



MULTIDISCIPLINARY MEDICAL TEAMS ARE KEY
A medical forum held in Macau proposed new approaches to manage complex disasters in very different scenarios

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CASINO REVENUE SLUMPS AN EIGHTH STRAIGHT MONTH
Macau's casino revenue slumped an eighth straight month in January for the longest losing streak on record

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ALIBABA PLEDGES ONE BILLION TO SUPPORT HK YOUTH STARTUPS

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"THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'"

WORLD BRIEFS

CHINA A father and daughter are executed for attacking and killing a woman who had refused to join their outlawed religious group during an altercation at a McDonald's outlet.

AFGHANISTAN Taliban insurgents, some likely wearing police uniforms, attack checkpoints in Afghanistan, killing at least nine officers, authorities say.

PAKISTAN When Pakistani Taliban militants stormed a Peshawar school and massacred 150 children and teachers, nobody could fight back. Shabnam Tabinda and some of her fellow teachers want to change that — and are practicing how to shoot terrorists.

THAILAND Police investigate a pair of bombings outside a luxury shopping mall in the heart of Bangkok, the first such violence reported in the capital since last year's army coup. One person was slightly injured in the blasts Sunday night, and police said the small homemade bombs were designed to sow panic, not kill. *More on p13*

THAILAND A massive fire that engulfed a tire plant in Thailand's eastern industrial estate caused about USD40 million in losses for one of China's largest tire exporters, officials says. The fire destroyed six out of 15 warehouses in the Linglong International Tire compound.

AUSTRALIA Prime Minister Tony Abbott, facing down a revolt from within his own government ranks, promises he will never again choose who gets an Australian knighthood and officially ditches his unpopular parental leave policy. *More on p12*

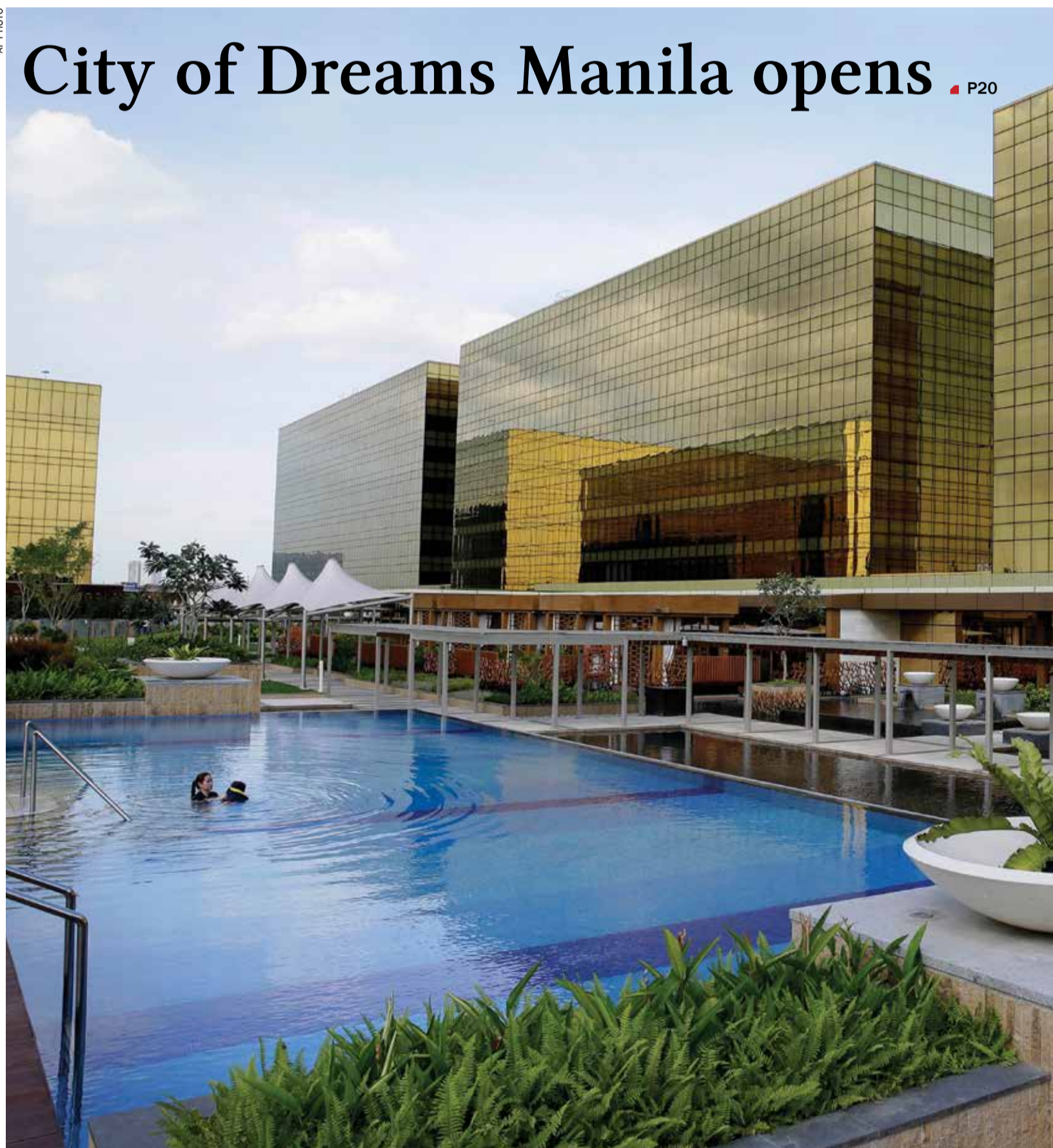
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'Change in status' hinders resident card renewals

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City of Dreams Manila opens

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AP PHOTO

MEDICAL FORUM

Multidisciplinary medical teams are key in disaster sites

Catarina Pinto

HARVARD Medical School professor and surgeon Susan Briggs has been to major disaster sites over the years, including New Orleans after deadly hurricane Katrina, Haiti, the World Trade Center after the terrorist attacks, and the Boston Marathon bombing. "I learned lessons from all these disasters," she stressed, adding that sending a multidisciplinary team is key.

Dr Briggs attended the Sino-Luso International Medical Forum (Series 23), chaired by the Macau University of Science and Technology's Faculty of Health Sciences. The surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital conducted workshops on how to manage complex disasters in very different scenarios.

"The important thing is to have multidisciplinary teams so we can prepare for all hazards. We don't know if we're going to need [it] but we should have a team composed of different specialists with very flexible roles, so we can do whatever the disaster needs medically," she told *The Times*.

Dr Briggs helped establish the first International Medical Surgical Response Team in the United States. Now the country has three. From her first disaster response experience in Armenia to Iran and Haiti, she acknowledges that there are indeed lessons to take



Susan Briggs

away from every disaster.

Out in the field, it's not only down to medicine. A good grasp of how to deal with cultural differences or politically hostile environments is also needed. Determining the most appropriate logistics for doctors to obtain supplies is another thought that often crosses their minds. Being prepared to deliver babies or perform C-sections is not out of the question either.

"Haiti [which was affected by a major earthquake in 2010] was one of the big challenges. It's the poorest country in the western hemisphere; the lack of medical care was devastating to all people (...) it was a challenge because of the resources: we had a lot of things

but they had nothing to follow up [after first aid]," she recalled.

One of her most moving experiences took place in rural Russia, when two trains filled with 600 people, including many children, exploded due to a gas leak. "We were deployed there to help, as were [nationals from] some other countries. When we got there, we had to modify a lot of things with our medical care," Dr. Briggs recalled.

Villagers who provided first aid to children and other people on the trains invited the American team over and offered them a banquet. "They had never seen an American. We arrived in the middle of the Siberian forest, they greeted

us and had prepared a banquet. We couldn't speak the language and yet [it] was the most wonderful experience, we communicated with hugs."

Dr Briggs acknowledged that this is why she works among disaster response teams: "To give back."

Having started her career as a surgical nurse, she always knew surgery would be her future. As a surgeon for the past 40 years, Dr. Briggs stressed that they have to be willing to educate themselves constantly while working in disaster sites.

Although it is very different from other areas she has been to, Macau can adopt and work with a similar set of measures taken in other regions, regar-

dless of the type of catastrophe it might face in the future.

"Disaster preparedness isn't all hazards, it's not preparing for a typhoon or an explosion. An example of that is we had the marathon bombing in our city [Boston] and we had been preparing for a mass casualty for 25 years with drills. We didn't think it would be a bomb, we had a system for all hazards, whatever it was, and it worked as well," she stressed.

She also advised Macau to develop different medical specialties, "as there's a perception that only certain medical specialties are needed in a disaster, which is not true."

Doctors from the Philippines - a nation often hit by typhoons - also attended the medical forum this past weekend to learn a new approach to medical response in disasters.

Dr. Tomas J. Monteverde recalled the deadly typhoon Haiyan. "We are happy to participate in the forum because the approach here is different. We have many typhoons every year and we were affected by typhoon Haiyan in November 2013. We were ready for typhoons but we underestimated its force," he stressed, adding that they plan to share Dr. Briggs' insights at a governmental level in the Philippines.

LtC Abraham C. Bayan, group commander of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Reserve Command, also stressed that the "preparedness was there [but] we were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the storm."

The Sino-Luso International Medical Forum (Series 23) kicked off on Saturday and ended yesterday. It examined the management of complex disasters while drawing on the lessons learned from the medical teams' experiences.

Health Bureau launches study on population next year

THE Health Bureau (SSM) will be launching a research study on Macau's population next year, seeking to understand what the main health problems affecting the lives of residents are. SSM said in a statement that it will also be rolling out a program in

an attempt to detect colon cancer early.

The bureau recalled that cancer is the main cause of death among Macau residents, particularly those aged between 40 and 50 years old. Lung, liver and colon cancer were the main causes of death among men. Lung,

colon and breast cancer were the main causes of death among women.

The bureau stressed that it has enough medical staff to treat and care for patients with cancer. Currently the Oncology Unit of the public hospital has two local doctors, one American and one doctor

from mainland China.

The head of the Health Bureau, Lei Chin Ion, spoke to reporters on Sunday, stressing that the services still need more time to assess the impact of measures recently taken to reduce the waiting period at the public hospital. New mea-

asures allow some Macau residents to resort to the private hospital, Kiang Wu, and non-profit medical entities while being granted a subsidy by the MSAR government.

He revealed that there was a slight increase in the number of people booking medical

appointments at non-profit medical institutions while the number of medical appointments at the public hospital remained stable.

Patients can also resort to a mobile phone app to access real time information on the waiting lists.

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Non-permanent residents face obstacles regarding 'change in status'

Catarina Pinto

A 'change in status' has been hampering the renewal of residence permits submitted through the Macau Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM). The obstacles affecting foreign families arise particularly when the main applicant changes employer or job category.

A recent court ruling came to revoke the Secretary for Economy and Finance's decision to cancel the residence permits of an Australian family of four, mainly because the court felt sympathy for the couple's children, who would be forced to interrupt their schooling in Macau.

The secretary's office had revoked their residence permits, arguing that the main applicant failed to communicate a change in status before the required deadline.

Hired as Director of Development Contracts Administration in the Procurement & Supply Chain Department, the applicant was granted temporary residence status valid until 2017, which was extended to his spouse and their two children.

The court ruling indicates that IPIM received notification from the applicant in July last year, informing them that he had ended his contract with his former company on April 30 and started a new job as Supply Chain, Services and non-F&B Procurement Director.

IPIM then requested he provide a series of documents related to the change in status, including pay roll slips and tax receipts, among others. Documentation received by IPIM, however, showed that the applicant had actually left his initial employer on April 14 and not April 30, as previously stated. Furthermore, the applicant declared he was unaware that he had been required to communicate a change in status, but that he did so after being notified by IPIM.

