



LIBRARIES TO OPEN LONGER

The Cultural Affairs Bureau is proposing an extended working schedule for some public libraries

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ARTS FAIR PRESENTS LOCAL CREATIONS

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CHOW TAI FOOK'S MACAU, HK SALES PLUNGE

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WORLD BRIEFS



CHINA Ford reported record sales of about 1.1 million vehicles in China last year. The Dearborn, Michigan, automaker said Friday that its 2015 sales in the country were up 3 percent from the previous year. It also set a new monthly sales record in December, selling 124,768 vehicles. That's up 27 percent from the prior year period.

CHINA Former Lyon boss Alain Perrin is out as the Chinese men's national team coach after slightly less than two years in the job. The Chinese Football Association said in a statement Friday that the Frenchman was departing following discussions between both sides. The search for a replacement would begin immediately.

USA Three students from China who attend high school in Southern California will plead no contest to criminal charges and spend years in jail for bullying a classmate they allegedly stripped, kicked with high heels, slapped and burned with cigarettes.

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IC proposes libraries open longer

Renato Marques

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is proposing an extended working schedule of some public libraries, including the Red Market Library that might soon be open 24 hours per day.

The information was presented by Ms Tang Mei Lin, chief of the new Department of Management of Public Libraries, former Director of the Macau Central Library, who stated that the final decision will be made in accordance with the findings of a University of Macau study commissioned by the IC.

Tang was speaking at the first of a newly initiated series of conference sessions between the Bureau headed by Ung Vai Meng and the press held last Friday at the Library Sir Robert Ho Tung. According to Mr Ung the purpose of the sessions was to offer a new platform of communication between the IC and the press. It is has not been decided how often these meetings will occur, but the "Cultural Meetings" will be held in a different cultural spaces throughout the territory.



Ung Vai Meng (center) speaks at the inaugural session of the "Cultural Meetings"

ghout the territory.

The extended library working schedule is one of the outcomes of the recent restructuring

of the IC that will integrate the libraries previously under the management of the Civic And Municipal Affairs Bureau

(IACM). The unified system will allow, for example, the sharing of books across all libraries.

The first meeting between the

IC and the press was attended by all of the heads of the new IC Departments. The president of the bureau also explained the new structure and reorganization in addition to a debriefing of some of the activities held throughout 2015.

Ung said the IC's "target is to contribute to making Macau a more sustainable city," in which they hope to be able to count on the support of the media.

The IC head also mentioned that the new structure, created according to the 2016 Policy Address guidelines, includes around 200 new staff members that will contribute in several areas to improving its service.

Chan Hou Seng, director of the Macau Museum of Art (MAM) said that the IC is keen to promote more education in the arts. "We want to promote Artistic Education," said the head of the MAM, stating that only by improving the knowledge of the Macau population first, and arts and art appreciation to tourists second can we succeed in promoting art events.

No timeline for new Central Library

DURING Friday's meeting, the chief of the department of Management of Public Libraries, Tang Mei Lin said that a timeline is yet to be set for the construction of the new Central Library.

The project has been presented by the government for a long time as a way to revitalize the space of the "Old Court" in Praia Grande area and is in its "second stage" of construction, after the initial Design, advised Tang. According to her, this second stage will lead to the "Conception Project" work that is

currently in the hands of the Public Works Bureau.

Ms Tang advanced that although there is no set deadline for the conclusion of the project it should include three different parts. Two of these are in the old court building that will see some sections of the premises demolished, maintaining the façade and the original structure, and a third part will include the Judiciary Police (PJ) building which is intended to be transformed into a museum.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON HERITAGE SITES LISTING

THE MACAU Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is holding a public consultation for the first group of buildings and sites proposed to be heritage listed. The consultation that began December 28 will be open until February 25 and, as is customary of public sessions, will be three in total. From the first group of buildings proposed by IC are four Foc Tac Chi Temples respectively located on Horta da Mitra, Rua do Teatro, Rua do Patane, and Rua do Almirante Sér-

gio; Three Sections of the Old City Walls located on S. Francisco road, Visconde de S. Januário road, and next to Penha Hill Church; and buildings at 28 Rua Manuel de Arriaga, Old Chong Sai Pharmacy, Old Residence of General Ye Ting, Old Cattle Municipal stables and Kennel, and the "Blue House" Building at 6 Estrada do Cemitério. The first public session was held on Saturday, January 9 and the next two sessions are scheduled for January 16 and 23.

THE Secretary for Administration and Justice, Sónia Chan and the Chief of the Office of the Secretary, Iao Man Leng, visited the Legal Affairs Bureau (DSAJ) last week to check on the work developments of the bureau since the integration of the Law Reform and International Law Bureau (DSRJDI) with the DSAJ as for-

Sónia Chan assesses administrative revamp



Sónia Chan (center)

malized on January 1.

At the meeting, the secretary mentioned that the DSAJ would soon assume an important role regarding the legislative work that will increase their work volume, urging the leaders and managers to speedup the process

of integration in order to ensure better coordination and dialogue among all staff.

After the meeting, Sónia Chan, accompanied by the managers of several services, visited the subunits of the Bureau in the Public Administration Building

at Rua do Campo and CNAC Building in the NAPE area.

After the merging of the two Bureaus, the DSAJ now operates with one director as well as three deputy directors that are in charge of eight departments and eleven divisions. **RM**

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THE disappearance of five individuals connected with the “Mighty Current” publishing house has brought into question the future of Hong Kong’s relationship with China.

It has been the most serious awakening for the Hong Kong community since last year’s “Umbrella movement” that opposed planned electoral reforms in the neighboring SAR.

Widely suspected, though still unproven, the central government is believed to have had some hand in the mysterious disappearances. What is most troubling however is that we still do not know how deep the scandal runs. If the central government is involved in the disappearances, then the next probable conclusion is that the Hong Kong SAR government is either aware of mainland involvement or not aware of it – both potentially worrying developments for the future of Hong Kong and indeed, Macau.

Hong Kong activists have decried the latest developments, including what they consider the inadequate response of Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying’s pledge to investigate further.

Nineteen-year-old student activist, Agnes Chow, whose video criticizing Beijing’s “political suppression” went viral last week, said that she was surprised by the clip’s reception. “I didn’t really expect so many people to watch my video but I think that it shows [how much] Hong Kong people [care] about this issue,” Chow told the Guardian last week.

But while the outrage in Hong Kong has made headlines around the world, Macau has been noticeably mute on the subject. The Times approached a number of Macau news kiosks and bookstores that feature the controversial publications to investigate what the owners and shoppers had to say.

Studying the covers of the controversial publications for sale in some news kiosks in downtown Macau, it is easy to see why mainland officials would be uncomfortable with the material. One book, entitled “Ambition”, chronicles President Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption cam-

MISSING HK PUBLISHERS’ CASE

‘Censorship is on the increase,’ local bookseller says



paign, which the book alleges to be merely a continuation of the Cultural Revolution that ravaged China in the 1960s and 70s.

Another publication details Xi’s purge of officials who were close to his predecessors; particularly those connected to former president Jiang Zemin, but also, to a lesser extent, those who worked closely with Hu Jintao.

A seller in one of the kiosks, who asked to remain anonymous, said that she had already sold 10 of these publications that morning, adding that this was “quite normal,” even though their sales had not increased since the scandal broke. “Some days I sell 10 books; other days I don’t sell any,” she remarked.

A kiosk owner at another stall said that he regularly sells 10 to 20 of the books per day, almost exclusively to mainland tourists visiting Macau. He confirmed that there had been no increase in sales since October.

The owner declined to be attributed to his comments. He adamantly said: “No!” before adding [with a smile], “you know, people have got caught recently ... I don’t want to do that [go public].”

An employee at a bookstore in downtown Macau said that “since Xi has come to power, freedom of expression is declining and censorship is on the increase.”

“But we are not really worried,” she added, “as we don’t sell a lot of these [types of] books.”

Visiting a third kiosk, the Times reviewed a magazine, entitled “Zhongguo Mibao Magazine,” which appears to feature much of the same controversial content. Although the inside cover stated that the magazine is published in New York, U.S., it is entirely in Chinese and includes articles by authors who overwhelmingly write under pseudonyms instead of using their real identities.

But perhaps this is not surprising. The ‘missing five’ are not the authors behind the works,

but the bookstore owners or employees at the publishing house, Mighty Current. It remains a topical but sensitive subject for retailers and none of those interviewed in Macau were happy to speak on the record.

The central government’s main objection to the material, which is banned in the mainland, is apparently not that residents of the SARs have access to them – indeed local residents seem largely uninterested – but that mainland tourists are taking the books back over the border.

Walking around the central tourism district on the weekend, the Times spoke to a number of mainland tourists and Macau residents to hear what they had to say. A group of eight young tourists from Shenzhen were initially exci-

ted to be talking to the media, but two of them confessed they had no knowledge of the missing bookstore owners. A third member of the group confirmed he understood but simply said: “Oh this... let’s go,” and motioned for the group to move away.

A woman who was setting up a protest banner concerning the Falun Gong movement also refused to comment on the issue. She also declined to tell reporters where she was from.

A Macau resident, who was asked if she was concerned about the recent disappearances, stated that “we are not concerned” but later added that, “it [the case of the missing individuals] is a bit scary.”

While the ramifications of the missing bookstore owners has the potential to affect many areas of public life in Hong Kong and Macau, there has been a divergence in opinion and reaction between the two territories.

Macau, one individual explained to the Times, is far more sympathetic than Hong Kong to the mainland.

The prevailing suspicion for the timing of the scandal is that it coincides with the planned publication of a book that is suspected to expose stories related to a former girlfriend of Xi. **Staff reporter**



“We are not really worried as we don’t sell a lot of these [types of] books.”

BOOKSELLER



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A creative products fair was held at Hong Kung Temple Square at 5 de Outubro Street over the weekend, which saw a number of Macau and Hong Kong artists gather to present their handcrafted designs and products to interested shoppers.

The event, entitled "Art Fair @5 Outubro Street", was supported by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC). According to the government organizer, there were 36 booths selling handicrafts, food and beverages, textiles, and eco-friendly utensils.

One of the booths, run by local resident Helen Leung from the "Living Green Project", sold tie-dyed products using all natural ingredients. She also sold 'green' cleaning items and other handmade beauty products.

Leung told the Times that one of her favorite colors used for the tie-dying originates from the bark of the lychee tree. She favors it because it produces a deep, rich red, which is then used to create colorful patterns on the scarves and bags she sells.

Another booth offered handmade soaps by an artisan company from Hong Kong, while a third showcased calligraphy done at the stall on red paper – typically bought in anticipation of the Chinese New Year.

