handled his finances from 1999 until early 2016, an especially lucrative period in the actor's career.

During that time, Depp launched the blockbuster "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise and other big-budget releases, including "Alice in Wonderland" and the 2005 film "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory."

Depp's attorneys did not immediately respond to email and phone messages seeking comment.

The countersuit seeks a judge's ruling that Depp is to blame for his financial troubles, and \$560,000 in fees The Management Group said it is owed.

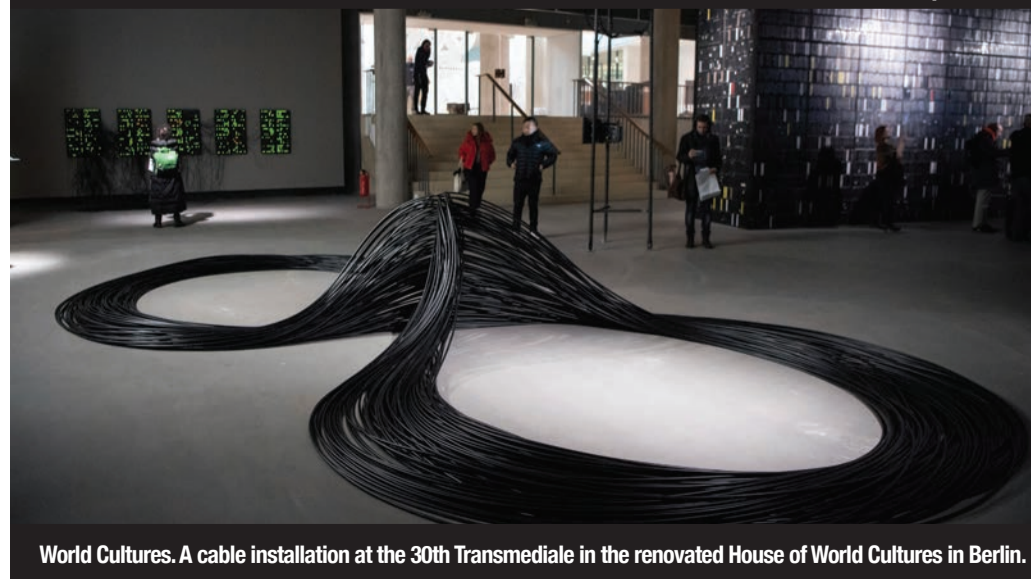
The money being sought comes on top of \$4.2 million the firm announced on Jan. 13 that it was seeking from Depp for repayment of a loan it said it made to the actor.

Depp is not the first blockbuster star to take his former managers to court alleging mismanagement.

Nicolas Cage sued his former business manager seeking \$20 million for alleged mismanagement in 2009 and the manager in a countersuit cited the actor's spending for his financial troubles. The case was resolved before trial. AP

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

Bernd von Jutrczenka/dpa via AP



World Cultures. A cable installation at the 30th Transmediale in the renovated House of World Cultures in Berlin.

Station	Air quality
Roadside	35-55 Good
High Density Residential Area	45-65 Good
Ambient	50-70 Good

SOURCE: DSMG

WORLD BRIEFS

JAPAN Officials have rejected President Donald Trump's suggestion that Tokyo is seeking to weaken the yen against the U.S. dollar to gain a trade advantage. More on p9



AP PHOTO

INDIA The shares of top Indian IT companies sank this week in response to news of proposed U.S. legislation that could make it harder for companies to replace American workers with those from countries like India.



AP PHOTO

USA Leading Democrats have come out in staunch opposition to Donald Trump's nomination of Neil Gorsuch (pictured) for the vacant position on the Supreme Court. The president named the Colorado appeals court judge yesterday to replace the late Antonin Scalia. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said he had "very serious doubts" about Judge Gorsuch's nomination. More on p15



AP PHOTO

UAE's top diplomat yesterday came out in defense of Trump's order temporarily barring citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States. The comments by Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan (pictured, right) could help bolster the administration's assertion that the directive was not intended as a ban against Muslims.

EU-MEXICO The European Union and Mexico are to speed up talks on a new trade agreement as U.S. administration moves to renegotiate major international trade pacts. EU and Mexico trade chiefs have agreed to hold negotiations on April 3-7 and June 26-29. They will also meet between rounds to push for further progress. Their current trade pact dates from 2000.