The applicant's new job position is similar to the previous one and so was the salary: MOP110,000 per month.

Nevertheless, he and his family lost their residency status since IPIM claimed that he failed to maintain his initial status, which allowed him to be granted residency in the first place, while later failing to submit documents regarding his new employment situation on time.

The Court of Second Instance (TSI) cancelled this decision, as the judges showed particular consideration for the couple's two children, aged five and seven years old, who would see their



academic years here abruptly interrupted. In addition, judges stated that allowing this family to continue living temporarily in Macau "does not harm public interest, especially when the applicant is employed under very similar duties as before."

Other cases of families facing challenges in renewing residence permits have also emerged, and are often linked to a change in status.

Going through the courts is costly, time consuming and even if one does win, the outcomes are still not guaranteed

Another applicant, who wishes to remain anonymous, told the Times that her family lost their residency status too, after living here for more than seven years. They had applied for residency under the same category as the first case.

"Our case is somewhat different but still hinges on the communication of the change in status to IPIM," the applicant said.

"Firstly, it's not made clear what 'change in status' means. If IPIM clearly specified the criteria for assessment and advised upon what criteria they origi-

nally assessed the application and the specific changes that they require to be advised [of], I'm sure that fewer families and individuals would have such issues of losing their residency status," she added.

Macau's administrative decree number 3/2005 states that a residence permit shall be cancelled if there is a change in the applicant's initial status.

But there's an exception to the rule, as the law states that an individual may communicate his/her change in status within the timeframe given by IPIM, or if the change in status is accepted by the institute. The applicant should therefore communicate any change in status to IPIM within 30 days.

However, the law fails to clarify some of the questions often raised by applicants, who are unsure if this means changes to marital status, living address, salary, family composition, job, salary, or economic status.

"Nothing is clear. IPIM needs to make it clear to applicants what IPIM needs to know and what is likely to happen when status does change," the applicant continued.

Furthermore, she recalled that applicants are required to meet IPIM's deadlines to communicate a change in status, but the institute "can make and advise the outcome of its decision whenever it wishes," not taking into consideration that, while the temporary resident awaits a decision, their families sometimes have to face endless bureaucratic woes in terms of schooling, immigration, health services, drivers licenses, finance, investment, or even when trying to borrow books

IPIM decided that after over seven years of living in Macau this family was not worthy of residency."

She believes that to be granted Macau residency one needs "to fit into a particular box, with very little room to contribute in other ways," as applicants "must comply with one narrow view of what it is to be an acceptable resident, and in the long run Macau misses out."

In addition, the applicant recalled that "Macau's administration does not appear to be clear on the intent behind the law. At the moment the department seems to apply the regulations and makes discretionary decisions that have a huge impact upon the lives of families that the department itself originally assessed as being of value to the Macau community. A change in job title, salary, or job description (which one would expect to occur within 7 years) should not change the value of the future contribution that the applicant's family can make. Surely the intent of the law is to keep valuable people who want to contribute and be part of the community. Regulations need to be developed and applied to meet the intent behind the law. The intent behind the law and the letter of the law do not seem to mesh here," she said.

"Going through the courts is costly, time consuming, and even if one does win, the outcomes are still not guaranteed at the administrative level," she stressed.

The couple's children had to relocate and study abroad, while their company has also been relocated and no longer employs Macau people.

"We viewed Macau as our home but because we weren't able to help the bureaucrats tick all the boxes, Macau doesn't want us, and one error can sever a great relationship and taint many years," she reiterated.

The Times contacted IPIM for clarifications on which changes in status should be communicated by temporary residents but did not receive a reply before press time.

from a local library.

Another issue pointed out by the applicant is the apparent lack of assessment criteria other than the main applicant's economic contribution to Macau society, mainly by his/her salary and job status.

"There are other contributions that are arguably more valuable but the criteria for temporary residency is based only on the main applicant without any consideration for the contributions of other family members to the community," she said, adding that "in our case each and every family member was involved in either representing Macau in sporting or academic endeavors and trained local residents in sporting, cultural and academic achievements at very high levels."

Furthermore, she recalled that despite her family's linguistic abilities, investment in real estate, substantial local assets, and involvement in the community, they still lost their residency status.

"None of this was included in the criteria for assessment (couldn't be), and again was not taken into consideration when

PERMANENT RESIDENCY DENIED OVER ABSENT FAMILY

THE COURT of Final Appeal (TUI) recently ruled that the former Secretary for Administration and Justice and the Identification Services Bureau (DSI) violated the MSAR's Basic Law when denying an Irish national permanent residency because his family did not live in Macau. According to Macau's Basic Law, a person is entitled to the right of permanent

residency after he or she has lived in Macau for seven consecutive years, regarding the territory as his or her "permanent or final place of residence." "We believe that for an applicant who has in fact been separated from his family, his wife and underage child not living in Macau doesn't prejudice his taking Macau as his permanent place of residence," TUI's ruling reads.

New Macau to consult public on sex crimes



Sulu Sou

The New Macau Association (ANM) announced that it will collect opinions from the public regarding legislation against sex crimes. President of the association, Sulu Sou Ka Hou, hoped that this move can encourage the Macau government to take the initiative in drafting the proposed law. In a press conference yesterday, Sou stated that the organization wants to "engage in real action" and will prepare materials for a public consultation on the proposed legislation against sexual harassment, indecent assault and the possession and distribution of child pornography. **JPL**

CRIME

Two cases of alleged sexual assault on minors

João Pedro Lau

THE Judiciary Police (PJ) have taken a man into custody, and handed another one to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), in two separate cases of sexual assault on females under the age of 18.

The former case involves a 17-year-old female victim and an 18-year-old suspect. Information suggested that the two were schoolmates and had been in a relationship for several years.

The two split mid-December 2014, but the suspect is alleged to have coerced the victim into staying in the relationship, claiming to possess nude photos and videos of her and threatening to publish them. The man also refused to return his key to the victim's apartment.

It is alleged that the man broke into the victim's apartment with the key on the morning of January 5, and proceeded to rape her. PJ said that the

victim tried to resist but failed. She also did not scream for help because she did not want her family to know, fearing for her reputation. The man carried out similar attacks at her house on January 24 and 27.

The victim could no longer bear the attacks, deciding to reveal the crime to her other schoolmates, who in turn notified the school. The school revealed the case to authorities on Sunday.

The latter case involves a 47-year-old suspect – a school doctor – and a 12-year-old victim under his care.

Information suggests that the victim was mildly injured at school in September last year and went to the school's health center for treatment. It is alleged that, while the suspect was treating the victim, he secretly gave her MOP20 and asked her to return to the health center as frequently as possible. It is also alleged that he gave the victim some money from time to time

when she went to the health center. He also asked the victim not to disclose their relationship to others. PJ claimed that the suspect only gave the victim money without requesting anything specific.

The victim was injured again in October and treated by the suspect. It is alleged that while the victim received MOP20 from the suspect as usual, while she was preparing to leave, he claimed to have offered to wipe away the sweat on her body since her hand was injured. Although the girl refused the request initially, the suspect was later able to put his hands under her shirt and touch her back and chest.

The alleged sexual molestation was discovered soon after the victim's father discovered the extra cash in his daughter's possession and forced her to disclose the origin of the money. They then decided to report the issue to the PJ at the end of October.

The police took the man into

custody yesterday morning, before he left for work. The PJ spokesperson explained that it took them almost three months to take action because they needed time to investigate the case in detail. PJ said the suspect refused to answer questions and will be charged with sexually abusing a person who is under care by the authorities.

UM ANNOUNCES GUIDELINES

THE UNIVERSITY of Macau (UM) stated yesterday that it will speed up the drafting of guidelines regarding the handling of sexual harassment cases. The statement also revealed that the university is planning to establish an Equal Opportunities Commission in the near future to handle relevant complaints and disputes.

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Lawmakers acknowledge difficulties in hiring AL staff

Catarina Pinto

LAWMAKER Chan Chak Mo, president of the Legislative Assembly 2nd Standing Committee, acknowledges that it will be difficult to hire more staff as additional vacancies will open once amendments to the AL's Organizational Set Up Law pass its second reading.

The committee's lawmakers are discussing amendments to a law regulating the AL's administrative, financial and technical support procedures. Changes to the existing law will allow the Legislative Assembly to hire more personnel to cope with the increasing workload.

Chan Chak Mo recalled that amendments have been tabled due not only to an increase in the AL's work, but also an increase in the number of lawmakers and plenary meetings.

Amendments were also proposed to improve career



enhancement inside the AL, since some have raised criticism over the difficulties of being promoted.

The bill now suggests the creation of two departments, namely a General Affairs Department and an IT and Publications Department.

Lawmakers acknowledged, however, that it will be difficult to hire more personnel to work at the Legislative Assembly. "We have been looking for a deputy secretary-general since 2008," said Chan Chak Mo, adding that this position offers

a competitive salary of about MOP70,000.

The lawmaker recognized that it is has been difficult to hire staff, as many residents choose to work for the private sector, which offers competitive salary packages. "We all know that we have a low unemployment rate and the government has to compete with the private sector [when recruiting] (...) But if we do not hire people, we might see current employees leave because there's a lot of work to do," he stressed.

Harbourview Hotel to open next week

The Harbourview Hotel will be the first venue to open as part of the Macau Fisherman's Wharf redevelopment project on February 11, according to casino and hotel services operator Macau Legend Development Ltd in a report to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. The company, led by billionaire David Chow, announced that Harbourview's soft opening commenced yesterday, with the grand opening set to take place Wednesday next week. With the opening of the Harbourview Hotel, Macau Legend will also enhance its gaming facilities in Fisherman's Wharf by adding 35 gaming tables at the Babylon Casino, which will be connected to the new hotel via a footbridge. The Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) granted the additional gaming tables last year. Macau Legend is hoping that more tables will be granted, stating that "as the redevelopment of the Macau Fisherman's Wharf progresses, the board expects that more tables will be granted by the DICJ to the company on an incremental basis to support the redevelopment of the Macau Fisherman's Wharf." The redevelopment project includes two hotels, a dinosaur museum, and an opera house. Mr Chow said last year that he's hoping to include more tourism elements in Fisherman's Wharf.

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Daryl Loo

Casinos hit worst streak ever as graft fight persists

MACAU'S casino revenue slumped an eighth straight month in January for the longest losing streak on record, and there are growing expectations the pain will persist another year as China's clampdown on graft intensifies.

Total gross gaming revenue in the world's biggest gambling hub fell 17.4 percent to 23.7 billion patacas (USD3 billion) last month, Macau's Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau said yesterday. This compared with the median estimate of a 17 pct decline from seven analysts surveyed by Bloomberg News.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption drive to catch "tigers and flies" and slowing economic growth means Macau may continue to face shrinking monthly revenue until later this year, when new resorts including from Melco Crown Entertainment Ltd. and Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd. open. Analysts are predicting weaker takings over the Lunar New Year holiday next month and a bigger drop in 2015 than last year's 2.6 pct decline.

"In regards to Lunar New Year, we are expecting a very soft holiday period relative to what we've seen in previous years," Union Gaming analyst Grant Govertsen said in an e-mail before the data was released. Gross gaming revenue in February could plunge by as much as 40 pct, making it the biggest monthly decline so far, he added.

Macau's casinos had raked in an all-time record of 38 billion patacas last February, as mainland tourists flooded the former Portuguese enclave amid the week-long Chinese public holidays to play casino games, including their favorite card game Baccarat. The holiday begins Feb. 18 this year.

January revenue rose 2 pct from the 23.3 billion patacas in December. Analysts had seen January's improvement over December as a sign that the industry may be out of its free-fall of late last year, including a record year-on-year drop in the final month of 2014 when Xi visited the city.