Arts Fair presents handcrafted local products



RENATO MARQUES



At the next booth sat a young man who drew caricatures of well-known celebrities and personalities in Hong Kong and Macau. Among them was a framed picture of Chief Executive Chui Sai On surrounded by green paper bills in a scene reminiscent of former FIFA President Sepp Blatter, who was showered with fake currency at a press conference last year.

A woman, who identified herself only as Elizabeth, showca-

sed hand-painted glass bottles; many of them adorned with colorful flowers.

"While the others are selling their products as a business, I am giving the proceeds [from my booth] to the Macau Autism Association," she told the Times.

Elizabeth added that she had invited autistic children to participate in the glass painting and other artistic creations, which she said they generally

36 booths selling handicrafts, food and beverages, textiles, and eco-friendly utensils

enjoyed.

The IC declared that the event was envisioned to help develop creative and cultural industries in Macau. They hope to inspire local residents to take up arts and crafts as a part of the effort to diversify the economy of the MSAR.

The fair will be returning to Hong Kung Temple Square four times over the next six months: February 13 - 14; March 12 - 13; April 9 - 10; and June 11 - 12. **Staff reporter**

Macau-bound Taiwanese man loses undeclared cash

A Taiwanese man, who was supposed to depart for Macau on Friday evening, surrendered the equivalent of roughly USD28,000 to Taiwan Customs officers.

According to media reports, the man was booked on a TransAsia Airways flight to Macau but canceled his trip when the Custom officers at the airport's Terminal 1 seized most of his cash.



AP PHOTO

The Aviation Police Bureau (APB) said that the man was carrying HKD300,000 in his coat pocket when the customs officers at Taoyuan International Airport confiscated HK\$218,000 (US\$27,948), in accordance with Taiwanese law.

The Customs declaration regulation requires passengers and transportation service personnel

traveling in and out of the country to declare foreign currency valued at more than US\$10,000, or cash in Renminbi amounting to 20,000RMB or more.

The accused said that he was very upset by the incident and was not aware of the Customs declaration law. He added that he planned to go shopping in Macau and Hong Kong but the customs left him with the equivalent

of US\$10,000 after seizing his money.

A similar case occurred last month when Taiwan's Customs officers confiscated 6.6 million Japanese yen from a Taiwanese national traveling with 9 million Japanese Yen. He lost about two-thirds of his cash after failing to declare the amount to Customs.

The APB reminds travelers going in and out of Taiwan to observe the regulations to avoid cash being confiscated.

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CALL TO MEMBERS**

According to the regulations and in compliance with article 8 no. 3 and 9 no. 4 of the Articles of Association of the Association of the Portuguese-Speaking Physicians of Macau, published in the Official Gazette of the MSAR no. 38 - 2nd Series, of 22 September 2010, members are called to the General Assembly of the Association, which will take place at the Clube Militar de Macau on Tuesday 19 January 2016, at 7:00 pm, with the following agenda:

1. Annual Report, Results and Accounts of 2015- the opinion of AMLPM Supervisory Board and Vote of the Annual Report and Accounts referred to the year 2015.

All the members admitted, according to Article 4th, n0.2 and Article 9th, n0.8 and N0.9, of the Statute, have the right to vote.

If at the scheduled time a quorum is not achieved, the General Meeting shall convene on second call, at 7:30pm on the same day, whatever the number of members present, in compliance with article 9 no.7 of the Articles of Association

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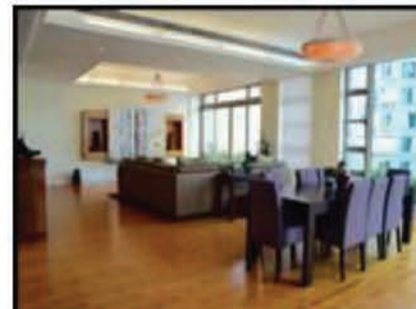


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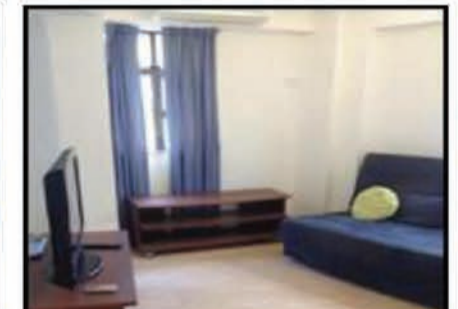
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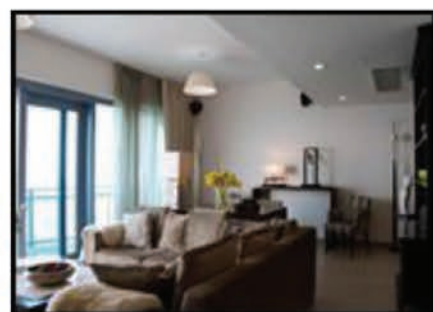


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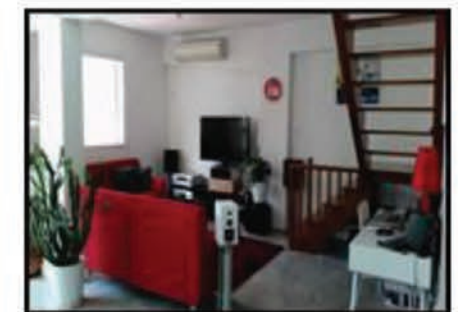
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Some of the suspects believed to have been involved in a prostitution ring that operated inside Hotel Lisboa

Alan Ho goes on trial, lawyer claims his innocence

Renato Marques

AFTER a year behind bars, Alan Ho and others suspected of being involved in a prostitution ring that operated inside Hotel Lisboa were finally brought before the Court of First Instance (TJB) on Friday.

Ho is a nephew of Stanley Ho. At the time of the arrests he was the executive director of the Hotel Lisboa. He was joined in the "dock" by another five staff members of the same hotel where the authorities claim the network operated.

The six defendants have been accused by the Macau's Public Prosecutors Office of criminal association and pimping and have been in remand since they were arrested in January 2015.

During the first hearing, only two of the defendants opted to answer questions posed by the lawyers, public prosecutor and the collective judges. The remaining four, including Alan Ho, remained silent during a session that was well attended by journalists.

The two defendants who decided to speak were the fourth and fifth defendants, Qiao Yan Yan and Bruce Mak, respectively the former assistant of the vice manager for "Special Markets PR" and the senior manager of the Security Department.

This first trial session was also marked at the start by a petition, interposed by Mr Alan Ho's lawyer Neto Valente, which asked for the hearing to be conducted behind

closed doors. Neto Valente based his claims on the need to prevent public pressure placing undue influence upon the judgement, claiming that "too much" information is already circulating in the press and reaching the public in a way that "convicts" his client ahead of his trial. The petition was analyzed and rejected by the judges who commenced the trial session shortly after.

Upon hearing the first alle-

■ The women were known at the hotel by the nickname 'Young Single Ladies'

gations, Neto Valente, Alan Ho's lawyer, denied the crimes his client was accused of, namely of establishing and leading a criminal organization that exploited prostitutes, as well as ninety counts of sexual exploitation, assuring that through the course of the trial Alan Ho will be able to prove his innocence in a prosecution that he determined to be "fragile."

The lawyer made specific references to several hearings held during the course of the investigations and "wiretappings" done by the Judiciary Police (PJ) where, in his opinion, other defendants "clear" the former executive director.

The fourth defendant, Bruce Mak, senior manager of the

Security Department, then answered several questions in which he said he considered his activity to be merely "normal" security tasks. He stated that he had no knowledge of other people "managing" any activity of the women that were known at the hotel by the acronym YSL ("Young Single Ladies"). Mak claimed the ladies were treated as any other hotel guest.

The senior manager also explained to the court the radio communications "code system" created by him for use among security staff composed of five code numbers (1,2,3,4, and Red) which again he stated was normal procedure especially when the team members come from different backgrounds and speak different languages.

Regarding the codes, the lawyer Vitor Gomes, representing the defendant Peter Lun, expressed surprise at the fact that the accusation by the Public Prosecutors Office only referred to the existence of the "code 1" which is used to warn of the presence of police officers, dismissing the other codes.

Replying to the Public Prosecutor, Mr Mak stated that he never heard the term "working rooms" to refer to the rooms where the alleged prostitutes were offering their services but had known that the "YSL" were occupying rooms in the fifth and sixth floors of the hotel. A "special" check-in counter was managed by the second defendant Kelly Wong, assistant deputy manager for "Special Market PR," a title that raised questions by the prosecutor. Mak said he was

"unaware" of any reason for the title.

The afternoon session led to the testimony of the fifth defendant Qiao Yan Yan, who stated that Alan Ho and Peter Lun (the second defendant on this case and former general manager) and her immediate boss, Kelly Wong had the responsibility of dealing and choosing the "YSL" that were situated in the two floors of the hotel unit.

Qiao also mentioned that it was part of her working duties to supervise and guarantee that the "girls" would not approach other hotel guests to offer their services or circulate outside the public area where they could operate freely as mentioned and remarked upon by Mak earlier in the morning.

The former assistant of Wong also admitted in court that she knew the procedures and rules well since she had been part of the group of YSL that frequented the hotel to provide sexual services.

The trial will resume with its second session scheduled for Friday, January 15.

Last year's police operation took into custody the 6 defendants together with 96 women that were providing sexual services in the hotel that belongs to the gaming tycoon Stanley Ho and which was being managed by his nephew. The six defendants were arrested on suspicions of managing a prostitution ring.

Twenty of the women were also taken into custody suspected of illegal immigration and ten for being in the possession of fake identification documents.

Partial Taipa road closure tomorrow

A stretch of Governor Albano de Oliveira Road in Taipa will be closed to traffic tomorrow. According to information from the Macau Transportation Infrastructure Office (GIT), the road closure will affect the stretch of road between Rua de Aveiro and Rotunda do Estádio (going both ways) and will be in force between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Drivers that wish to access Estrada Governador Albano de Oliveira to the Jockey Club must access Rua de Aveiro (via a temporary lane). The exiting of the road from the opposite direction (from Ocean Gardens) will be through Rua de Fat San, also via a temporary traffic lane. These traffic changes are due to works related to the construction of the Macau LRT.

Leong, Chan meet junkets to discuss regulation



The director of the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ), Paulo Martins Chan, held a meeting on Friday with the Macau Gaming and Entertainment Promoters Association to discuss gaming regulation and improvements to gaming law, according to Asia Gaming Brief. Lionel Leong, the Secretary for Economy and Finance, joined Paulo Chan and representatives from the Macau junket association, to discuss improvements to gaming law. Chan said that his priority was to improve the laws and regulation related to gaming, as well as to optimize the deployment of resources within DICJ. He also emphasized the important role that junkets played in Macau.