Macau casino shares were mixed at the close of trading in Hong Kong. Wynn Macau Ltd. rose 0.9 percent, Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd gained 0.5 pct and MGM China Holdings Ltd. was up 0.1 pct, while SJM Holdings Ltd. lost 1.8 pct, Sands China Ltd. fell 0.9 pct and Melco Crown Entertainment Ltd. declined 0.2 pct. The benchmark Hang Seng Index fell 0.1 pct.

Xi's crackdown helped wipe about \$73 billion from the

BLOOMBERG



market value of Macau's casinos last year. Casino shares fell for a third straight month in January, with the Bloomberg Intelligence Macau (China) Gaming Market Index dropping 3.7 pct, the longest falling streak since July 2012.

At least nine analysts have cut their Macau gross gaming revenue estimates for 2015 since Jan. 5, according to a Bloomberg News survey, with a median forecast of an 8 pct slump. Their previous median estimate was for the year's growth to be flat.

Potential full-smoking ban could hurt gaming demand by 5 to 6 percent

JPMORGAN CHASE & CO. ANALYSTS

Sands China Ltd., the casino operator controlled by billionaire Sheldon Adelson, last week reported fourth-quarter earnings that missed analyst estimates after China's clampdown deterred high-rollers. The volume of Macau's VIP junkets during the quarter last year was the lowest since the same period in 2010, Adelson said. Junket operators are the middlemen who bring in high rollers to the casinos and provide loans to gamble with.

Amid the weakening VIP market, Melco Crown is touting a Batman ride among other Hollywood-centric features for its Studio City casino resort on the Cotai strip that will open later this year. Galaxy's expansion in the same area will recreate New York's Broadway theater. They're hoping more mass market tourists will be drawn to the city, amid the government's push for Macau to diversify from gambling.

Casinos could experience more pain as Macau considers

a complete ban on smoking in their gambling halls. The government said it is looking to push for a full smoking ban on all areas at casinos. VIP gambling rooms are currently exempted from the ban. "Potential full-smoking ban could hurt gaming demand by 5 to 6 pct," JPMorgan Chase & Co. analysts led by D.S. Kim estimated in a note dated Jan. 30.

Other tighter policies to negatively impact casinos included restrictions on the use of UnionPay debit cards in Macau, making it harder for bettors to buy pricey items in yuan that they exchange for patacas needed to gamble. Four Chinese suspects were arrested for illegally using

altered UnionPay terminals to obtain cash of about 102 million yuan for clients were arrested, the Macao Daily newspaper reported last week.

Macau has tightened rules for the transit visas issued for Chinese visitors entering, closing a prior loophole used by many high-end players to go to the city more often and stay longer than normally allowed.

Last month, a prominent hotel executive who's a nephew of casino tycoon and SJM Holdings Ltd. founder Stanley Ho was arrested in the largest bust of a prostitution ring in the city's history, in a sign that Xi's crackdown was expanding to include long-tolerated vices. **Bloomberg**

GALAXY TOPS GAMING OPERATORS

GALAXY RESORTS took first place in Macau's gaming industry in January with a market share of 22.5 pct, slightly above SJM (22 pct) and Sands China (20 pct). According to

Lusa news agency, the fourth position belongs to Melco Crown, with a market share of 14.5 pct, followed by Wynn Macau (10.5 pct) and MGM (slightly above 10 pct).

MGM announces staff bonus payout

MGM Macau announced yesterday a discretionary bonus payout for all non-management team members.

The bonus, which is equivalent to one month's salary, will be distributed to eligible team members who hold non-managerial positions in February.

Grant R. Bowie, chief executive officer and executive director of MGM

BLOOMBERG



China Holdings Limited, commented, "I would like to thank all the staff for their hard work and dedication. As we prepare for the opening of our Cotai property, we look forward to creating many opportunities for the MGM Macau team to seek promotion and career advancement."

In addition to the bonus, the gaming operator said that it expects "to roll out other initiatives in making careers at MGM Macau competitive and rewarding."

corporate bits

BNU AND ASIA MILES LAUNCH CO-BRAND CREDIT CARD



Banco Nacional Ultramarino (BNU) and Asia Miles yesterday launched the BNU Asia Miles Visa Card. This is the first co-brand card in Macau that allows its cardholders to earn Asia Miles directly through spending.

The card is now available at all 18 BNU branches in two card types – Platinum Visa and Gold Visa. It not only combines banking service and travel & lifestyle rewards, but also brings a number of new benefits to cardholders.

These advantages include the exclusive Asia Miles ear-

ning rate in Macau – for Platinum Card, 1 Asia Mile will be earned for every MOP10 spent in Macau, Hong Kong and mainland China or MOP5 spent for overseas transactions; auto-converted into Asia Miles for free; 10% discount on purchase of Asia Miles Gift Miles, mileage renewal and transfer fee via www.asia-miles.com; and the privileges of the “BNU Life” program. A welcome bonus of 5,000 Asia Miles will be offered to all new cardholders, subject to a minimum spend during the first 3 months.

SANDS RESORTS BRINGING BROADWAY TO MACAU



From superstars to exhibitions, and from music to sports, Sands China Ltd. has aimed to deliver a diverse range of entertainment options to Macau. With the arrival of CATS at The Venetian Theatre March 6-15, Broadway musicals are a strong addition to the range of non-gaming attractions already available to Macau's locals and visitors at Sands Resorts.

“Bringing an authentic Broadway show to Macau is the latest example of our multi-tiered entertainment strategy in action,” said Scott Messinger, Senior Vice President of

Marketing, Sands China Ltd. “Sands China knows the importance of diversifying the tourism product in Macau, and we have continually brought in new offerings to accomplish that goal. Providing a wide variety of superstar entertainment is a key attraction of our integrated resorts and helps the awareness of Macau as a destination. We are pleased to continue shining a global spotlight on Macau with a world-renowned Broadway show like CATS, as we raise the profile of Macau as a world center of tourism and leisure.”

China aviation billionaire emerges on budget airlines IPO

Jill Mao

WANG Zhenghua, chairman of Spring Airlines Co., became a billionaire as the stock surged after staging the first initial public offering of a Chinese airline since 2002.

Shares of the low-cost carrier jumped 44 percent on its trading debut on Jan. 21, and climbed by the 10 percent limit for eight straight days, tripling in value. The 10 percent increase yesterday boosted Wang's net worth to USD1 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

“The IPO came at a very good time,” said Han Yichao, a Shanghai-based aviation analyst at Chang Jiang Securities, over the phone. “Spring Air is lucky because the whole aviation sector soared last year and shares of most companies have doubled.”

Airline stocks are riding a bull market. A global surplus has driven oil prices almost 50 percent lower last year. That in turn cut



expenses for jet fuel and boosted the valuation for the aviation industry and Spring Air's offer price for its initial share sale, Han said.

China Eastern Airlines Corp., the nation's second-largest airline by market capitalization, said Friday

it expects profit in its fiscal year to rise as much as 60 percent, citing stronger operation capacity and lower jet fuel price.

Spring Air plans to buy new aircraft as rising incomes drive up demand for air travel across Asia. In the first 11 months of 2014, mainland Chinese tourists made more than 100 million international trips, topping the travel total for the previous year, according to data from the China National Tourism Administration.

Wang, 70, started the airline in 2005, and derives the bulk of his wealth from the 26 percent stake in the company. He is optimistic about the outlook for budget airlines in China because the market is still dominated by full-service carriers.

“Low-cost airlines has less than 5 percent of the market in China,” Zhang Wu'an, a spokesman for Spring Air, said in an e-mailed statement yesterday. “It has a bright market prospect in the future.” **Bloomberg**

Prosecutors recommend 3 years prison for nut rage executive

Youkyung Lee
Business Writer, Seoul

SOUTH Korean prosecutors yesterday recommended 3 years prison for the former Korean Air executive charged with endangering flight safety after an in-flight tantrum over how she was served macadamia nuts.

Cho, the daughter of Korean Air's chairman, has pleaded not guilty to four charges. In the final day of testimony, she



Cho Hyun-ah, who was head of cabin service at Korean Air

defended her actions as the result of devotion to work.

Cho ordered the chief flight attendant off a Dec. 5 flight after a heated confrontation with cabin

crew, forcing the plane to return to the gate at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York. She was angry at being offered nuts in a bag, instead of on a dish, which she said violated the airline's service rules in first class.

Her behavior, dubbed nut rage, caused an uproar in South Korea. The incident touched a nerve in a country where the economy is dominated by family-run conglomerates known as chaebol that often act above

the law.

Prosecutors are seeking a 2 year prison sentence for Yeo Woon-jin, the Korean Air executive accused of pressuring cabin crew to cover up the incident and to lie to investigators from South Korea's transport ministry.

They also called for 2 years prison for Kim Woon-sub, a transport ministry official and former Korean Air executive accused of leaking secrets about the ministry's investigation. **AP**

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China donates rice to flood victims in Mozambique

embassy in Mozambique, Wang Lipei.

At the same time, Mozambique's flagship airline LAM provided cargo capacity of two tons of donations to the flood victims on all flights between Maputo and Quelimane, the capital of Zambezia province, which was most affected by the floods.

The floods affected about 150,000 people and destroyed 19,000 homes

The Ministry of State Administration and Civil Service reported that until last Tuesday the floods had left 117 dead, including 93 in Zambezia, had affected about 150,000 people and destroyed 19,000 homes in central and northern Mozambique. **MDT/Macauhub**

ANGOLA

Ambassador announces investment by Chinese companies

SEVERAL Chinese companies will invest this year in Uíge in socio-economic sectors and infrastructure, the Chinese ambassador to Angola announced at a hearing granted by the provincial deputy governor for the economic and productive sector.

Gao Kexiang, who visited the province of Uíge for two days, said priority sectors were agriculture, industry, construction, public works, energy, water and tourism.

Cited by state newspaper Jornal de Angola, the ambassador noted "the potential in the province in the areas of agriculture, livestock, tourism, energy and water," which can help improve the development of the province and the country itself.

The diplomat took advantage of his visit to also check on the progress of ongoing projects involving Chinese companies, such as rice production in the plains of Lusselua, Sanza Pombo and construction works of construction of several social facilities.

Gao Kexiang reiterated the interest of Chinese companies with technical capabilities to invest in working in Angola and pointed out that more than 100 Chinese companies are present in Angola, particularly in construction and public works, livestock, agriculture and tourism.

The deputy governor for the economic and productive sector of Uíge province told the ambassador that the province has huge potential for almost unexplored mineral resources, as well as rich soil and subsoil for sand, rocks, limestone, copper, marble and diamonds. **MDT/Macauhub**



An helicopter flies over inundated fields in Mozambique

CHINA has donated 10 tons of rice to victims of the floods that affected the provinces of central and northern Mozambique, the Deputy Di-

rector General of the National Institute of Disaster Management (INGC) said in Mozambique.

The donation, provided symbolically last week in Maputo, was

provided by the China-Mozambique Chamber of Commerce, and was attended by the organization's president, Ma Shuiyu, and economic attaché of the Chinese

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Alibaba offers young Hong Kong entrepreneurs HKD1 billion

ALIBABA Group is planning to pump HKD1 billion into a not-for-profit foundation aimed at boosting entrepreneurship among Hong Kong's younger population, international IT website ZDNet reported yesterday.

According to an article by Leon Spencer posted on the site, the Chinese e-commerce giant announced on Sunday that it would establish the Alibaba Hong Kong Young Entrepreneurs Foundation in order to support local youths starting up and building businesses selling products and services to mainland China through its own online ecosystem.

The feature details how the program will see participants gain access to financial capital, technical assistance, and training. It is also likely to see Alibaba Group's own marketplaces such as Tmall and Taobao awarded with a legion of new users and increased trade.

However, the company's executive chairman Jack Ma said the foundation is being set up in order to offer Hong Kong's younger population new opportunities, and help strengthen economic ties between Hong Kong and mainland China, according to a report by Susan Wang posted on Alibaba Group's corporate news portal Alizila.

"With a mission 'to make it easy to do business anywhere', Alibaba is passionate about



fostering entrepreneurial spirits among young people," ZDNet quoted Ma saying in a statement. "We hope to create life-changing opportunities so that Hong Kong's young people have an opportunity to build thriving businesses that will serve as a bridge between Hong Kong and mainland China."

The foundation will also provide venture capital to entrepreneurs and startups by investing in businesses started by young people in Hong Kong.

Profits generated by venture capital investments made by the foundation will be funneled back into the foundation for reinvestment, ensuring an "evergreen" funding source, the report said.

The plan will also see internship opportunities at Alibaba Group and other businesses within Alibaba's ecosystem offered to 200 selected students from Hong Kong universities each year, allowing them to gain firsthand experience working in mainland China, the company said.

According to ZDNet, the fund announcement came as pro-democracy protestors returned to the streets of Hong Kong on Sunday, in the first large rally since last year's mass demonstrations calling for direct democratic elections to choose the city-state's next leader.

Hong Kong has seen its youth and student population turn out in huge numbers, with the so-called Occupy Central demonstrations shutting down major roads for over two months late last year.

Organizers of the latest demonstration estimated Sunday's turnout at around 13,000 people, while local police said it was closer to 8,800 people, according to Al Jazeera.

Just last week, Alibaba Group reported a 28 percent year-on-year fall in net income to \$964 million (5.98 billion yuan) in its December quarter financial results, with the company citing costs associated with its initial public offering (IPO) in the United States last September, as stated by ZDNet.

Meanwhile, the story further details how the company has moved to hire 300 people to form an "anti-counterfeit special operations battalion" in order to weed out fake and counterfeit products on its Taobao Marketplace site. This was after China's State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC) publicly released a report accusing Alibaba of failing to stamp out the sale of fake and counterfeit items on the platform.

Alibaba Group's executive vice chairman Joe Tsai responded last week, saying that the company was cracking down on fakes with a "zero tolerance policy" towards counterfeit products, ZDNet said. He also took the time to openly question the accuracy of the SAIC's report, saying its findings were the result of flawed methodology.

"We believe the flawed approach taken in the report, and the tactic of releasing a so-called 'whitepaper' specifically targeting us, was so unfair that we felt compelled to take the extraordinary step of preparing a formal complaint to the SAIC," the website quoted Tsai as saying at the time.

CCTV to take its New Year TV gala to a global audience

Louise Watt, Beijing

CHINA says its annual Lunar New Year gala TV show is all set to go international.

State broadcaster China Central Television says it's making rights available to foreign broadcasters for the first time, and plans to promote the Feb. 18 show on Twitter and other social media.

CCTV touts its annual hours-long Spring Festival Gala as the world's longest-running and most-watched variety show.

A staple of holiday celebrations since the 1980s, the evening show also has been widely mocked for cheesy performances

and stilted staging.

This year's show will be broadcast in several languages, including English, Hindi, Arabic, Portuguese and German, under agreements with 24 foreign media outlets, said Ma Runsheng, general manager of CHNPEC, the CCTV-owned agency which deals with its copyrights.

Ma said greatest hits from past shows — including the best moments of traditional Chinese opera — will be encapsulated to promote the gala on YouTube, Google Plus and Twitter, which are blocked in China.

"Our purpose is to make our gala available to more overseas Chinese and overseas foreign



viewers who love Chinese culture and want to learn about Chinese culture through this festive celebration," Ma said at a news conference yesterday.

This year's theme is "Family Harmony Yields Success."

The gala is already

broadcast live on multiple TV channels and on some Chinese websites. Last year, more than 700 million people watched the show live or a replay a week later on CCTV or other channels, and 110 million people watched it online, according to Zheng Weidong, deputy

■ This year's show will be broadcast in several languages, including English, Hindi, Arabic, Portuguese and German, under agreements with 24 foreign media outlets

ty managing director of CSM Media Research, which pulls together ratings.

When it first started in 1983, relatively few Chinese families had their own TV sets, but it later developed into a major annual viewing event.

Now, many younger viewers prefer watching

something else online. Last year, to try to increase its appeal, organizers hired acclaimed film director Feng Xiaogang to direct it, but he reportedly complained that he didn't have the freedom to do what he wanted, and many critics gave the show a thumbs-down. **AP**



Mao Xiaofeng, president at China Minsheng Banking Corp.

Minsheng Bank falls as president resigns after probe report

CHINA Minsheng Banking Corp. shares fell after President Mao Xiaofeng resigned and a magazine reported that he's being investigated by Chinese authorities.

Mao stepped down for "personal reasons," the bank said Saturday, after Caixin reported that authorities took him to assist with an investigation. Mao's mobile was turned off when called by Bloomberg News on Saturday.

Minsheng, a lender with a market capitalization bigger than Deutsche Bank AG or Credit Suisse Group AG, slid as much as 10.5 percent in Hong Kong and 6.6 percent in Shanghai yesterday.

No. 1 shareholder Anbang Insurance Group Co. may see price declines as a buying opportunity, according to analysts at Credit Suisse Group AG who cut their one-year target for the stock by 10 percent, citing uncertainties related to the developments. China International Capital Corp. advised investors to stay away from Minsheng shares until April when the bank is due to re-elect board members.

Any investigation "may be related to China's anti-corruption campaign" and it may "potentially take a while before investors get full details," Victor Wang and Steven Zhu, Hong Kong-based analysts at Credit Suisse, wrote in a note. While Minsheng remains a "premium quality bank," its shares will be weak in the short term, they said.

Minsheng's stock has declined about 10 percent this year in Hong Kong after surging 42 percent in 2014.

Mao's resignation comes as President Xi Jinping intensifies a crack-

down on graft, which has been described by state media as the harshest since the founding of the People's Republic of China in October 1949. The campaign has spanned businesses, the military, and officials such as Zhou Yongkang, a former member of the Politburo Standing Committee, and Ling Jihua, who was a top aide of retired president Hu Jintao.

If a link exists, Mao would be the highest-ranking banker embroiled in Xi's campaign.

■ If a link exists, Mao would be the highest-ranking banker embroiled in Xi's [corruption] campaign

Minsheng's largest shareholders including Anbang said they won't sell stakes after Mao's resignation, CICC said in a note on Sunday, citing a briefing of analysts by Minsheng's management. Mao's situation has nothing to do with Minsheng's operations, the lender said.

Billionaire shareholder Shi Yuzhu said on his microblog yesterday that he'd oppose the appointment of any unknown candidate as a replacement for Mao, saying that the bank had had leadership problems before Mao's tenure.

Anbang, the Chinese insurer that agreed in October to purchase New York's Waldorf Astoria hotel, has

been buying the lender's Shanghai-listed A shares and its Hong Kong-listed H-shares, boosting its holdings to 22.5 percent and 5.2 percent respectively as of Jan. 29.

Minsheng was founded in 1996 by 59 private investors including pig-feed tycoon Liu Yonghao. With a market capitalization of about \$48 billion, the lender sits below the likes of Industrial & Commercial Bank of China Ltd. and China Construction Bank Corp.

Billionaire Guo Guangchang disposed of his entire 0.13 percent stake in Minsheng's A-shares, according to disclosure filings to the Hong Kong stock exchange on Jan. 27.

Chairman Hong Qi has been appointed as Minsheng's acting president. Mao, who was named president last August, didn't have any disagreement with the board, the Beijing-based bank said in a statement to the Shanghai Stock Exchange on Saturday.

The Caixin report said Mao was taken away by the Communist Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and removed as party secretary by the banking regulator.

Mao is a graduate of Harvard University, where he completed a Master's degree in public administration in 2000, according to a company profile. Before joining Minsheng in 2002, he had roles with the China Communist Youth League and as an official in Hunan province.

Turning 43 this year, Mao is the youngest president of a listed Chinese bank, according to Caixin. The president of a Chinese lender is the equivalent of a chief executive officer at a U.S. bank. **Bloomberg**

Gov't executes 2 from banned sect for murder at McDonald's



A father and daughter have been executed in China for attacking and killing a woman who had refused to join their outlawed religious group during an altercation at a McDonald's outlet, a court said yesterday. Zhang Fan and her father, Zhang Lidong, were executed after the Supreme People's Court approved the death penalty, the Yantai Intermediate People's Court in the eastern province of Shandong said in a statement. It didn't say when the executions took place. The two were convicted and sentenced in October along with three other women who received sentences from life imprisonment to seven years. The court said the group had called the victim "an evil spirit" and a "demon" before beating her to death one evening last May while at a McDonald's restaurant. She had refused to give them her number so that they could recruit new members into the "All-powerful Spirit" group, which China considers an illegal cult. The anti-Communist sect believes Jesus was resurrected as a Chinese woman. China's Supreme People's Court must review and approve all death sentences.

Beijing, Delhi reaffirm ties following Obama's trip



Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj, left, and Chinese President Xi Jinping

China and India reaffirmed their warming ties Friday following U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to New Delhi that underscored Beijing's complicated relationship with both countries. Chinese President Xi Jinping welcomed India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to Beijing and said he expected greater developments in ties between the two Asian giants this year. Swaraj is attending a trilateral forum in Beijing among China, India and Russia. Obama's visit to India last month was seen in China as an attempt to deepen American influence in countries on China's periphery. China's government said it hoped closer U.S.-India relations would be a positive force for the region, but the state-run news agency Xinhua dismissed Obama's visit as "more symbolic than pragmatic, given the long-standing division between the two giants, which may be as huge as the distance between them." Beijing's own relations with New Delhi received a big boost from Xi's visit to the country in September, although the sides still differ over their disputed border, unequal trade and China's attempts to expand its influence into the Indian Ocean.



In this Nov. 13 2010 photo, Aung San Suu Kyi, left behind the gate, addresses her supporters from her house compound after her release from house arrest in Yangon

MYANMAR

Gate Suu Kyi spoke from to go up for auction

Aye Aye Win, Yangon

THE iron gate that stood in front of the home of Myanmar's formerly imprisoned democracy icon, separating her from throngs of cheering supporters as she made speeches challenging the country's then-military rulers, is going on the auction block.

Soe Nyunt, the current owner, said yesterday the starting bid would be USD200,000.

He said the proceeds would go toward helping Aung San Suu Kyi build a new National League for Democracy party headquarters.

The 69-year old Nobel laureate — and daughter of Myanmar's famous independence leader, Gen. Aung San — became an international symbol of peaceful resistance in the face of oppression during her 15 years of on-again-off-again house arrest.

She permanently moved from London to the lakeside house of her mother almost 27 years ago, where while under incarceration she often mounted a table behind its front

gate and held on the pointed iron spikes as she spoke to crowds through a loudspeaker about everything from corruption to the abysmal state of education.

In 1996, the then-military regime had enough, blocking public access to the house. But in 2007, more than 500 chanting Buddhist monks brazenly walked past the barricades, Suu Kyi met them in front of the gate, bowing her head in a show of respect and then waving.

When finally released in 2010, soon after elections that were widely seen as neither free nor fair, thousands of supporters greeted her with garlands and bouquets of flowers.

A bumpy transition from dictatorship to democracy followed. Suu Kyi is now leader of the opposition in the country's young, military-dominated parliament, but she has said many of the reforms implemented since 2011 have either stalled or rolled back.

Soe Nyunt said he saw the gate — and the house number, 54, painted on a separate lac-

quered plate — while landscaping the garden. He said it was lying under a mango tree waiting to be picked up by a junk collector.