Dengue fever case detected at the Gongbei checkpoint

A 32 year-old man, a resident of Mainland China, was found suffering from dengue fever upon entry to Zhuhai through the Gongbei border on January 4, the Macau Health Bureau revealed. The case, initially detected by the temperature monitor installed in the checkpoint, was further investigated by quarantine officials. A blood test concluded that the man was infected with "dengue" type I. The dengue patient was returning to mainland China through Macau after a trip to Malaysia where he had been for about a month. Due to the timing of the manifestation of the symptoms and also the fact that the dengue-carrying mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*) is not active in the region at this time of the year, the health service considers that there is a very low possibility of the disease spreading.



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Bank Rakyat said to scrap USD500m life insurance sale

Jonathan Browning, Joyce Koh and Fathiya Dahrul

PT Bank Rakyat Indonesia, the country's most profitable lender, has canceled the sale process for a 40 percent stake in its life insurance arm, people with knowledge of the matter said.

The state-controlled bank will try to boost the business's value internally before any future sale, the people said, asking not to be identified as the details are private. Hong Kong billionaire Richard Li's FWD Group, South Korea's Hanwha Life Insurance Co. and BNP Paribas Cardif were vying for the holding, valued at USD400 million to \$500 million, in an auction process that started nearly a year ago, the people said.

Indonesian companies were involved in \$3.7 billion of acquisitions last year, down 64 percent from 2014, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. The Bank Rakyat unit, known as BRIngin Life, sells products through the lender's 10,000 outlets across Indonesia.

The state lender agreed to take direct ownership of BRIngin Life from its pension fund last year in preparation for the introduction of a foreign partner. It shortlisted bidders in July and initially planned to choose a winner in September, people with knowledge of the matter said previously.

Bank Rakyat told bidders it may restart the sale in the future, the people said. The life insurance unit, whose full name is PT Asuransi Jiwa Bringing Jiwa Sejahtera, increased its net income 76 percent in 2014 to 410.4 billion rupiah (\$29.5 million).

"We want to optimize BRIngin Life's performance," Hari Siaga, Bank Rakyat's corporate secretary, said by phone Friday. "We aren't thinking about a partner just now – that would be a second step."

Bank Rakyat shares rose 2.7 percent to 11,550 rupiah at 2:23 p.m. in Jakarta. A spokesman for Hanwha Life said he couldn't immediately comment, while representatives for FWD and BNP Paribas declined to comment.

Hanwha Life, South Korea's oldest insurer, operates in China, Vietnam and Indonesia. FWD, which is part-owned by Swiss Re AG, is part of Li's Pacific Century Group. It was formed when the billionaire bought ING Groep NV's insurance and pension units in Hong Kong, Macau and Thailand for 1.64 billion euros (\$1.8 billion) in 2013. **Bloomberg**

Chow Tai Fook's HK, Macau sales plunge on fewer Chinese

Daryl Loo and Foster Wong

CHOW Tai Fook Jewellery Group Ltd., the world's largest listed jewelry chain, said same-store sales in Hong Kong and Macau plunged 23 percent in the final three months of 2015 as fewer mainland Chinese tourists visited the two cities.

Same-store sales, for outlets open at least a year, fell 6 percent for those in mainland China, bringing the total decline to 15 percent for the fiscal third quarter ending December, the company said in a statement Friday. The retail sales value for all of the company's outlets slumped 11 percent in the period, it added.

The operating environment in China as well as sales outlook for the Lunar New Year holidays in February remain challenging, and the company will continue to focus on cost-cutting measures in the rest of the current fiscal year ending March, Managing Director Kent Wong said on a conference call with reporters Friday.

"The retail jewelry industry is now in a consolidation stage after the rapid growth in the past decade," Wong



An employee touches gold bangles as they sit in display inside a Chow Tai Fook Jewellery Group Ltd. jewelry store

said. "What we can do now is to better control cost structure on both rentals and staff costs, while expanding our high-end product lines."

Chow Tai Fook in November declared its first-ever special dividend even as it posted the steepest decline in semi-annual profit since it went public, after its shares fell to about 70 percent before its offer price since its 2011 share listing. China's economic slowdown, as well as campaigns against corruption and extravagant spending have hurt luxury retailers and casino companies.

The retailer of gems and watches has said it will shut outlets that do not perform well, but doesn't plan to lay off workers. Still, the number of employees may fall further after it dropped 8 percent in the first half, reducing staff costs by 13 percent, Wong said Friday.

Chow Tai Fook Chairman Henry Cheng said in November the company has shelved its overseas expansion plans and will focus on the Hong Kong, Macau and mainland China businesses.

Mainland Chinese tourists to Hong Kong, who accounted for more than 70 percent of the total in November,

have dropped 16 percent in the month, according to the city's tourism board.

Chow Tai Fook may request rental reductions of 30 percent on average, for the roughly one-third of its Hong Kong stores that renew their lease agreements each year, it had said in November. Wong said the company is in talks to renew leases for three shops in the city.

The luxury chain's retail network expanded to 2,317 points of sales as of end-2015, including a net opening of 28 jewelry, and 2 watch outlets in mainland China. It will open between 50 to 60 points of sales in China in the rest of the fiscal year, Wong said.

Competitor Chow Sang Sang Holdings International Ltd. said it won't cut prices even as it expects same-store sales to slide during the Lunar New Year holidays, amid a strong Hong Kong dollar that has turned mainland tourists away, the Standard newspaper reported Friday citing Lau Hak-bun, the company's general manager of Greater China retail.

Chow Tai Fook's Wong also said the company has no plan to cut product prices in the future. **Bloomberg**

What we can do now is to better control cost structure on both rentals and staff costs.

KENT WONG

corporate bits

After setting attendance records around the world and completing one of the biggest comedy tours ever, global comedy star Russell Peters will be staging his first ever visit to Macau.

The Canadian-born comedian is set to perform at the Studio City Event Center on February 26, as part of his "Almost Famous World Tour".

The show features all new material plus Peters' lightning-fast improvisation skills.

"I like to interact with the audience," said Peters, "I use the interaction to take me from bit to bit. Some guys go on-stage with a script and don't deviate from it. That's not my style."

Last year's leg of the "Almost Famous World Tour" saw Peters travel to Australia, New

RUSSELL PETERS TO PERFORM AT STUDIO CITY



Zealand, South Africa, the UK, and various destinations across Europe and Asia. Over

300,000 fans were estimated to have attended his shows globally.

MGM INTRODUCES STUDENTS TO RESPONSIBLE GAMING PROGRAM

A group of Youth and Social Services students from HKUSPACE Po Leung Kuk Stanley Ho Community College visited MGM Macau for a presentation on MGM's responsible gaming program, followed by a tour of the resort. The program aims to inculcate the values of responsible gaming and introduce techniques for the prevention of problem gaming, as well as enhance the students' understanding of social welfare services.

During the January 6 visit, Ms Eileen Ho, Director of Casino Talent Development and Responsible Gaming, introduced the MGM program. She explained different measures to raise public



awareness of responsible gaming and prevent problem gaming issues.

MGM is committed to supporting the MSAR govern-

ment in the promotion of responsible gaming, and provides ongoing workshops, training and talks for the Golden Lion Team members.

World could face months of Chinese market aftershocks

The latest trigger was currency jitters, but Thursday's plunge in Chinese stocks was just one in a series of aftershocks from last year's boom and bust that could shake markets for months to come.

Investor anxiety over economic weakness and a possible glut of unwanted shares flooding the market have complicated Beijing's efforts to withdraw emergency controls imposed after Chinese stock prices collapsed in June.

On Thursday, trading halted for the day after a stock index fell 7 percent a half-hour into the trading day. It was this week's second daylong suspension after a plunge in prices Monday tripped the same "circuit breakers" that were introduced Jan. 1.

Regulators suspended use of the "circuit breaker" effective Friday after economists warned it might be adding to volatility. They said trading was halted to often and the mechanism accelerated declines by encouraging investors to sell quickly before they were locked out. According to IHS, the mechanism would have been tripped 20 times if it had been in place in the final quarter of 2015.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index more than doubled between late 2014 and June, then dived 30 percent. Supported by a multibillion-dollar government interven-



tion, the market rose almost 25 percent in the final months of 2015, only to collapse in the new year. That left the main index down 15 percent from its December peak.

Wild price swings could continue through the first half of this year, according to financial analysts. Even after the latest declines, the Shanghai index is up 36 percent from October 2014.

The turmoil in China triggered a sell-off in Asian and Western stocks. Beijing keeps its markets sealed off from global capital flows, but due to the vast size of China's economy, foreign investors watch them closely and react to volatility.

"The market still is trying to find a bottom, and that takes time," said Chen Yong, a strategist at Lianxun Securities. "The key is to be able to resume normal daily trading, and during that time volatility is inevitable."

The upheaval disrupted the ruling Communist Party's plans to use the stock markets as a tool to make China's state-dominated economy more competitive and productive.

Economic growth fell to a six-year low of 6.9 percent in the July-September quarter and is forecast by the International Monetary Fund to decline further to 6.3 percent this year. Monday's stock price plunged was triggered by surveys that showed ma-

nufacturing in December was weaker than expected.

The latest bout of selling was fueled by concern Beijing is letting China's yuan weaken too fast against the dollar.

The yuan, also known as the renminbi, has drifted down by 6 percent against the U.S. currency since the central bank adopted a mechanism in August it said would make the state-set exchange rate more market-oriented.

The yuan's link to the dollar meant it soared as the U.S. currency climbed over the past year, making it overvalued by 10 to 15 percent against those of other developing countries. But the prospect Beijing wou-

ld close such a large gap fueled fears it might lead to an outflow of capital, weakening China's economy and reducing the supply of money to support share prices.

Thursday's exchange rate of 6.5646 yuan to the dollar was the lowest since March 2011.

"The government hopes to see the yuan depreciate to stimulate exports and the economy, but the speed of depreciation went too fast," said analyst Zhang Gang of Central China Securities.

The White House said the U.S. was closely monitoring China's currency. White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the U.S. approach to the uncertainty was to continue pressing China to speed up the pace of economic reforms he said would benefit China long-term and help the global economy.

Investors also were skittish about the impending end Thursday of a six-month ban on share sales by any stockholder who owns more than 5 percent of a company, according to Zhang.

Regulators tried to head off such concern by announcing earlier in the week major shareholders could sell only in private transactions to avoid flooding the market. After Thursday's market plunge, the securities agency tightened that restriction by saying they can unload only the equivalent of 1 percent of a company's shares over the next three months.

"Additional volatility in China's stock market remains almost certain in the first half of 2016," said economist Brian Jackson of IHS Global Insight in a report. "China's stock market reform will remain a messy affair." AP

Food price rise pushes inflation up 1.6 percent

CHINA'S consumer inflation edged up 1.6 percent in December year on year as food prices rose, official data showed Saturday.

The inflation rate reported by the National Bureau of Statistics was up from November's 1.5 percent and was driven by a 1.5 percent increase in food prices. The price of fresh vegetables jumped 13.7 percent and fresh fruits went up 2.3 percent.