Recognizing its significance, he asked if he could have it, giving a few hundred dollars in exchange.

"This gate tells the history of the country's democratic struggle," Soe Nyunt told The Associated Press, adding that it should be placed in a museum for future generations.

But he decided on the auction, to be held within the next few weeks, after seeing that the cash-strapped NLD badly needed a new party headquarters.

He said he hoped some of the money would go toward upcoming centennial celebrations to honor Suu Kyi's father.

This is not the first time items associated with Suu Kyi have been auctioned. Suu Kyi's hand-made sweaters were auctioned at a party fundraiser in 2012, fetching \$123,000. The proceeds went to her education and health projects. **AP**

AUSTRALIA

Contrite prime minister won't appoint knights

Rod McGuirk, Canberra

PRIME Minister Tony Abbott, facing down a revolt from within his own government ranks, promised yesterday he would never again choose who gets an Australian knighthood and officially ditched his unpopular parental leave policy.

Abbott used a speech to the National Press Club to assure the nation and disgruntled members of his own administration that he was determined to lead "the most consultative and the most collegial government this country has ever seen."

After angering many within government ranks last week by making the husband of Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip, an Australian knight, Abbott said that the Order of Australia Council would decide from now on who was made a knight or dame.

Abbott, who took power after winning an election in 2013, was widely criticized for resurrecting the titles a year ago. Bestowing a knighthood on the 93-year-old Duke of Edinburgh on Australia's national day was seen as an insult to deserving Australian citizens.

"I accept that I probably overdid it on awards," Abbott said.

He also ditched his unpopular policy to pay women who earn up to 100,000 Australian dollars (USD78,000) a year the equivalent of their full salary for six months of maternity leave. The policy, which Abbott has described as his signature policy, was widely seen as unfair to the poor and had virtually no support within the government.

Abbott described both reintroducing knighthoods and the paid parental leave policy as "captain's calls," an Australian term that refers to a team captain using a prerogative to make decisions regardless of teammates' opinions.

"They are two captain's calls that I have made, but I have listened, I have learned and I have acted," he said.

A furor over Prince Philip's knighthood has been blamed in part for the surprise likely loss by the conservative government in elections on Saturday in Queensland state.

While vote counting continued, the center-left Labor Party appeared close to for-



Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott

ming a government in the 89-seat state parliament in one of biggest political upsets in Australian history.

That is a rebound from the last election in 2012, when a Labor government was tossed out of power and left with only seven lawmakers.

Dissatisfaction with Abbott's government is also seen as a factor behind the loss of a conservative government in Victoria state elections in November.

Australian governments are rarely thrown out after a single term. Yet that happened in Victoria and is the most likely result in Queensland. Federal government lawmakers now fear that they are on track, with Abbott at the helm, to become the first single-term federal government since 1931.

Sydney's The Daily Telegraph newspaper described Abbott's speech yesterday as a "last-gasp hope for survival."

Fairfax Media reported yesterday that Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull, the ruling Liberal Party's former leader, and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, Abbott's deputy, are under pressure from colleagues to challenge Abbott for the leadership in a ballot of Liberal lawmakers.

A poll by market researcher Ipsos published by Fairfax Media newspapers yesterday showed that the opposition Labor Party was clearly more popular than Abbott's government. It found 54 percent of respondents referred Labor and 46 percent preferred the government — a reversal of the 2013 election result that delivered the government a clear majority.

Abbott's approval rating had declined to 29 percent in the latest poll from 38 percent in December. **AP**

JAPAN

Abe defends handling of hostage crisis

Mari Yamaguchi and Elaine Kurtenbach, Tokyo

JAPANESE Prime Minister Shinzo Abe defended his policy toward terrorism, as the flag at his official residence flew at half-staff yesterday in a mark of mourning for two hostages killed by the Islamic State group.

During a long day of parliamentary debate, Abe parried numerous questions about his handling of the hostage crisis, which came to a grisly end with news early Sunday that journalist Kenji Goto had been beheaded by the extremists.

Abe said his announcement of USD200 million in non-military aid for the fight against the Islamic State group, made during a visit to the Middle East just days before the militants demanded a \$200 million ransom for the two hostages, was meant to convey Japan's strong commitment to battling terrorism and fostering peace and stability in the region.

Some have questioned that decision, saying Abe should have been more cautious and not mentioned the Islamic Sta-

te group by name.

Responding to a question by an opposition lawmaker, Abe confirmed that he was aware of the hostage situation when he made the announcement.

Abe said he wished to publicize Japan's contribution to the fight against extremism, and rejected the idea of a more cautious approach.

"As international society seeks to restore peace and stability in the Middle East ... I thought it would be the most appropriate destination to visit, and that I should broadcast my message to the world from there," Abe said. "I thought announcing Japan's contribution to fulfill its responsibility would contribute to the international community's effort to fight against terrorism and prevent its expansion."

Abe said he did not see an increased terrorist risk following threats in a purported Islamic State group video that vowed to target Japanese and make the knife Goto's killer was wielding Japan's "nightmare."

"The terrorists are criminals," Abe said. "We are determined to pursue them and hold them accountable."

AP PHOTO



Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, second left, speaks during a government and ruling parties meeting at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo

Still, Japan has ordered heightened security precautions for airports and other public transport and at Japanese facilities overseas, such as embassies and schools.

The government also has called on journalists and others in areas near the conflict to withdraw, given the risk of further kidnappings and other threats.

The flag outside Abe's official residence was lowered to half-staff to mourn Goto and the other hostage, gun aficionado and adventurer Haruna

Yukawa, who reportedly was killed earlier.

Goto's wife, Rinko Jogo, said in a statement released yesterday that she was devastated but proud of her husband.

Jogo requested privacy for her family as they deal with their loss, and thanked those who had supported them.

"I remain extremely proud of my husband, who reported the plight of people in conflict areas like Iraq, Somalia and Syria," she said in the statement, issued through the British-ba-

sed journalist group Rory Peck Trust.

"It was his passion to highlight the effects on ordinary people, especially through the eyes of children, and to inform the rest of us of the tragedies of war," she said.

Goto left for Syria in late October, just a few weeks after the birth of the couple's youngest daughter, apparently hoping to rescue Yukawa, who had been seized by the militants last summer. Soon after, he was captured by the extremists. AP

THAILAND

1 hurt as small blasts rattle Bangkok mall shoppers

Thanyarat Doksono, Bangkok

POLICE in Thailand yesterday were investigating a pair of bombings outside a luxury shopping mall in the heart of Bangkok, the first such violence reported in the capital since last year's army coup.

One person was slightly injured in the blasts Sunday night, and police said the small homemade bombs were designed to sow panic, not kill.

The explosions occurred about 8 p.m. between the upscale Siam Paragon shopping mall and a mass transit elevated train line, which was undamaged but briefly shut as a precaution.

Siam Paragon was titled the world's most photo-

AP PHOTO



A Thai soldier stands guard as forensic police officers investigate near the front of Siam Paragon shopping mall, the site of a blast in Bangkok

graphed location on Instagram in 2013 and is a trendy meeting place in Bangkok that claims to have more than 100,000 Thai and foreign visitors a day.

Police initially said the explosions were caused by a malfunctioning transformer, but Natio-

nal Police spokesman Lt. Gen. Prawut Thawornsiri later said they were caused by devices that were probably not meant to hurt anyone. Service at the station was suspended for about an hour.

"The explosions were caused by two pipe bombs,

but the flash powder that was used had low pressure. You can see that the damage was not much," national police spokesman Lt. Gen. Prawut Thawornsiri told reporters yesterday. "It showed the perpetrators intended only to cause panic, threaten or stir up chaos."

"We have not ruled out a possibility that it was politically motivated but we are pursuing all kinds of motives," he said.

The explosive ordnance disposal team said the two bombs were controlled by digital clocks and one of them was hidden behind a transformer, which sent out some plume of smokes near the busy sky train station, according to police Col. Kamthorn Auicharoen, who heads the unit. He said a Thai man was slightly in-

jured in his left hand.

Kamthorn said police were looking for two male suspects seen on closed-circuit television footage and will likely issue arrest warrants for them in a few days.

The incident came at a time of slightly raised political temperatures in Thailand, as the country's ruling junta has tightened its clampdown on critics of its rule. It came a little more than a week after the impeachment of former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra.

Thailand has been under martial law since the army seized power in a May 22 coup that toppled her elected government.

There has been little open opposition, and virtually no violent opposition, to the military regime that

took over from an elected civilian government after the coup d'etat. Martial law remains in effect under the dual administration of the junta and a military-appointed interim Cabinet, and any dissent is strongly discouraged.

Junta-leader-cum-Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said yesterday that security measures will be tightened and asked the public to help prevent such an incident from happening again.

Thailand has a history of conspiratorial politics, and political protests in the capital, especially aggressive street demonstrations, have become more common since a 2006 coup toppled Yingluck's brother, Thaksin Shinawatra, from the prime minister's job. AP

EBOLA

Vaccine trial starts in Liberia

Jonathan Paye-Layleh, Monrovia

A large-scale human trial of two potential Ebola vaccines got under way in Liberia's capital yesterday, part of a global effort to prevent a repeat of the epidemic that has now claimed nearly 9,000 lives in West Africa.

The trials in Liberia are taking place after smaller studies determined that the vaccines were safe for human use. By comparing them now with a placebo shot, scientists hope to learn whether they can prevent people from contracting the ghastly virus that has killed some 60 percent of those hospitalized with the disease.

Yet despite the trials' promise, authorities still must combat fear and suspicion that people could become infected by taking part. Each vaccine uses a different virus to carry non-infectious Ebola genetic material into the body and spark an immune response.

On Sunday in one densely populated neighborhood of Monrovia, musicians sang songs explaining the purpose and intent of the trial in a bid to dispel fears.



Health care workers inside a USAID-funded Ebola clinic with their Ebola virus protective gear in Monrovia

B. Emmanuel Lansana, 43, a physician's assistant, was the first to receive doses yesterday. Two shots were administered at different points on his right arm. His wife had expressed apprehension about the vaccine trial, but Lansana said he still wanted to take part.

"From the counseling, all of the reservations I have were explained, my doubts were cleared," he said in a room where he was being observed for 30 minutes afterward.

Up to 600 volunteers are taking part in the first phase, and trial organizers have said eventually as many as 27,000 people could take part.

"We are targeting about 12 persons for today and hopefully the number will increase as we go alone," Wissedi Sio Njoh, director of operations with the vaccination campaign, told The Associated Press.

The World Health Organization says the Ebola epidemic has infected more than 22,000 people and claimed more than 8,800 lives over the past year. Without a vaccine, officials have fought the outbreak with old-fashioned public health measures, including isolating the sick, tracking and quarantining those who had contact with them, and setting up teams to safely bury bodies. AP

FRANCE

Pimping trial to start for ex-IMF chief Strauss-Kahn

Greg Keller, Paris

DOMINIQUE Strauss-Kahn is going on trial for sex charges in France — the nation where he once was considered a top presidential contender.

The former head of the International Monetary Fund, whose career nosedived amid accusations of sexually assaulting a hotel maid in New York, is facing charges in France: aggravated pimping and involvement in a prostitution ring operating out of luxury hotels.

The French economist known widely as DSK faces up to 10 years in prison and a 1.5 million-euro (USD1.7 million) fine, as he and more than a dozen other French and Belgian businessmen and police officers go on trial beginning Monday in the northern French city of Lille.

The trial is scheduled to last three weeks, with Strauss-Kahn not expected to testify until Feb. 10.

Investigators have compiled hundreds of pages of testimony from prostitutes describing the orgies allegedly organized by the 65-year-old Strauss-Kahn and his co-defendants, centered on



Former IMF Secretary General Dominique Strauss-Kahn

the Carlton hotel in Lille near the Belgian border. Strauss-Kahn says he took part in "libertine" activities but insists he never knew the women involved were prostitutes.