Consumer inflation had been drifting down after hitting 2 percent in August. Relatively low inflation has given Chinese leaders room to cut interest rates six times since November 2014 to stimulate the slowing economy.

Saturday's data showed that consumer prices were up 1.4



A vendor prepares food for a customer at a stall in the Gongbei district of Zhuhai

percent in 2015 compared with the previous year, also pushed by higher food prices. Pork prices jumped year on year by 9.5 percent and fresh vegetables went up 7.4 percent.

The year's rise was well below the official target of 3 percent, and lower than 2 percent growth in 2014.

Producer prices, measured as goods that leave the factory, declined by 5.9 percent in December from a year earlier, extending a long period of declines due to excess production capacity in many industries. Producer prices dropped 5.2 percent in 2015 from the previous year. AP

Activists held in labor crackdown arrested, Reuters reports

Janet Ong

CHINA has formally arrested a Guangzhou labor organizer and three other people authorities had been holding amid a crackdown on worker activism, Reuters reported, citing two lawyers.

Zeng Feiyang, director of the Panyu Migrant Workers Center, was charged with "disturbing social order," Reuters said, citing his lawyer, Cheng Zhunqiang. Fellow labor activists Meng Han and Zhu Xiaomei were also arrested on the same charge, Cheng and Yan Xin, who is Meng's lawyer, told Reuters. The lawyers said prosecutors in Guangzhou informed them of the arrests Friday, without explaining why the trio was charged.

Another activist, He Xiaobo, was arrested on charges of em-

bezzlement, according to the New York-based China Labor Watch. The lawyers for Zhu and He couldn't be reached for comment, Reuters said. Prosecutors in Guangzhou's Panyu district didn't answer Reuters' calls seeking comment, and the Guangdong government didn't respond to a faxed query, the report said.

The four were among several southern China labor activists detained late last year, as a broad crackdown on dissent under President Xi Jinping expands. The campaign has led to the jailing of journalists, dissidents and lawyers who defend them, with dozens of members of the so-called rights-defense movement detained last summer over allegations of manipulating public opinion and influencing rulings. Bloomberg

Janet Ong

Missing HK bookseller says in video China trip voluntary

A Hong Kong bookseller whose disappearance has inflamed concerns about growing Chinese interference in the city told his wife in a video message that he traveled to the mainland on his own accord, the Sing Tao newspaper reported.

Lee Bo - one of five missing people who are affiliated with a company that published and sold books critical of the ruling Communist Party - said in a 46-second recording received Saturday that his decision to cross the border was a personal one, the paper reported, citing an interview with his wife. Lee, who also sent a letter, asked people to respect his privacy and not join a planned protest over the case, the newspaper said yesterday.

Lee's disappearance, which was reported by his wife Jan. 1, has reignited debate about the Communist Party's influence in Hong Kong, a former British colony that enjoys independent courts and guaranteed freedom of expression under the terms of its return to China. Fears of encroachment under Chinese President Xi Jinping sparked the student-led democracy protests that paralyzed parts of the city for months in 2014.

The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China stage a rally yesterday demanding answers from the mainland on the disappearance of Lee and four of his colleagues.

Lee's case has drawn particular interest because he was last seen in Hong Kong, where mainland police don't have jurisdiction un-



A protester holds a placard during a protest against the disappearances of booksellers yesterday in Hong Kong

der the so-called One Country, Two Systems framework.

While mainland authorities haven't commented, the disappearances prompted Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying to express concern and reaffirm that only local authorities could enforce the law. Hong Kong police are investigating and have not disclosed if mainland authorities have told them about the case.

Lee's bookstore, Causeway

Bay Books, was popular among tourists from China as a source of often salacious books, banned on the mainland, about the country's elite. He was last seen leaving a warehouse on Hong Kong Island used by the company.

Lee has made repeated contact with associates in Hong Kong since his disappearance. Taiwan's Central News Agency last Monday published a handwritten letter said to be faxed from Lee to a

bookstore colleague. In it, he said he took his "own way" to China to assist in an investigation that might take some time. Lee's wife approached local police on Mon-

Lee's disappearance has reignited debate about the Communist Party's influence in Hong Kong

day and withdrew a request for help, but Hong Kong police have continued their investigation.

The assertion that Lee would travel to the mainland on his own conflicts with his remarks to the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post before his disappearance. In an interview about his missing colleagues, he said he wasn't worried about his own safety because he had avoided traveling to the mainland for many years, the newspaper reported on Thursday. **Bloomberg**

THOUSANDS MARCH IN HK

ACCORDING TO several media reports, thousands in Hong Kong have rallied against the disappearance of the five Hong Kong booksellers. The BBC described how protesters chanted "say no to political kidnapping" while marching to the offices of China's Liaison Office in Hong Kong.

US tells China to end 'business as usual' with N.Korea

Matthew Pennington, Washington

XINHUA

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry urged China to end "business as usual" with North Korea after the isolated nation conducted its fourth nuclear test.

Kerry told reporters last week that he spoke by phone with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. He said that China's approach to North Korea had failed.

Kerry rejected a reporter's suggestion that the Obama administration had neglected the North Korean threat as it focused on curbing Iran's nuclear program. He said there had been constant consultations on North Korea, including on his first trip to China after he became the top U.S. diplomat in 2013.



This photo provided by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on Jan. 6 shows people gathering in front of a big screen at Pyongyang Railway Station to follow news reports on the bomb test

"Now China had a particular approach that it wanted to make and we agreed and respected to give them the space to be able to implement that, but today in my conversation with the Chinese I made it very clear, that has not worked and we cannot continue business as usual," Kerry said, without elaborating.

The U.N. Security Coun-

cil has pledged new sanctions against North Korea after its purported hydrogen bomb test on Wednesday. China has a pivotal position as it is a permanent council member and the North's main trading partner. Fraternal relations between Beijing and Pyongyang have become strained in recent years, but China has been reluctant to impose economic

restrictions that could destabilize its wayward neighbor and cause turmoil on its border.

Kerry said he and Wang agreed to work very closely together on steps "to address our increasing concerns about that nuclear test."

Wang stressed to Kerry that China is "firmly committed to the denuclearization of the peninsula and firmly committed to maintaining peace and stability on the peninsula," according to a statement issued by the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

"China is willing to carry out communication with all relevant parties, including the United States," Wang said, according to the statement.

Meanwhile, pressure was mounting in Washington for congressional action to punish North

Korea. The House of Representatives will vote as early as next week on legislation imposing new U.S. sanctions.

Leader of the Democratic minority, Nancy Pelosi of California, promised there will be strong bipartisan support for the legislation tabled by the top Republican and Democrat lawmakers on the House Foreign Affairs Committee that would target access to hard currency and other goods and step up inspections of North Korean cargo.

Similar legislation passed the House two years ago but did not advance in the Senate.

"The easy solution here is to go after the one place where they (North Korea) get the hard currency," said Rep. Ed Royce, the Republican committee chair. He said that

the 2005 blacklisting of Banco Delta Asia, a bank based in Macau that held North Korean government funds, had restricted then-leader Kim Jong Il's ability to pay his generals.

"It worked for a while in the past until we lifted those sanctions under the thought that North Korea might come back to the table. Of course they cheated on that agreement, so we made the wrong move," he told CNN, calling for a similar approach on sanctions again to restrict the North's ability to fund its weapons programs.

Sanctioning banks in China that handle North Korean transactions could upset Beijing. U.S. officials have also said there are few targets available because of the North's isolation from the international financial system. **AP**

Powerful US bomber flies over S. Korea as standoff deepens

Foster Klug, Ahn Young-Joon

A powerful U.S. B-52 bomber flew low over South Korea yesterday, a clear show of force from the United States as a Cold War-style standoff deepened between its ally Seoul and North Korea following Pyongyang's fourth nuclear test.

North Korea will read the fly-over of a bomber capable of delivering nuclear weapons — seen by an Associated Press photographer at Osan Air Base near Seoul — as a threat. Any hint of America's nuclear power enrages Pyongyang, which links its own pursuit of atomic weapons to what it sees as past nuclear-backed moves by the United States to topple its authoritarian government.

The B-52 was joined by South Korean F-15 and U.S. F-16 fighters and returned to its base in Guam after the flight, the U.S. military said.

"This was a demonstration of the ironclad U.S. commitment to our allies in South Korea, in Japan, and to the defense of the American homeland," said Adm. Harry B. Harris Jr., commander U.S. Pacific Command, in a statement. "North Korea's nuclear test is a blatant violation of its international obligations."

The B-52 flight follows a victory tour by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to celebrate the country's widely disputed claim of a hydrogen bomb

test. Kim is seeking to rally pride in an explosion viewed with outrage by much of the world and to boost his domestic political goals.

There was no immediate reaction from North Korea's state media to the B-52 fly-over, which also happened after North Korea's third nuclear test in 2013.

Kim's first public commen-

■ There was no immediate reaction from North Korea's state media to the B-52 fly-over

ts about last week's test came in a visit to the country's military headquarters, where he called the explosion "a self-defensive step" meant to protect the region "from the danger of nuclear war caused by the U.S.-led imperialists," according to a dispatch yesterday from state-run Korean Central News Agency.

"It is the legitimate right of a sovereign state and a fair action that nobody can criticize," Kim was reported as saying during his tour of the People's Armed Forces Ministry.

The tone of Kim's comments, which sought to glorify him

and justify the test, is typical of state media propaganda.

But they also provide insight into North Korea's long-running argument that it is the presence of tens of thousands of U.S. troops in South Korea and Japan, and a "hostile" U.S. policy that seeks to topple the government in Pyongyang, that make North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons absolutely necessary.

During his tour, Kim posed for photos with leading military officials in front of statues of the two members of his family who led the country previously — Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung. He also sought to link the purported success of the nuclear test to a ruling Workers' Party convention in May, the party's first since 1980. He's expected to use the congress to announce major state policies and shake up the country's political elite to further consolidate his power.

World powers are looking for ways to punish the North over a nuclear test that, even if not of a hydrogen bomb, still likely pushes Pyongyang closer to its goal of a nuclear-armed missile that can reach the U.S. mainland. Many outside governments and experts question whether the blast was in fact a powerful hydrogen test.

In the wake of the test on Wednesday, the two Koreas have settled into the kind of Cold War-era standoff that has defined their relationship over the past seven decades. Since

Friday, South Korea has been blasting anti-Pyongyang propaganda from huge speakers along the border, and the North is reportedly using speakers of its own in an attempt to keep its soldiers from hearing the South Korean messages.

A top North Korean ruling party official's recent warning that the South's broadcasts have pushed the Korean Peninsula "toward the brink of war" is typical of Pyongyang's over-the-top rhetoric. But it is also indicative of the real fury that the broadcasts, which criticize the country's revered dictatorship, cause in the North.

North Korea considers the South Korean broadcasts tantamount to an act of war. When Seoul Korea briefly resumed propaganda broadcasts in August after an 11-year break, Seoul says the two Koreas exchanged artillery fire.

South Korean troops, near about 10 sites where loudspeakers started blaring propaganda Friday, were on the highest alert, but have not detected any unusual movement from North Korea along the border, said an official from Seoul's Defense Ministry, who refused to be named, citing office rules.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency said Seoul had deployed missiles, artillery and other weapons systems near the border to swiftly deal with any possible North Korean provocation. The ministry would not confirm the report,

nor another by Yonhap that said North Korea had started its own broadcasts likely meant to keep its soldiers from hearing the South Korean messages.

Officials say broadcasts from the South's loudspeakers can travel about 10 kilometers during the day and 24 kilometers at night. That reaches many of the huge force of North Korean soldiers stationed near the border, as well as residents in border towns such as Kaesong, where the Koreans jointly operate an industrial park that has been a valuable cash source for the impoverished North.

While the South's broadcasts also include news and pop music, much of the programming challenges North Korea's government more directly.

"We hope that our fellow Koreans in the North will be able to live in a society that doesn't invade individual lives as soon as possible," a female presenter said in parts of the broadcast that officials revealed to South Korean media. "Countries run by dictatorships even try to control human instincts."

Marathon talks by the Koreans in August eased anger and stopped the broadcasts, which Seoul started after blaming North Korean land mines for maiming two soldiers. It might be more difficult to do so now. Seoul can't stand down easily, some analysts say, and it's highly unlikely that the North will express regret for its nuclear test, which is a source of intense national pride.

It may take weeks or longer to confirm or refute the North's claim that it successfully tested a hydrogen bomb, which would mark a major and unanticipated advance for its still-limited nuclear arsenal. AP



A banner shows a picture of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as South Korean war veterans stage a rally against North Korea in Seoul, South Korea

Huge Catholic parade held under heavy security in Manila

Jim Gomez and Bullit Marquez, Manila

MORE than a million Filipino Roman Catholic devotees jammed Manila's streets Saturday for an annual procession of a centuries-old statue of Christ that was held under extra heavy security following the Paris attacks.

About 5,000 police and soldiers were deployed to secure the daylong procession of the Black Nazarene in one of Asia's largest religious festivals, although no specific threat was being monitored.

The huge crowd reached more than a million by noon, Manila police Chief Superintendent Rolando Nana said.

The raucous gathering is a security nightmare for the Philippines, a poor Southeast Asian country battling widespread crime nationwide and Muslim extremists in the south. Police sharpshooters, bomb-sniffing dogs and SWAT teams stood by and surveillance drones were flown over the slow-moving procession.

Security forces randomly checked bags for weapons, firecrackers



Tens of thousands of Catholic devotees jostle to get closer to the image of the Black Nazarene as they take part in a raucous procession to celebrate its feast day in Manila

and pointed objects, including umbrellas, which were banned. Coast guard and navy personnel patrolled a major river where the procession crossed over.

Although there was no specific terrorist threat, security concerns were sparked by recent brazen attacks by Islamic State group extremists in countries such as France, police said.

A tired devotee fainted during the procession and died from an unspecified ailment. Nearly 1,000 other people received treatment for minor illnesses and injuries, including many who got bruised or sustained fractures while jostling through the thick crowds to get close to or have their whi-

te towels wiped on the wooden statue of Christ, which was on a carriage pulled by a rope by men in maroon shirts, according to Gwendolyn Pang of the Philippine Red Cross.

The wooden statue of Christ, crowned with thorns and bearing a cross, is believed to have been brought from Mexico to Manila on a galleon in 1606 by Spanish missionaries. The ship that carried it caught fire, but the charred statue survived. Some believe the statue's survival from fires and earthquakes through the centuries and intense bombings during World War II is a testament to its mystical powers.

The spectacle reflects the Philippines' unique brand of Catholi-

cism, which includes folk superstitions, in Asia's largest Catholic nation. Dozens of Filipinos have themselves nailed to crosses on Good Friday in another tradition to emulate Christ's suffering that draws huge crowds each year.

Mostly barefoot, the devotees from all walks of life brave the crowds and heat to pray for good health, jobs, fortune and solution to all sorts of predicaments.

Dante Avila, a 22-year-old factory worker, said he was wrongly implicated in the shooting to death of a child in a gang brawl in November in his neighborhood in suburban Caloocan city. Fearing for his life, he said he fled from home and hid in a province and showed up at the procession to pray to the Nazarene to help him prove his innocence.

"I swear to God I'm innocent," Avila said from a stretcher in a first-aid station, where medics treated the injured.

After struggling to touch Christ's statue, he got crushed by the crowd and fainted.

Another devotee, Arvin Tamayo, and his family rented a truck to parade life-size statues of Christ and the Virgin Mary, a ritual they have been doing every year since his father died of cancer in 2009.

"We're praying for good health," he said. "It's so financially and emotionally draining to see somebody in the family die slowly in pain." AP

Pakistan to present list of Taliban open to peace talks

Pakistan will present a list of Taliban willing to negotiate with Kabul at a four-nation meeting this week aimed at reviving the Afghan peace process, an Afghan official said yesterday. Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States are scheduled to meet in Islamabad on Monday to discuss a road map for peace talks. The meeting will not include the Taliban.

Indonesia's foreign-exchange reserves jump

Bank Indonesia's foreign-exchange reserves jumped the most since April 2012 last month, giving the central bank more scope to manage the exchange rate in the face of external headwinds. The stockpile grew by USD5.7 billion to \$105.9 billion, the monetary authority said in a statement. That came after Bank Indonesia posted the figures on its website earlier on Friday before removing them. The gain is the largest since April 2012 and the first increase following a nine-month run in which the reserves fell 13 percent.

AD

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Spain's Princess Cristina faces historic tax fraud trial

Alan Clendenning, Madrid

VISITS to the palm-dotted Mediterranean island of Mallorca for Spain's Princess Cristina used to mean luxurious stays at the seaside Marivent Palace — but the sister of King Felipe VI won't get anywhere near the royal family's official summer residence in a trip this week.

Instead, the 50-year-old princess and her husband are set to face anti-monarchy protesters and hordes of media today as they enter a makeshift courtroom and she makes history in front of millions of Spanish TV viewers as the first royal family member to face criminal charges since the monarchy was restored in 1975.

Following the tax fraud trial expected to last six months, the princess could face up to eight years in prison if a three-member panel of judges agrees the couple abused a real estate consulting firm described in court papers as a "front company" to bankroll a lavish lifestyle — including parties at their modernist Barcelona mansion, salsa dancing classes and vacations at expensive hotels.

Cristina and her husband, Olympic handball medalist turned businessman Inaki Urdangarin, will sit in the dock alongside 16 others in the case centering on allegations that Urdangarin used his Duke of Palma title to embezzle about 6 million euros (USD6.5 million) in public contracts through the Noos Institute. It was the nonprofit foundation he set up with a business partner to broker seminars and sports events as a tourism lure.

The alleged scheming involved some events that never happened or were billed



Spain's Princess Cristina is photographed as she walks toward her office in Barcelona, Spain

at unusually high rates at the height of Spain's economic boom before the onset of the financial crisis in 2008. Some money went to the Aizoon real estate company that paid for personal expenses for the couple — a perk they should have declared as an income to tax authorities but allegedly didn't.

The suspects stand accused of being "greedy in a time when it wasn't seen as being that bad," said Ana Romero, the royalty reporter for the El Espanol digital publication. "There was a lot of money around, and it's a country where connections are very important."

There are so many defendants and lawyers plus reporters covering the case that judicial officials were forced to move the trial from a courthouse to a sprawling building com-

plex on the outskirts of Palma de Mallorca normally used to hold mass training courses for public servants. The case is being heard in the regional capital of Spain's Balearic Islands because many of Urdangarin's deals were for the islands.

The princess and her husband are not expected to utter a word during the first few days of the trial as judges read out the 89 alleged crimes committed by the suspects, and lawyers including Cristina's make arguments aimed at having their clients removed from the case.

She denied knowledge of her husband's activities during a 2014 closed door court appearance and a prosecutor recommended she should be fined but a judge decided Cristina could be charged with tax fraud in 2007 and 2008

because Spanish law allows groups to file charges when state prosecutors don't. Her case was driven forward by the anti-corruption group Manos Limpias (Clean Hands).

"They're saying she knew about it," said Ignacio Sanchez, a Madrid-based lawyer for Hogan Lovells International LLP who specializes in white collar crime and fraud. "They are saying she cooperated with it, knew that her husband was doing it and allowed him to do it."

Details about the lavish life the couple enjoyed dribbled out in court paperwork released during the pre-trial investigation from 2011 to 2013, outraging Spaniards as the country teetered on the edge of financial chaos at the height of Europe's debt crisis. The case made for a steady stream of bad headlines for Cristina's

father, former King Juan Carlos — already smarting from a big backlash after he broke his hip during a 2012 elephant hunting trip seen as an extreme example of royal excess.

Juan Carlos ended up abdicating in 2014, not mentioning the scandals bearing down on his reign but saying Spain needed fresh royal blood. Cristina's brother Felipe has never mentioned his sister's troubles directly but pledged to restore public trust in Spain's monarchy.

Shortly after taking over, he invoked a palace reshuffle that stripped Cristina and her older sister Princess Elena of their roles as official members of the royal family though they have not given up their slots of succession in line for the throne.

And six months after Felipe became king, a prosecutor recommended charges for Urdangarin carrying a possible sentence of 19½ years in prison while saying Cristina should not be indicted but ordered to pay 580,000 euros (\$711,000) to cover the amount she could have profited because of her husband's alleged illegal dealings.

But the judge disagreed, saying in court documents that many company expenses appeared personal in nature, honing in on household examples with bills for work or services at the mansion charged to Aizoon.

"As royal misdemeanors go, things don't get much worse than this," said Joe Little, managing editor of Britain's Majesty magazine.

Just as Felipe and his wife Queen Letizia are making their mark as Spain's new royal couple and "repairing damage to the monarchy, this thing is coming back and biting them. It's not guilt by association, but it's an unhelpful situation just when they have turned the corner," Little added.

Cristina's royal role of appearing in public was reduced as her legal troubles mounted during her father's reign, and it's been completely eliminated by her brother Felipe. **AP**

Sean Penn under investigation for 'El Chapo' interview, ABC says

Janet Ong

ACTOR Sean Penn is under investigation for a Rolling Stone magazine interview with drug kingpin Joaquin Guzman, ABC News reported, citing unidentified people in the Mexican government.