It's not illegal to pay for sex in France, but it's against the law to solicit or to run a prostitution business.

Hundreds of reporters are expected to cover the trial, making it one of the highest-profile cases in France in years.

In 2011, Strauss-Kahn was accused of sexually assaulting Guinean-born maid Nafissatou Diallo in New York, accusations that ended his high-flying finance career.

As head of the Washington-based IMF between 2007 and 2011, Strauss-Kahn was also tipped to become the French Socialist party's presidential candidate for the

2012 election.

That was before he was arrested and jailed in New York for four days. Diallo told police he forced her to perform oral sex, tried to rape her and tore a ligament in her shoulder after she arrived to clean his luxury suite at the Hotel Sofitel in New York in May 2011.

Strauss-Kahn was forced to resign from his \$500,000-a-year IMF position, even though New York prosecutors dropped the case three months later because they said Diallo had undercut her credibility by lying about her background and changing her account of her actions right after the alleged attack.

Strauss-Kahn said the sexual encounter was consensual but called it "a moral failing." AP

EGYPT

Al-Jazeera reporter freed from jail wants colleagues released

Kristen Gelineau, Sydney

FOR more than a year, the parents of jailed Al-Jazeera English journalist Peter Greste kept up a relentless, resolute campaign to free their Australian son from an Egyptian prison. Yesterday, the misery that had been etched on their faces had been transformed into beaming grins as they bounded over to the microphones once more — this time, to proclaim their son a free man.

"There is still a sense of unreality about it all, much like the day 403 days back when we received a call one night that Peter's in an Egyptian prison," said Greste's father Juris, who donned a festive red shirt and matching hat — a stark departure from his typically subdued attire. "To me, it is yet to quite sink in where we are, what's happened."

What happened was a surprise to many. Greste was released from prison and deported Sunday after a presidential "approval," according to an Egyptian prison official and the nation's official news agency. The official and an Interior Ministry statement said he was released under a new deportation law passed last year.

But the joy over Greste's release was tempered by the news that two of his colleagues, Egyptian-Canadian Mohammed Fahmy and Egypt-



Juris, right, and Lois Greste, parents of Australian journalist Peter Greste seen in a poster, and his brother Andrew, pose with a poster of him after speaking to the media

tian Baher Mohammed, remained jailed. The trio was arrested in 2013 over their coverage of the violent crackdown on Islamist protests following the military overthrow of President Mohammed Morsi. Egyptian authorities accused them of providing a platform for Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood, now declared a terrorist organization, but officials never provided any concrete evidence.

Greste, who was whisked out of Egypt on a flight to Cyprus, was in a state of disbelief about his freedom and deeply relieved — but still worried about his imprisoned friends, said his brother, Andrew Greste.

"His excitement is tempered and restrained and will be until those guys are free," Andrew Greste said at the news conference in Brisbane. "He won't give up until Baher and Mohammed are out of there." AP

Daryna Krasnolutska and
Kateryna Choursina

UKRAINE

Rebel leader aims to call up 100,000 as conflict intensifies

A Ukrainian separatist leader ordered a full military mobilization as the conflict with government forces escalated after peace talks failed to secure a truce.

The call-up in 10 days' time seeks to increase the rebel army to as many as 100,000 people, Alexander Zakharchenko, head of the self-declared Donetsk republic, said yesterday, according to the separatist-run DAN news service.

The additional troops will be trained and deployed against a Ukrainian military build-up in the south of the conflict zone so that "by spring, they'll be meeting a different force," Zakharchenko said, according to DAN.

The order went out as fighting between government forces and rebels in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk has intensified, deepening the worst standoff between Russia and the U.S. and Europe since the Cold War. A Saturday meeting in Minsk, Belarus, between Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe ended after representatives of the two self-proclaimed republics sought a revision of peace accords and were "not even pre-



Ukrainian military vehicles are seen driving on the road towards the town of Artemivsk

pared to discuss" a cease-fire, the OSCE said.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande called in a telephone conversation on Sunday for "an unconditional and immediate cease-fire, as the conflict is escalating and the number of civilian casualties is growing," according to a statement on the Ukrainian leader's

website.

Zakharchenko said the rebels will attend no more meetings in Minsk until Ukraine appoints an "official representative," the Interfax news service reported. Ukrainian former President Leonid Kuchma, who represents Ukraine at the talks, is "a private person," Zakharchenko said, according to Interfax.

Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE had agreed on a document for

discussion in Minsk that included "concrete steps" for a truce, the withdrawal of heavy weaponry, supply of humanitarian aid and the release of prisoners, the group said late Friday. Merkel, Hollande and Poroshenko said that the separatists should be encouraged not to block talks and Russia must use its influence on the rebels to this end, according to an e-mailed statement from Steffen Seibert, a German government spokesman.

Five soldiers were killed and 29 wounded in the past 24 hours, Ukrainian military spokesman Vladyslav Seleznyov told reporters in Kiev yesterday. Rebel forces attacked Ukrainian troops 104 times in that period, he said.

Separatists attacked government troops in Debaltseve, a strategic transport hub, with artillery and Grad multiple-rocket-launch systems, Ukrainian military spokesman Leonid Matyukhin said by video link at the same briefing. Rebels shelled

residential areas in the villages of Pisky and Vodyane twice, he said.

Eleven civilians died and 42 were injured in shelling by Ukrainian forces in the past day in the self-declared Donetsk republic, DAN reported yesterday, citing rebel spokesman Eduard Basurin.

A "maximum effort is being invested on the ground to ensure a cease-fire, withdrawal of heavy artillery, respect for the established demarcation line," Ivica Dacic, Serbia's foreign minister and OSCE chairman-in-office, told reporters in Belgrade on Sunday.

The U.S. and the European Union have threatened to expand sanctions against Russia for what they say is Russian President Vladimir Putin's support of the rebels, adding to restrictions imposed since the March annexation of Crimea and the downing of a Malaysian airliner over Donetsk in July. **Bloomberg**

AD

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what's ON



HAND PAINTED PORCELAIN
— FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH:
EAST-WEST RITUALS BY ARLINDA FROTA
TIME: 2pm-7pm (closed on Sundays)
UNTIL: February 7, 2015
VENUE: Creative Macau, G/F Macau Cultural
Centre Building, Xian Xing Hai Avenue
ADMISSION: Free
ENQUIRIES: (853) 2875 3282

19TH AND 20TH CENTURY PORTRAIT OIL
PAINTINGS — MAM COLLECTION
TIME: 10am-7pm
(Closed on Mondays, No admission after 6:30 pm)
UNTIL: December 31, 2015
VENUE: Macau Museum of Art,
Av. Xian Xing Hai, s/n, NAPE
ADMISSION: MOP5
(Free on Sundays and public holidays)
ENQUIRIES: (853) 8791 9814

RETURN TO THE ORIGIN
— RESTORING MAM COLLECTION
TIME: 10am-7pm
(Closed on Mondays, no admission after 6:30 pm)
UNTIL: March 8, 2015
VENUE: Macau Museum of Art,
Av. Xian Xing Hai, s/n, NAPE
ADMISSION: MOP5
(Free on Sundays and public holidays)
ENQUIRIES: (853) 8791 9814

RED SANDALWOOD ART EXHIBITION
OF OLD BEIJING CITY GATES
TIME: 12pm-9pm (Tuesdays to Sundays, open on
Mondays that fall on a public holiday)
UNTIL: March 22, 2015
VENUE: Level 2 MGM Art Space
ADMISSION: Free
ENQUIRIES: (853) 8802 8888

WATER AURORA
TIME: 24 hours daily
VENUE: MGM Macau, Av. Dr. Sun Yat Sen, NAPE
ADMISSION: Free
ENQUIRIES: (853) 8802 8888

Offbeat

**BART THE CAT HIT BY CAR, BURIED
AND THEN CRAWLS FROM GRAVE**

Bart the cat was hit by a car, buried and crawled back from the dead — literally.

Earlier this month, a car hit the 1 1/2-year-old cat in Tampa, Florida. Bart's owner was so distraught, he couldn't stand the thought of burying him, so he asked neighbor to dig a shallow grave.

Five days later, on Jan. 21, a matted and injured Bart emerged, meowing for food.

"At first it blew me away," said Dusty Albritton, the neighbor who buried Bart. "All I knew was this cat was dead and 'Pet Sematary' is real."

Bart had a broken jaw, a ruptured eye and a torn-up face. He was dehydrated and hungry, but alive.

Owner Ellis Hutson didn't know what to do. "It was unbelievable," he told The Tampa Bay Times (bit.ly/1y4JxZZ). "I've never seen anything like that before."

Hutson got in touch with the Humane Society of Tampa Bay, which through the Save-A-Pet Medical Fund will help cover the costs of Bart's care. On Tuesday, the cat underwent surgery to remove an eye, wire his jaw shut and insert a feeding tube, which cost more than USD1,000. AP

TV canal macau

13:00	TDM News (Repeated)
13:30	News (RTPi) Delayed Broadcast
14:30	RTPi Live
17:35	Brazil Avenue (Repeated)
18:30	TDM Sports (Repeated)
19:30	Soap Opera
20:30	Main News, Financial & Weather Report
21:00	TDM Interview
21:45	Happy Endings S2
22:10	Brazil Avenue
23:00	TDM News
23:30	Miscellaneous
00:30	Main News, Financial & Weather Report (Repeated)

cinema

CINETEATRO

29 JAN - 4 FEB

**BLACKHAT**

ROOM 1

2.15, 4.45, 7.15, 9.45 pm

Director: Michael Mann

Starring: Chris Hemsworth, Viola Davis, Wei Tang

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 133min

**NIGHTCRAWLER**

ROOM 2

2.30, 4.45, 7.15, 9.30 pm

Director: Dan Gilroy

Starring: Jake Gyllenhaal, Rene Russo, Riz Ahmed, Bill Paxton

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 117min

**AMERICAN SNIPER**

ROOM 3

2.15, 4.45, 7.15, 9.45 pm

Director: Clint Eastwood

Starring: Bradley Cooper, Sienna Miller, Kyle Gallner

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 132min

MACAU TOWER

29 JAN - 4 FEB

BLACKHAT

2.30, 4.30, 7.00, 9.30 pm

Director: Michael Mann

Starring: Chris Hemsworth, Viola Davis, Wei Tang

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 133min

this day in history



Rodney Bickerstaffe

**1988 NURSES PROTEST
FOR BETTER PAY**

Nurses across the UK have taken part in a day of industrial action to secure more money for themselves and the NHS.

In the House of Commons Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher condemned the health workers' strike saying it was prolonging waiting lists and deserting patients.

But just 200 of the 9,000 operations planned for today had to be cancelled, according to Health Service figures.

Many nurses and health service staff joined pickets during their breaks or arranged cover for their shifts.

The Department of Health described the action as patchy and estimated only 2% of the country's 470,000 nurses were actually on strike.

The National Union of Public Employees (Nupe) said about 2,500 nurses were striking officially and 6,000 others supported them throughout the day.

In London, they were joined by patients, pensioner groups and Labour MPs in the 40 hospitals across the capital.

A South Yorkshire pit, Frickley Colliery, was brought to a standstill when nearly 200 day-shift workers refused to cross the nurses' picket line at the pit gate.

Department of Health plans to offer nurses a 3% pay rise and end national wage increases in favour of regional variations were leaked to the Nursing Times magazine, published yesterday.

The general secretary of Nupe - which is leading the current protest - Rodney Bickerstaffe described the 3% as "a pathetic and bitter blow to other health workers already totally demoralised and dejected."