Kate del Castillo, the Mexican actress whom Penn says helped arrange the meeting, is also being investigated, the report says. The U.S. Department of Justice declined to comment on the Rolling Stone story and whether the interview led to Guzman's re-

captured by Mexican authorities on Friday, ABC says.

Penn spoke with Guzman, known as "El Chapo" for seven hours in October while he was on the run from the authorities, and had follow-up interviews by phone and video, the Rolling Stone

said.

Guzman told Penn in a video recording he had tried drugs but isn't a drug addict and hadn't taken any drugs in the last 20 years, the report says. He started to grow and sell marijuana and poppies at the age of 15 to survive, he said, ac-



Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, right, is escorted by a soldier

cording to the report Guzman was first caught in Guatemala in 1993 and extradited to Me-

xico. He escaped from a high-security prison in Jalisco state in 2001. **Bloomberg**

Egypt's first parliament in 3 years convenes

EGYPT'S first legislature in more than three years, a 596-seat chamber packed with supporters of President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, held its inaugural session yesterday, signaling the completion of a political road map announced after the 2013 military overthrow of an elected Islamist president.

The assembly, elected in November and December, is the first elected chamber since el-Sissi, as military chief, led the ouster of President Mohammed Morsi following mass protests against the Islamist leader and his Muslim Brotherhood. The new parliament replaces one dominated by Islamists that was dissolved by a court ruling in June 2012.

The new chamber's first task will be to ratify some 300 presidential decrees issued by el-Sissi since taking office in June 2014 and interim president Adly Mansour before him. Under the constitution, these decrees must be ratified within 15 days starting from the date of the inaugural session. Failure to do so will re-

sult in the automatic repeal of the laws.

The decrees include a law severely restricting street demonstrations and a terror law that curbs press freedoms and gives police sweeping powers.

Yesterday's session was mostly a procedural one, with lawmakers taking their oaths. The chamber is also expected to elect a speaker and two deputies. Some of the lawmakers, in a show of patriotism, held red, black and white Egyptian flags as they took the oath.

After Morsi's overthrow, El-Sissi announced three steps to take Egypt back to democratic rule: The adoption of a new constitution and presidential and parliamentary elections.

But the process has unfolded against the backdrop of a harsh crackdown on Islamists and other dissidents that has seen thousands jailed. The Muslim Brotherhood, which swept every election following the 2011 uprising that toppled President Hosni Mubarak, is officially branded a terrorist group. **AP**

French president, rocker honor 2015 attack victims

FRENCH President Francois Hollande and other dignitaries held a special ceremony yesterday to honor all those killed in Islamic extremist violence around Paris in 2015 - a year when the European way of life was targeted time and again with deadly consequences.

At least one attacker is at large. The country is under a state of emergency after attacks Nov. 13, and a police station was attacked Thursday by a man whose background is still unclear.

Hollande and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo unveiled a plaque yesterday in memory of victims targeted at newspaper Charlie Hebdo, a kosher market, a rock concert, cafes, a stadium and elsewhere.

The ceremony took place at Place de la Republique, a pla-



President Francois Hollande, center, and Prime Minister Manuel Valls, right, lay a wreath of flowers during a ceremony to honor the victims of the 2015 attacks

za that has become a symbol of Parisians' solidarity since the attacks, which began Jan. 7, 2015.

French rocker and national icon Johnny Hallyday joined the army choir in a special, somber musical performance.

The violence left some 150 victims dead, and several attackers were also killed.

Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve called for national unity and insisted the government is doing all it can to protect France. Many questions remain about the Nov. 13 attacks, including how many people were involved and may still be at large.

Cazeneuve said on i-Tele television that "We don't know where Salah Abdeslam is," referring to a fugitive gunman. Abdeslam crossed into Belgium Nov. 14 and Belgian authorities believe he hid out in a Brussels area apartment used to make bombs for the Paris attacks before moving on. **AP**

AD

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what's ON

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TIME: 10am-7pm (Mondays to Saturdays);
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UNTIL: January 31, 2016

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VENUE: Creative Macau, G/F Macau Cultural Centre
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Offbeat

RECORD-BREAKING 'STAR WARS'
MOVIE OPENS IN CHINA

A couple looks at "Star Wars" merchandise for sale at a shopping mall in Beijing

The record-breaking "Star Wars" opened Saturday in China, where it is far from certain to draw in enough moviegoers to knock off "Avatar" as the world's all-time biggest grossing movie.

"Star Wars: The Force Awakens" is the highest ever grossing film in the North American market, where it was released three weeks ago.

But internationally, it still has a long way to go to beat "Avatar," James Cameron's science-fiction movie with blue aliens. The international box office of the latest "Star Wars" movie stands at USD1.6 billion, compared to the \$2.8 billion "Avatar" made in 2009.

Richard Huang, an analyst at Nomura Securities, expects the movie to roughly match the \$229 million in Chinese box-office sales that "Jurassic World" generated last year.

Not many Chinese are familiar with "Star Wars." The franchise's three prequel films released from 1999 to 2005 were shown in China, but at a time when there were much fewer screens in the country.

Promotional events organized by Disney in the months leading up to the release included the placing of 500 Stormtrooper figures on the steps of the Great Wall and the illumination of the movie's Chinese title on the guard towers for a light show in October.

It enlisted the marketing power of actor and singer Lu Han, who appeared in promotional videos and released a music video on Thursday called "The Inner Force" with images from the film.

In an overt bid to appeal to Chinese audiences in next "Star Wars" film, "Rogue One," bosses have cast Hong Kong martial arts actor Donnie Yen and Chinese actor and director Jiang Wen in it.

China is expected to surpass North America as the world's largest movie market as soon as next year, and Hollywood is casting Chinese actors and incorporating Chinese elements to appeal to the massive audience. **AP**

TV canal macau

13:00	TDM News (Repeated)
13:30	News (RTPi) Delayed Broadcast
14:30	RTPi Live
16:10	Criminal Minds S. 7
17:40	Trail of Lies (Repeat)
18:30	Contraponto (Repeated)
19:30	Soap Oepra
20:30	Main News, Financial & Weather Report
21:00	TDM Sports
22:10	Trail of Lies
23:00	TDM News
23:30	Miscellaneous
00:05	Main News, Financial & Weather Report (Repeated)
00:40	RTPi Live

cinema



CINETEATRO

7 JAN - 13 JAN



THE 33

ROOM 1

2.30, 4.45, 7.15, 9.30 pm

Director: Patricia Riggen

Starring: Antonio Banderas, Rodrigo Santoro,

Juliette Binoche

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 127min

SECRET IN THEIR EYES

ROOM 2

2.30, 4.30, 9.30 pm

Director: Billy Ray

Starring: Chiwetel Ejiofor, Nicole Kidman, Julia

Roberts

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 111min

IP MAN 3

ROOM 2

7.30 pm

Director: Wilson Yip Wai Shun

Starring: Donnie Yen, Lynn Xiong, Max Zhang

Language: Cantonese (English/Cantonese)

Duration: 110min

SHERLOCK: THE ABOMINABLE BRIDE

ROOM 3

2.30, 4.45, 9.30 pm

Director: Douglas Mackinnon

Starring: Benedict Cumberbatch, Martin Freeman,

Una Stubbs

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 89min

THE BOY AND THE BEAST

ROOM 3

7.15 pm

Director: Mamoru Hosoda

Language: Japanese (English/Cantonese)

Duration: 119min

MACAU TOWER

COMING SOON 14 JAN - 10 FEB

THE 5H WAVE

2.30, 4.45, 7.15, 9.30 pm

Director: J Blakeson

Starring: Chloë Grace Moretz, Nick Robinson, Maika

Monroe

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 112min

this day in history

1962 THOUSANDS KILLED
IN PERU LANDSLIDE

At least 2,000 people are believed to have been killed after a massive avalanche of rocks and ice buried an entire mountain village and several settlements in north-west Peru.

Last night millions of tons of snow, rocks, mud and debris tumbled down the extinct volcano of Huascarán, Peru's highest mountain in the Andes range.

The village of Ranrahirca and its inhabitants was totally destroyed along with eight other towns. The mayor Alfonso Caballero said only about 50 of its 500 inhabitants survived. "In eight minutes Ranrahirca was wiped off the map," he said. Relief efforts are being hampered by the very storms that started the devastating landslide, but there are believed to be few survivors.

Colonel Umberto Ampuera, head of emergency services, said the disaster was "like a scene from Dante's Inferno". He appealed to the Peruvian Government for aid to restore stricken communications and reach anyone who escaped the landslide.

Two Peruvian Air Force planes have carried relief supplies to the area and troops have been sent there to open up roads to Ranrahirca and other areas cut off by the avalanche.

A massive wall of ice and rocks, about 12 meters high and 1km high, roared down the River Santa. The river rose by eight meters carrying with it everything in its path down the Rio Santa valley. Bodies have been found at the port of Chimbote, 60 miles from the scene of the tragedy, where the river meets the sea.

The President of the Peruvian Red Cross, Roberto Thorndike, estimated between 2,000 and 2,500 people were killed. But local authorities believe the death toll is higher - between 3,000 and 4,000 people.

The region is prone to major avalanches at this time of year when glaciers melt and break off sliding through the "quebradas" (deep canyons) in the valley below.

U Thant, the acting United Nations Secretary General, has offered Peru aid to alleviate the situation.

In a telegram to President Manuel Prado he said representatives of the UN technical assistance board and the UN children's fund would be ready to give any help required of them.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

It is estimated that about 4,000 people died in the avalanche but the final figure will never be known.

The 1962 avalanche that caused so much devastation in the Rio Santa Valley was eclipsed in 1970 by another massive landslide.

On 31 May a huge earthquake 25km from the town of Chimbote, on the north coast of Peru, triggered off Latin America's biggest recorded landslide.

A wall of ice was dislodged from Mount Huascarán and in three minutes slid down a glacier and travelled another 10km to bury the town of Yungay.

The avalanche destroyed Ranrahirca all over again - about 20,000 people died and there were just 400 survivors.

YOUR STARS

Aries Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Getting out of the hole is daunting but it is possible if you stay calm.

Taurus April 20-May 20 Is it really a good time for a personal day? Don't talk yourself into the wrong answer.

Gemini May 21-Jun. 21 Don't bother having a hidden agenda. Unless you're willing to live under cover, your plans are not worth the price tag.

Cancer Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Some storms are better weathered by hiding in a hole. This is one of them.

Leo Jul. 23-Aug. 22 You can lose money and earn it back. You can let go of your possessions and replace them.

Virgo Aug. 23-Sept. 22 Your head is full of healthy ambition, but your heart is urging you to have fun.

Libra Sep.23-Oct. 22 Don't get depressed. Setting limits on spending is not a punishment.

Scorpio Oct. 23 - Nov. 21 Things may look dark and gloomy but actually the sun is starting to peak from behind the clouds.