Defending the government document, written for the Nurses Pay Review Board, Health Minister Tony Newton said: "Wage rises of just under 3% would compensate the average earner for price rises over the last 12 months."

A Gallup Poll carried out last night shows the British public sympathises with the nurses' strike action and supports their demands for higher pay.

The nurses' independent pay review body will report in April.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Nursing unions continued to battle with the government over pay rises and threatened further strike action.

The Royal College of Nursing - the biggest nursing union - balloted its members over its no-strike pledge in mid-February.

Cohse announced a national day of action for 14 March, the eve of the budget.

A new clinical grading structure came into force and average pay increases of 15% - more for specialists - were recommended by the pay review body when it reported in April.

The government accepted the recommendations and funded the rises centrally, rather than adding to the burdens of the health authorities.

YOUR STARS

Aries

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

A message comes your way from an older friend or relative who needs a favor. You can earn bonus karma by hopping to it and taking care of this before it starts to get even more complicated.

Gemini

May 21-Jun. 21

You're price-obsessed today — and maybe with good reason. Even if your checkbook is overflowing, you should still see if you can hunt down a bargain that saves you enough to do something fun.

Leo

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Try something new today — you can't stick with the same old thing! It's a good day to ask for new responsibilities at work or to take a new approach to dating. Don't go off the deep end, though!

Libra

Sep.23-Oct. 22

Try not to take on anything new at work — or to accept invites from new people. You don't have to blow them off permanently — just wait a few days to think things over and clear off your plate a bit.

Sagittarius

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You've got to be true to yourself today — even if that means letting yourself wallow in sadness or other negative emotions. A little genuine angst may save you from days or weeks of repression.

Aquarius

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You're as responsible as the next person — but today, you need to kick it up a notch. Make sure that you're thinking everything through and remembering all the important people in your life.

Taurus

April 20-May 20

You feel a deep sense of serenity — and while it comes from your energy rather than your circumstances, it's still genuine. Embrace it and see if you can instill this same spirit in those around you.

Cancer

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Emotional issues are prominent today — but they're almost all positive! You can handle pretty much anything that arises, and should feel deeply satisfied by this time tomorrow.

Virgo

Aug. 23-Sept. 22

Today is perfect for parties, networking events and all other forms of socializing. Your great energy is helping you to make good impressions and to have a great time while you're at it!

Scorpio

Oct. 23 - Nov. 21

Put that brain power to good use! Your amazing mental energy is great for problem solving and for getting folks to see things your way. Keep it simple, if possible — life is complex enough already.

Capricorn

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

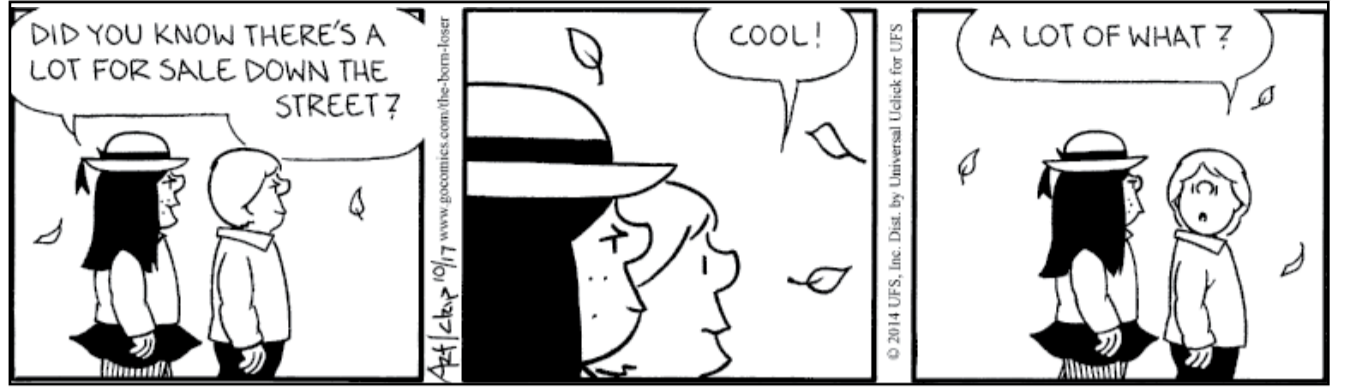
You need to make a big change — and today is the perfect day for it! Try not to shock the world too much, but don't be shy about showing people what you are capable of. It can be fun!

Pisces

Feb.19-Mar. 20

It's time once again to start something new! You are likely to experience good luck and great reactions from your people when you launch a new business or project, so toss your doubts aside and make your move!

THE BORN LOSER by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

Easy

		9	3	6				
1	2							9
	3				7	1	8	
			3					5
		4	7		2	6		
5			4					
	8	6	5					4
							5	2
				1	4	9		

Easy+

	8			3			7	
	6			8	4			9
				7	3			8
				5			8	2
8	4					9		5
5	7			6				
4	7	9						
6	8	7						4
	5	1					9	

Medium

		3				5		6
			1		3			7
	9	4		5				
3				6			1	
	7		5	9	4			8
	6		3					2
				2		3	4	
1			7		9			
9	8					2		

Hard

					1		3	
9					4			
7								
			8	9				7
5							1	
			4					
	3			2				
	1							6
			9			7		

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
--	-----	-----	-----------

CHINA

Beijing	-5	8	smoggy
Harbin	-18	-5	clear
Tianjin	-2	5	overcast/cloudy
Urumqi	-18	-10	foggy/clear
Xi'an	-4	7	cloudy/clear
Lhasa	-7	9	clear
Chengdu	2	10	cloudy
Chongqing	7	11	overcast
Kunming	3	19	clear
Nanjing	2	8	overcast
Shanghai	4	8	drizzle/overcast
Wuhan	-2	8	cloudy/clear
Hangzhou	2	6	drizzle
Taipei	14	19	overcast/drizzle
Guangzhou	11	21	cloudy
Hong Kong	16	20	cloudy

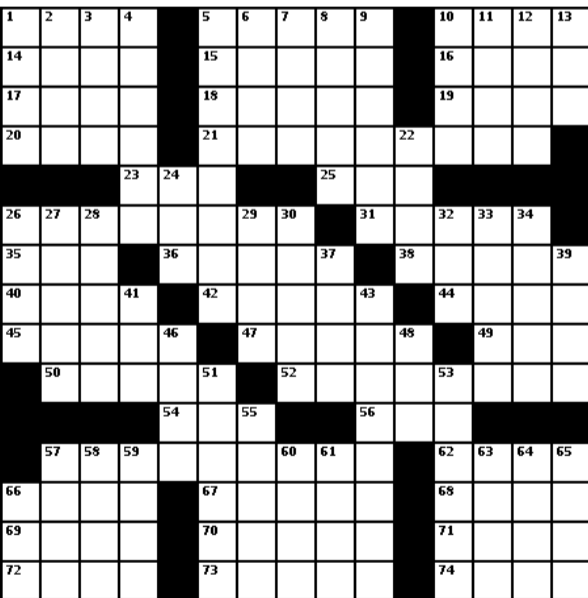
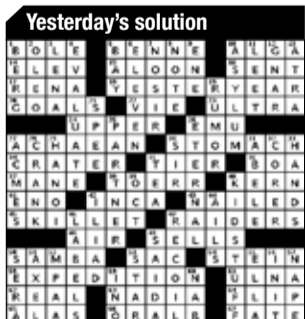
WORLD

Moscow	-6	-2	light snow
Frankfurt	-1	1	sleet
Paris	-3	2	light snow/drizzle
London	0	3	sleet/drizzle
New York	-9	5	snow/sleet

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Puppeteer Tony; 5- Devour; 10- Gospel singer Winans; 14- In ___ of; 15- Acid type; 16- Jazz singer Anita; 17- ___ saw Elba; 18- Sonata movement; 19- Look at amorously; 20- Woven fabric; 21- Pen name; 23- Exclamation of relief; 25- Lilly of pharmaceuticals; 26- Last; 31- Take pleasure in; 35- A Kennedy; 36- Villain's look; 38- Gold standard; 40- Archer of myth; 42- Kett and James; 44- Lazy, inactive; 45- Fathers; 47- Smooth transition; 49- Dusk, to Donne; 50- China's Zhou ___; 52- Heliopsis-shaped design; 54- Lady of Sp.; 56- Air rifle ammo; 57- Second highest in Tibetan Buddhism; 62- About; 66- Strike with foot; 67- Bus station; 68- Radar screen element; 69- An apple ___; 70- Whiskey type; 71- After the bell; 72- Beatty and Rorem; 73- Fable; 74- Black, to Blake;

DOWN: 1- Killed; 2- Leeds's river; 3- Ridge of rock; 4- Stringed musical instrument; 5- Headset; 6- Old Testament book; 7- Fork feature; 8- Unwarranted; 9- Breed of dog; 10- Masked critter; 11- Nervously irritable; 12- Still; 13- Storm center; 22- Hog sound; 24- Early hrs.; 26- Numbered rds.; 27- Strange and mysterious; 28- Decorate; 29- Tennis units; 30- French beans?; 32- ___ alai; 33- Command; 34- Some locks; 37- Prego competitor; 39- Portable shelter; 41- Poivre's partner; 43- Bask; 46- Scarf; 48- Outward flow; 51- Containing a platinum-like element; 53- In working order; 55- Olds model; 57- Periodic movement of the sea; 58- Mil. school; 59- The ___ the limit; 60- Neat as ___; 61- Lion's share; 63- Thick slice; 64- Bandleader Puente; 65- Dentist's request; 66- Neb. neighbor



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
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Steve Douglas,
AP Sports Writer

PREVIEW | RUGBY

Ireland the team to beat in open Six Nations

FOR Irish rugby, it turns out there is life after Brian O'Driscoll.

The international retirement of O'Driscoll following Ireland's title success in last year's Six Nations left a major hole in the national team. How would it cope without the great center, one of the country's greatest ever servants?

There was no need to worry. Ireland has won every game since, including four in a row against giants from the southern hemisphere's Rugby Championship, and is the team to beat in the 2015 Six Nations that starts on Friday with an eagerly anticipated clash between fierce rivals Wales and England in Cardiff.

A typically unpredictable tournament — there have been four different winners in the last five years — again appears wide open, however, with Europe's finest on a high after a strong set of results against their southern hemisphere counterparts in the recent November tests.

An argument could be made for France, England and Wales winning the last Six Nations before the Rugby World Cup in September, while Scotland looks to



Ireland's Andrew Trimble scores a try despite being tackled by Italy's Tito Tebaldi, right, and Joshua Raffaele Furno during their Six Nations Rugby Union international match at the Aviva Stadium, Dublin

have improved immeasurably under new coach Vern Cotter. Italy, once again, is the rank outsider and favorite for a fifth wooden spoon in seven editions.

It's tough to look beyond Ireland as champion, though, and the fixture list helps.

Joe Schmidt's team, which did the double over Argentina last summer and then beat South Africa and

Australia in November to stretch its winning run to seven tests, is at home to France and England and has away games against Italy and Scotland. Its other away match, against Wales in Round 4, is the toughest fixture and could prove to be the title decider.

Ireland's gnarly pack, led by lock Paul O'Connell, continues to give the team's back division a strong plat-

form that flyhalf Jonathan Sexton rarely wastes.

"Ireland are probably the best team in the northern hemisphere," said Italy captain Sergio Parisse, whose side hosts the holders on Saturday. "They are a very complete team."

Ireland's injury situation was looking bleak two weeks ago, but has cleared up at just the right time. Four likely starting backs — Sexton, scrumhalf Conor Murray, center Robbie Henshaw, and winger Dave Kearney — have been sidelined but were selected Sunday in the squad for the first two matches. Prop Cian Healy and star flanker Sean O'Brien have also recently returned from injury.