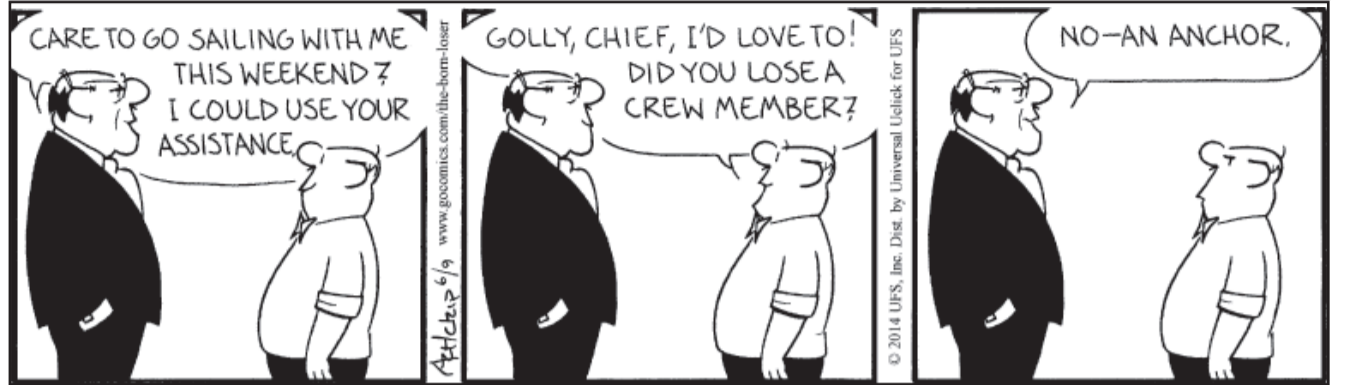
Sagittarius Nov. 22-Dec. 21 You're completely focused on money. You and the rest of the world, that is.

Capricorn Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Impressing others should be the least of your ambitions. Focus on more down to earth goals.

Aquarius Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Wrestling your finances into shape is proving harder than you thought it would be.

Pisces Feb.19-Mar. 20 You know how good it feels to help others financially. Let someone else have the pleasure for a change.

THE BORN LOSER by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

Easy

9x9 grid for Easy Sudoku puzzle with some numbers filled in.

Easy+

9x9 grid for Easy+ Sudoku puzzle with some numbers filled in.

Medium

9x9 grid for Medium Sudoku puzzle with some numbers filled in.

Hard

9x9 grid for Hard Sudoku puzzle with some numbers filled in.

WEATHER

Table with columns: MIN, MAX, CONDITION

CHINA

Table listing weather conditions for various Chinese cities like Beijing, Harbin, Tianjin, etc.

WORLD

Table listing weather conditions for various world cities like Moscow, Frankfurt, Paris, etc.

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Very, to Verdi; 6- 1968 U.S. Open champ; 10- "Return of the Jedi" critter; 14- Get to know; 15- Hwys.; 16- E or G, e.g.; 17- Between Venus and Mars; 18- Young male horse; 19- Stumble; 20- Homebody; 22- Technical sch.; 23- Travel on water; 24- Where it's at; 26- Alternative to p's; 30- Loss of memory; 34- Make ___ of (write down); 35- Black-and-white treat; 36- United; 37- Asset; 38- Gave a hoot; 40- Chemical used on trees; 41- Hosp. readout; 42- "Consnarit!"; 43- Rice-___; 44- Aseptic; 46- Supervise; 48- Skirt stitching; 49- Exxon, formerly; 50- ___ time (never); 53- Not local; 59- Press; 60- Harper's Bazaar illustrator; 61- Ancient Greek colony; 62- Notable exploit, legal document; 63- Surgery reminder; 64- ___ we all?; 65- "The Clan of the Cave Bear" heroine; 66- Flat sound; 67- Bird homes;

DOWN: 1- Pub orders; 2- Show to a table; 3- Franklin D.'s mother; 4- Pretentious; 5- Rashly; 6- Jughead's pal; 7- Pub perch; 8- Steering wheel; 9- Highly regarded; 10- Whole; 11- Threadbare; 12- Elevator man; 13- Retained; 21- Mai ___; 25- Numero ___; 26- Scruffs; 27- Small bay; 28- Overcharge; 29- Elev.; 30- 100 square meters; 31- Flies alone; 32- Senseless; 33- Hawk's home; 35- Assn.; 38- Composure; 39- "Wheel of Fortune" buy; 40- Sheet music abbr.; 42- Conk out; 43- Eternal; 45- Girl in a Beach Boys song; 46- Willows; 47- Brandy letters; 49- Kett and James; 50- Verdi heroine; 51- Deuce beater; 52- Christmas carol; 54- Circle segments; 55- Had on; 56- Supermodel Sastre; 57- Force; 58- Chow



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TENNIS

Injury, illness hit top six women players before Australian Open

Dennis Passa, Brisbane

IT'S been an injury and illness-filled start to 2016 for the top six women in tennis, and just a week from the start of the Australian Open.

Defending Sydney International champion Petra Kvitova, a two-time Wimbledon winner, pulled out of the Sydney tournament yesterday, the second week in a row she's had to quit due to a stomach virus. She was joined a few hours later by Agnieszka Radwanska, the No. 2-seeded player in Sydney, who has a left leg injury.

Last week, the world's four top-ranked women retired or withdrew from tournaments due to injuries on the left side of their bodies: No. 1 Serena Williams (Hopman Cup/knee), second-ranked Halep (Brisbane/ankle), No. 3 Garbine Murguruza (Brisbane/foot) and fourth-ranked Maria Sharapova (Brisbane/forearm).

Now No. 5 Radwanska and



Agnieszka Radwanska pulled out of the Sydney tournament yesterday due to an injury in her left leg

RAONIC WINS BRISBANE TITLE

MILOS RAONIC held his nerve and broke Roger Federer's serve once in each set to win the Brisbane International final 6-4, 6-4 on last night, reversing the outcome of the 2015 decider between the pair. Raonic attacked Federer with his booming serve and forehand, as expected, but also went to the net 13 times in the first set and won 10 of those points to set him on course for only his second win in 11 matches against the 17-time major winner.

No. 6 Kvitova are on the ever-growing injury list.

Kvitova retired during the first round of the Shenzhen Open in China last week. She was scheduled to play her first match in Sydney against Germany's Sabine Lisicki today.

"I'm really disappointed to have to withdraw... but unfortunately I am still not feeling well," the sixth-ranked Kvitova said in a statement.

Former No. 1 and now 16th-ranked Ana Ivanovic is healthy, but her new season is nonetheless off to a poor start. After losing in the first round last week in Auckland, she was granted a Sydney wild card.

Ivanovic, who won the French

Open in 2008, months after losing the Australian Open final to Sharapova, was beaten 6-4, 6-2 by fifth-seeded Karolina Pliskova in a first-round match yesterday.

"I was thinking, it's not really (an) easy draw for first round," Pliskova said. "I was really expecting a tough match. I'm just happy it went a little bit more my way."

In other first-round matches, another Serbian former No. 1, Jelena Jankovic, beat American CoCo Vandeweghe 6-3, 6-4; former French and U.S. Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova defeated Australian Tammi Patterson 6-2, 6-0; and Caroline Garcia, who represented

France at the Hopman Cup last week, beat countrywoman Kristina Mladenovic 7-6 (4), 6-4.

Bernard Tomic is the top-seeded man at Sydney, while Halep is the top-seeded woman.

Halep, who has a first-round bye, said yesterday that she'll likely carry the injury into the Australian Open, which begins Jan. 18.

"It's difficult to know that you will be injured when you come to Australia. To me it happened this year," she said. "I was not happy but we have to accept it."

At the Hobart International, another of the Australian Open warm-up tournaments, second-seeded Camila Giorgi of Italy beat Zarina Diyas of

Kazakhstan 6-4, 1-6, 6-1 and seventh-seeded Alize Cornet of France defeated Denisa Allertova of Czech Republic 6-4, 7-5 on Sunday.

Sloane Stephens, who won the ASB Classic in Auckland on Saturday, was a late withdrawal from Hobart due to a virus.

Former No. 5 Eugenie Bouchard, who is entered at Hobart, says she has "zero expectations" at the Australian Open as she makes her comeback from a concussion she sustained at the U.S. Open when she slipped and fell in the dressing room.

Last week, the world's four top ranked women retired or withdrew from tournaments due to injuries on the left side of their bodies

The Canadian made the quarterfinals at last week's Shenzhen Open after a four-month layoff.

"A month or two ago I wasn't even sure I could play the Australian Open, so I'm just so happy to be in Australia, looking forward to playing these two tournaments (with) zero expectations," the 21-year-old Bouchard said yesterday.

She was pleased with her play in China despite losing in the last eight to Hungarian Timea Babos.

"To step on the court and play a full match with no pain, play three matches three days in a row, was a success for me even though I lost the last match," she said.

Bouchard will play American veteran Bethanie Mattek-Sands in the first round in Hobart. AP

FIFA ethics judges send written verdict to Blatter

SEPP Blatter and Michel Platini can now launch appeals against their eight-year bans from football after FIFA's ethics committee judges sent them full written reasons for the verdicts.

Lawyers for Blatter and Platini needed the documents received on Saturday to file formal appeals with FIFA, world soccer's governing body.

FIFA refused Platini's request last month to

bypass its process and appeal directly to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

"The adjudicatory chamber of the independent ethics committee has fulfilled its commitment to provide the grounds for the respective decisions to Mr. Blatter and Mr. Platini within the first half of January 2016 as they had previously been informed," the judges said in a statement

Blatter wants to be cleared before the Feb. 26 FIFA election congress.

Platini has given up on being a candidate to succeed his former mentor Blatter but wants to clear his name and retain his presidency of European soccer body UEFA. Platini's communication team told The Associated Press that they received all the documents needed on Friday night and will likely

lodge their appeal with FIFA on Monday.

Blatter and Platini deny wrongdoing but were judged last month to have broken ethics rules on conflicts of interest, breach of loyalty and offering or receiving gifts.

Platini took USD2 million of FIFA money in 2011 - a payment approved by Blatter as uncontracted salary for work as a presidential adviser from 1999-2002. AP



FIFA President Sepp Blatter

Tales Azzoni, Madrid

SPANISH LEAGUE

Real Madrid wins in Zidane's debut as head coach

ZINEDINE Zidane's head-coaching career got off to a winning start as Real Madrid defeated Deportivo La Coruna 5-0 in the Spanish league on Saturday.

Gareth Bale had a hat trick and Karim Benzema scored twice, including with a back-heel flick.

Zidane received a warm welcome at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium, with fans loudly cheering the former galactico before and after the game. It was a completely different atmosphere compared to when Rafa Benitez was in charge. Benitez was jeered in nearly every game since a demoralizing 4-0 home loss to Barcelona in November, a result that ignited a crisis at the Spanish giant.