With a home World Cup looming, England will be looking to assert itself and win the Six Nations for the first time under Stuart Lancaster.

The English have great strength in depth, and pride in the shirt has been regained in Lancaster's

tenure, but the team still appears a work in progress, and doubts remain about the best composition in the back row and at half back. George Ford is the new man at No. 10 in place of Owen Farrell, who is one of a slew of injury absentees that includes lock Joe Launchbury, No. 8 Ben Morgan and center Manu Tuilagi.

Much will depend on how the English get on in the tournament opener at Millennium Stadium, where they were smashed 30-3 in a title decider two years ago.

"We learned a lot from that game and we have come a long way in terms of composure," England forwards coach Graham Rowntree said.

Injury-wise, Wales has the most stable squad heading into the tournament, and the November win over South Africa, which ended a 22-match losing run against the southern hemisphere's big three, will

have done wonders for confidence.

"This squad are in the middle of a cycle I think," coach Warren Gatland said. "A lot of this team should still be together for the next four or five years. It's a healthy position to be in, in terms of being excited about the Six Nations."

France coach Philippe Saint-Andre was asked at last week's tournament launch what to expect from his team over the next two months. "To be honest," he said, "I have no idea."

And there lies the problem for the mercurial French. The time has come for Saint-Andre to stop tinkering and lay the foundations for a World Cup campaign by picking a settled side in the Six Nations. But this is France, and experimentation is a hard habit to break.

The star player remains Wesley Fofana, a destructive runner in midfield, but whether France's pack can dominate games the way it used to is doubtful.

And will this be the year Scotland turns from being a plucky hopeful to a genuine contender? Impressive wins over Argentina and Tonga in November, combined with a narrow loss to New Zealand, suggest the highly rated Cotter is building something to savor at Murrayfield. **AP**

FOOTBALL

Australia rising in Asia, on and off the field

AUSTRALIA'S victory over South Korea in the Asian Cup final over the weekend capped a remarkable period for a nation which is only just awakening to the possibilities that membership of Asia provides — on and off the field.

Inside three months Australia has catapulted itself to the forefront of the Asian football confederation, the world's largest.

Watched by a 76,385-strong crowd, Australia's 2-1 defeat of two-time champion South Korea in extra time at Sydney's Olympic stadium was the country's first Asian Cup title since moving to the Asian zone from Oceania in 2006.

It continued a run of strong performances at the quadrennial continental championships for Australia, which includes a final appearance in 2011 where it eventually lost to Japan 1-0 in extra time.

"The goal should be for this confederation to break the European and South American monopoly on the World Cup," said Australia coach Ange Postecoglou after guiding the Socceroos to its breakthrough victory. "This tour-

■ The Cup was well supported by the general Australian public, with over 640,000 people attending the 32 games in five cities

nament here, it's a great achievement but it's not the end of the journey. It is the beginning for us."

"I'm not going to put any limits on this group of players. Whatever we do, we've set the standard here today."

The Asian Cup was the first major football tournament to be hosted by Australia and provided some much-needed positive news after the controversial 2022 World Cup bidding process that saw Australia lose out to Qatar.



Australia's Jason Davidson, center, and South Korea's Lee Keun Ho scramble for the ball during the AFC Asian Cup final soccer match between South Korea and Australia in Sydney

FIFA President Sepp Blatter's arrival at the official medal presentation after the final triggered boos from home fans, eager to voice their displeasure at the tainted governing body.

The tournament, though, was well supported by the general Australian public, with over 640,000 people attending the 32 games in five cities — Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra and Newcastle — a 50 percent increase on attendances at the pre-

vious edition in Qatar in 2011.

The organizers also boasted of record television audiences across the continent.

In China, Asia's biggest market, the cumulative average viewership for the event was 182 million by the end of the semifinal stage and the cumulative reach totaled 950 million. The AFC cited its data from CSM Media Research - KantarSport Asia.

Television viewership in the host nation exceeded one million

for its semifinal victory over the United Arab Emirates, making it one of the most widely watched football matches in the country's history.

"I think it's going to do a lot of things," said Australia winger Mathew Leckie, who plays for second-tier German club FC Ingolstadt. "It's incredible the amount of people that came tonight. For me I think it's the biggest Australian success in sport."

"Champions of Asia, it's quite incredible and you know you could see how much everyone loved tonight."

At club level, Australia has also had a breakthrough year in Asian competition.

In November, Australia club side Western Sydney Wanderers, coached by former Socceroo Tony Popovic, claimed the country's first Asian club-competition silverware by beating the more-fancied Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia 1-0 on aggregate in the Asian Champions League.

"We came into this confederation knowing it would be a huge challenge, the Matildas won the (women's) Asian Cup (in 2010), then the Wanderers in the Champions League and now we've won," Postecoglou said.

"I said from day one we won't take a backward step from anyone. We don't do it in another sport and we don't do it in football." **AP**

opinion

Our Desk

João Pedro Lau



MACAU – LOULAN

During our geography class in high school, our teacher would sometimes share with us his travelling experiences, especially his journeys to mainland China. He went to places like Guangxi and Inner Mongolia before they were polluted or commercialized.

Among the many mainland attractions he mentioned, the one that fascinated me the most was the relics of the small kingdoms alongside the Silk Road in northwest China.

Among those kingdoms was the Loulan Kingdom, or Kroran. It caught my attention because of its name in Chinese, which is both elegant and mysterious. Some historians believe that Loulan was once a splendid kingdom because of its location on the Silk Road. However, after hundreds of years of prosperity, the kingdom suddenly disappeared from the world some time in the fourth or the fifth century.

There were several theories on the decline of Loulan. Some said that it was because of the changing course of the river and the changing position of lakes, which led to the kingdom suffering from a severe water shortage. Others pointed out that there were military conflicts taking place in the region, which might have caused the demise of Loulan. Another hypothesis was that the kingdom was abandoned after merchants opened a new route for the Silk Road. Regardless of the reasons, it is easy to understand that a small kingdom like Loulan is very vulnerable to external changes.

Coming back to the present, while kingdoms like Loulan are long gone, we can actually find regions in the present world that are similar to Loulan; and Macau is one of the examples.

Just like Loulan, Macau used to be on the maritime Silk Road, which made it a prosperous seaport. However, it was eventually replaced by Hong Kong and later rendered a far less important city.

Although it found its glory back through the gaming industry, Macau is still highly susceptible to external factors and there is the chance it will face another decline in the future.

I believe that the central government has also forecast this gloomy future and has thus been urging and pushing the Macau government to diversify its economy through playing its old role – the trade nexus between China and the world, especially the Portuguese speaking countries.

However, the Macau government seems to be pretty unresponsive to this request. Although there were gestures and slogans coming from senior officials, there have been very few substantial moves toward truly fostering Macau as a trade platform.

The current prosperity of Macau may continue into the foreseeable future, but it definitely is not going to last forever. There is no place in the world that can generate wealth indefinitely only through gambling. And when the right storm hits Macau, be it a deeper recession in the Chinese economy, the further strengthening of anti-corruption measures, or worse, the legalization of gambling in other Chinese cities, Macau will face its second decline and become the modern Loulan.

I know these types of warnings have already been flooding the media for ages, but it is time for Macau to take this warning seriously since time is truly running out.

It was reported yesterday by MDT that Zhuhai has decided to build a free trade center for China and three Portuguese-speaking countries in Hengqin. Although the Zhuhai authority maintained that the measure is only to help Macau's economic diversification, it is obvious that Hengqin is capable of replacing Macau if it receives enough support from the local and central government, and can successfully attract the skilled professionals it needs.

I think the recent gaming revenue slump has already forced the Macau government to put more effort into finding an alternative industry for the SAR. I hope that they can do it quick enough so that Macau will not eventually be abandoned.

THE BUZZ MERCEDES CONFIDENT F1 CHAMPION HAMILTON WILL SIGN NEW DEAL

Mercedes is confident that Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton will sign a new contract soon, with his current deal expiring at the end of the year.

The 30-year-old British driver clinched his second F1 title last year in dramatic style, beating Mercedes teammate Nico Rosberg at the final double-points race in Abu Dhabi.

Although talks have only just started on a new

deal, the head of Mercedes-Benz Motorsport Toto Wolff says discussions "will come to a positive end soon. I have no doubt about that."

Wolff played down the fact negotiations had started somewhat later than was anticipated, adding "we met each other after the break one week ago and had a good discussion. There is no hurry. It's only January."



GAMING

Melco Crown opens new casino resort in Manila

MELCO Crown Entertainment formally opened its \$1 billion casino and entertainment resort in Manila yesterday, hoping to cash in on a fast growing Philippine economy and increased tourism.

The company's co-chairman and CEO Lawrence Ho said the opening of the City of Dreams Manila is part of the company's plans to have casinos across Asia. It operates casinos in the world's biggest gambling market, Macau. China's corruption crackdown has deterred high-rolling mainland gamblers from Macau's casino tables in the past year.

The Manila casino will cater to the growing influx of tourists to the Philippines,

■ The casino will cater to the growing influx of tourists to the Philippines and also target local gamblers

but Clarence Chung Yuk Man, chairman of the Philippine arm of Melco Crown, said it would also target local gamblers who are estimated to have parted with USD2.3 billion last year.

He said out of the casino operators with licenses in the Philippines, Melco is the only one with a customer base in Macau and can bring in VIP customers and high-rollers.

"We will promote cross marketing and also try to promote this property to our customers so that there is additional choice for them," Chung told a news conference.

Australian billionaire James Packer, who is Melco's co-chairman, said the Philippines' strong economy, its 100 million people and rising tourism offer a huge market potential.

The resort houses a casino; the Crown, Nobu and Hyatt hotels; two premium nightclubs; the world's first DreamWorks-inspired interactive play space DreamPlay; restaurants and retail shops.

Nobu is part-owned by Hollywood star Robert de Niro, who appears in a video commercial for the resort, alongside Leonardo Di Caprio and director Martin Scorsese. AP

THE DECISIVE MOMENT



Sebastian Vettel posted the fastest lap for Ferrari on the first day of pre-season Formula One testing on Sunday, while last year's championship runner-up Nico Rosberg clocked a massive 157 laps.

Station	Air quality
Roadside	90-120 Moderate
High Density Residential Area	90-120 Moderate
Ambient	75-105 Moderate

WORLD BRIEFS



INDONESIA An Indonesian court decides to go ahead with the trials of an American couple charged with murdering the woman's mother while vacationing on the resort island of Bali last year. The three-judge panel overruled defense arguments that the indictment submitted by prosecutors had inaccuracies and should be annulled.

USA President Barack is sending Congress a USD4 trillion budget that seeks to raise taxes on wealthier Americans and corporations and use the extra income to lift the fortunes of American families who have felt squeezed during tough economic times. He would also ease tight budget constraints imposed on the military and domestic programs.



USA A Super Bowl that got off to a slow start wound up with a "Whoa!" finish, a lot like the New England Patriots' entire season. Patriots quarterback Tom Brady threw two of his four touchdown passes in the final quarter to erase a double-digit deficit, rookie Malcolm Butler picked off Russell Wilson's short throw while Marshawn Lynch watched, and the Patriots ended a decade drought without an NFL title by beating the defending champion Seattle Seahawks 28-24 in a taut classic Sunday night (yesterday morning).

BELGIAN police have evacuated hundreds of people from the European Parliament after a suspicious vehicle was spotted nearby. Parliament spokesman Jaume Duch Guillot said yesterday that "police evacuated three of the parliament's buildings" in Brussels and cordoned off a suspicious car. Belgian media showed a photograph of a police robot moving toward a vehicle in a nearby street. Duch Guillot said about 500 people were evacuated but two of the three buildings, used only for administrative purposes, have since been declared safe.