"The fans were behind the team from the first minute until the end. It was a great atmosphere," Zidane said. "But we have to understand that this was only the first game, we have to keep winning. The goal is to keep playing well and keep winning games."

Real Madrid moved to within two points of Barcelona, which earlier defeated Granada 4-0 with a hat trick by Lionel Messi and a goal by Neymar.

Barcelona will have a game in hand after the 19th round this weekend.

Zidane, who thrived at Madrid until retiring in 2006, stepped up from Madrid's B team when Benitez was fired this week after seven months on the job.

"It means a lot to me to be here," Zidane said. "I want to enjoy this win."

Benzema opened the scoring by using his back heel to redirect Sergio Ramos' shot off a corner, then Bale headed in a cross from Dani Carvajal se-



Real Madrid's Karim Benzema, center, celebrates after scoring the opening goal against Deportivo Coruna at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on Saturday

ven minutes later, and found the net from close range after a cross by Cristiano Ronaldo to open the second half. Bale's third goal was another header, and Benzema's second came in the game's last play.

Ronaldo's best opportunity was when he struck the post

with a first-half header.

At the Camp Nou, Messi scored twice within the first 15 minutes and added his third in the second half. Neymar closed the scoring late.

Barcelona had drawn four of its last six matches but was coming off a 4-1 win over city rival Espanyol in the Copa del

Rey. It had been held by Espanyol to a scoreless draw in the previous league round.

"I'm very satisfied with how the team played today," Barcelona coach Luis Enrique said. "Everybody was focused from the beginning. The players knew how important it was to win these three points."

Barcelona dominated Granada, which was only 17th in the 20-team standings.

"We could have scored more," Barcelona defender Aleix Vidal said. "But the main thing was to get the three points. We are back in the lead, now we'll see what happens in the other matches."

Messi found the net from close range in the eighth minute after a pass from Arda Turan, then bagged his second six minutes later by striking an open net after a pass by Suarez. Messi's third goal came after Neymar struck the post and the ball rebounded to Messi inside the area for his ninth league goal.

It was Messi's first hat trick of the season, and 33rd of his career. He is favored to win a record fifth Ballon d'Or today (see back page), from a shortlist with Neymar and Ronaldo.

Neymar sealed Barcelona's victory from close range, scoring his 15th league goal to tie Suarez as the competition's leading scorer. Ronaldo has 14.

Dani Alves, who this week called Spanish media "garbage" for the way it covers soccer, came off the bench in the second half and was loudly cheered by the Barcelona fans.

The club initially condemned Alves' comments, but late Friday said it would give its support to the player in case a local association of sports media went ahead with its threat to sue the Brazilian right back. **AP**

EPL

Arsenal joined in 4th round by Man United, Man City

Jack Bezants, London

ARSENAL began its FA Cup defense with a 3-1 comeback victory against Sunderland and was joined in the fourth round by Manchester United and Manchester City on Saturday.

United labored past Sheffield United 1-0 at Old Trafford, and Manchester City emphatically defeated Norwich 3-0.

It looked as if there could be a shock at Emirates Stadium, where the Premier League leader



Arsenal's Gabriel, center left, jumps as he attempts to block a header by Sunderland's Steven Fletcher during the English FA Cup third round at the Emirates stadium

fell behind to a Jermaine Lens strike after 17 minutes for Sunderland, which

was second-to-last in the league.

But Joel Campbell equa-

lized, then two goals in three second-half minutes from substitute Aaron Ramsey and Olivier Giroud ensured Arsenal moved on to the next round.

"In the second half we took over," Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said. "We played in their half, scored great goals, and created many chances."

United overcame Sheffield with a penalty from Wayne Rooney with time virtually up, but its performance against third-tier opposition was ano-

ther display lacking attacking intent.

When substitute Memphis Depay tried his luck with a low shot which went comfortably wide in the 66th minute, it was United's first attempt at goal, and was greeted with sarcastic cheers by supporters.

Depay was felled in the box in the third minute of injury time by Dean Hammond, and Rooney scored from the spot.

United manager Louis van Gaal regarded the result as more important

than the performance.

"You have to play more quickly than we did in the first half," Van Gaal said. "They are defending with 10, 11 players behind the ball. It's more easy to defend than attack."

City had no problems at Norwich. Sergio Aguero beat four players before converting for the opener, and assisted on the second scored by Kelechi Iheanacho.

Kevin De Bruyne added the third, shooting through the legs of goalkeeper John Ruddy. **AP**

opinion

Rear Window

Severo Portela



ICEBERG

In the aftermath of the so-called Dore heist, the Secretary for Economy and Finance and the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau imposed stricter accounting rules on junket operators in a bid to improve transparency and prevent VIP room related theft. Allegedly, Dore managers had stolen and siphoned HK\$2 billion, roughly US\$258million, from Wynn Macau.

Naturally, the industry was more than eager to buy and sell the narrative of this as a singular event, in spite of the rumors of multiple episodes of financial trouble all along the food chain - the nature of the squeeze on the casino business could not but result in multiple stings. 2015 came to a close in style with the public slapping of VIP gambling operator Kwok Wing Shun, aka "Shanghai Boy", allegedly for bad debt. Shanghai Boy was having his tea at tea time... in The Peninsula.

The problem seems to be that to strictly regulate the junket business it will be necessary to go to depths where even junkets fear to tread. Just take the alleged Dore copycat early in 2016 - L'Arc SJM Casino -where VIP room operators allegedly pocketed HK 100 million.

Information on this embezzlement is not abundant, yet, but it seems to involve a Chan Yan Hung and 10 VIP rooms. Indeed, it is not the amount involved that makes L'Arc coup deserve our attention, but the fact that the SJM managing director, and its major individual shareholder, Angela Leong, quoted by Portuguese daily Hoje Macau, claims to not know the operations and financial dealings between the casino and the VIP room operators, aka junkets, all that well. That is how astray the junket universe has gone!

If information is scarce, commentary is rare. But legislator Zheng Anting, who has been a kind of shadow watch on anything related to the industry, offered a serious warning: this is the tip of the iceberg. Zheng could not quantify his concern, and it is not quantifiable, but we can introduce here as a light note on the opaque world of junket finances a reasonable hypothetical. Just consider that only one-tenth of the volume of the iceberg, no matter its size, is standing above the water!

2015 gaming volume sank about one third compared with the previous year to a still galactic 30 billion, as reported by Kate O'Keefe - a WSJ journalist no longer based in Hong Kong - "roiled by China's crackdown on corruption and capital flight". Of course, the trend came to stay, and as Lionel Leong is saying once again; the industry needs to be aware it has to keep on adjusting, adjusting. Those who dream of a softening of the financial grip on Macau are just...dreaming.

Finally, we have to worry about the fate of the five missing editors of the Mighty Current publishing house and bookstore in Causeway Bay. Unsettling it is, to say the least. Since we are talking about five from the book industry, why not dedicate to them a Kafka quote from his notebooks: The Messiah will only come when he is no longer necessary.

We hope Lee Bo and the others can find their way back to Hong Kong, and who knows, they can write a book on Regina Ip and her amazing theory on the porous border, fishing and smuggling. We can do the laughing part.

THE BUZZ USD2.6M VIOLIN FOUND AFTER MUSICIAN FORGETS IT ON TRAIN

German police say they have recovered a violin worth USD2.6 million that a musician had mistakenly left on a train.

A spokesman for German federal police says the woman forgot the violin when she stepped off a local train between Mannheim and Saarbruecken in the west of the country.

She alerted police who were able to recover the instrument, described as a General Dupont Grumiaux Stradivarius made in 1727.

Police spokesman Dieter Schwan said in an email Friday to the Associated Press that the unidentified musician was American.

Messi set to get 5th FIFA best player prize, end Ronaldo run



Lionel Messi

LIONEL Messi is favored to win the FIFA Ballon d'Or today, ending Cristiano Ronaldo's two-year hold on soccer's top individual prize. Messi already has a 4-3 lead in their career duel for the annual FIFA prize but has recently been eclipsed by his great rival.

That changed in 2015

when Messi inspired Barcelona to regain the Champions League title among five major trophies to none for Real Madrid, despite Ronaldo's relentless goal-scoring pace.

Barcelona's dominance also helped Brazil star Neymar earn a place on the three-man shortlist for the

first time.

The Catalan club can sweep the men's honors with Luis Enrique heading the coaches' shortlist after becoming European champion and winning the Spanish league and cup, European Super Cup and Club World Cup.

Messi can also win the Puskas Award - a fans' online vote for best goal - for his solo slalom through the Athletic Bilbao defense to score in the Spanish cup final.

Barcelona swept the 2011 awards when Messi and then-coach Pep Guardiola won. Guardiola is also nominated this year after winning the Bundesliga with Bayern Munich. Guardiola will skip Monday's event to stay with Bayern's midwinter training camp in Qatar.

The World Cup-winning United States team is set to dominate the women's honors. Carli Lloyd's 13 minute hat trick in the final - including a shot from the halfway line in a 5-2 rout of Japan - makes her a top contender for the player's prize. Lloyd is a finalist for the first time at 33 after a decade of national team duty, more than 200 appearances and two Olympic titles. AP

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

Xinhua/Cheong Kam Ka



Tourists visit Senado Square during the festive season.

Station	Air quality
Roadside	60-80 Moderate
High Density Residential Area	60-80 Moderate
Ambient	60-80 Moderate

SOURCE: DSMG

WORLD BRIEFS



FRENCH President Francois Hollande and other dignitaries held a special ceremony Sunday to honor all those killed in Islamic extremist violence around Paris in 2015 - a year when the European way of life was targeted time and again. More on p15

CANADA A United Airlines flight bound for Denver was diverted to Vancouver early Saturday morning after a threatening message was received. United Flight 1104 from Anchorage, Alaska, landed safely in Canada's third-biggest city.

MEXICO Recaptured drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman's secret interview with U.S. actor Sean Penn helped authorities locate his whereabouts, a Mexican law enforcement official said. More on p14



PORTUGAL With an alliance of Socialists, communists and radicals holding power, voters appear set to seek some balance by electing a center-right politician as their head of state. The official campaign period for the Jan. 24 presidential election started yesterday and the hot favorite is Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, a former Social Democratic Party leader who had a popular TV show. Polls suggest he could get more than 50 percent of votes against nine rivals.

ITALY Maria Teresa de Filippis, the first woman to race in Formula One, has died at the age of 89. Formula One made the announcement on its website Saturday without providing a cause of death. De Filippis made three starts for the Maserati team in 1958, finishing 10th at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium for her best result.

SWEDISH airport officials say they have closed the departure lounge at Skavsta Airport and halted outgoing flights after a suspicious powder was found in a passenger's hand luggage.