



THE BENEFITS OF LOYALTY PROGRAMS

Loyalty programs maximize hotel occupancy and guest satisfaction, according to Sheraton Macao's managing director

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HOTEL ESTORIL INELIGIBLE FOR PROTECTION

The Cultural Heritage Council backs the decision not to list the Hotel Estoril for protection

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SURVEY | 17 PERCENT OF HK MAIDS ENGAGED IN FORCED LABOR

Forced labor of domestic helpers 'less likely' in Macau

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Associations join forces against infectious diseases facility

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WORLD BRIEFS

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

More on p11



MYANMAR's parliament yesterday elected Htin Kyaw as the country's new president in a watershed moment that ushers the longtime opposition party of Aung San Suu Kyi into government after 54 years of direct or indirect military rule.

AFGHANISTAN President Ashraf Ghani says the Islamic State group is "on the run" in an eastern border province where in recent months the militants had taken over some remote districts.

More on backpage

TOURISM

Manager discusses benefits of loyalty programs

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

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

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

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

When asked how SPG deals with the Chinese market in both mainland China and Macau, McNab said, "The Chinese market is just as willing to participate, as you can see in the growth of the Asia-Pacific market. [...] The growth for us is not in North America, but outside [of that region]."

McNab also mentioned the



Janet McNab

distinctive qualities consumers look for when traveling; an aspect under consideration many businesses nowadays.

"It's a real 'what's in it for me?' kind of society that we live in, and it's not age-specific," the hotelier added.

Henry Brockman, Chairman of BBAM, believes that it is important for Macau to maintain good relationships with guests.

"It is vital for Macau to keep its hotel visitors happy and

entertained, and ensure that they tell their friends and come again," he said.

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

Hong Kong teenage suicides draw local attention

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

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

In 2014, 11.4 individuals per 100,000 tried to end their

own lives in Hong Kong.

According to Cheong, student suicide occurs mainly in September and October, which corresponds to the beginning of the new semester. "When students are afraid to face a new environment, while nobody is there to provide them with help, they may attempt to kill themselves. But pressure from school is not the only reason. The reasons are always a mix of physical, mental, and financial issues," Cheong said.

During the workshop, DSEJ urged teachers to take the initiative if they notice anything abnormal by, for instance, asking students whether they are planning to commit suicide, as well as entrusting potentially suicidal students to counselors and psychologists. The number of student counselors has been steadily increasing, according to DSEJ. There are currently 225 counselors, each of them supporting 365 students.

Companies encouraged to step into e-commerce business

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

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

Since Macau has been trying to diversify its economy, the government is

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

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

ONE SHOT NEWS



Professor Hu Angang, director of the Center for China Studies at Tsinghua University, delivered a seminar on "Macau's strategic development opportunities" yesterday at the East Asian Games Dome. Hu elaborated on China's 13th Five-Year Plan and gave suggestions on the MSAR's five-year development plan.

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LAWYER

Lorenzo to plead guilty in UN bribery scheme case

A defense lawyer says a U.S. citizen charged in the United Nations bribery case will plead guilty today to charges.

Attorney Brian Bieber said Monday that Francis Lorenzo will plead guilty to three charges. Lorenzo is a suspended ambassador from the Dominican Republic who was arrested last year.

The plea comes in a case that resulted in the arrest of a former president of the U.N. General Assembly and Macau real estate developer Ng Lap Seng.

Bieber says Lorenzo will plead guilty to conspiracy to commit bribery, conspiracy to commit money laundering and filing a false tax return.

Bieber says his client decided to plead guilty after reviewing the government's evidence. He says it led him to "accept responsibility for his role in the criminal conspiracies committed by him and his co-defendants." **MDT/AP**

ACCORDING TO CARITAS

Local domestic workers 'less likely' to experience forced labor

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hong Kong labor law on domestic



Domestic helpers and their supporters raise a placard with words "Stop The Violence" to support the 23-year-old Indonesian maid Erwiana Sulistyaningsih during a 2014 protest in Hong Kong

workers requires helpers to "stay in" (live at their boss' home), increasing the risk of exploitation.

"Macau residents don't want their domestic helpers to live with them because they [want] to enjoy privacy," he adds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Staff reporter

LACK OF MINIMUM WAGE RAISES CONCERN

PAUL PUN says Macau should adjust the "minimum wage" rather than stating "not below MOP2,500 with a housing allowance of MOP500." According to the Caritas head, "the human resources should periodically review the yearly work salary [of domestic workers] for them to have a clear reference salary, [...] a decent salary."

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Local association says non-Chinese media face hiring challenges

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

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

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

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



AIPIM's president João Francisco Pinto

According to AIPIM, Victor Chan received the motion and said he would pass it to the appropriate authorities, namely

Journalists will debate a code of ethics and their own legal status

the Human Resources Office and the Public Security Police Force.

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

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

UNITED NATIONS

NGOs attend meeting on the status of women

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

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



teness and social skills of women in Macau.

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

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Chui Sai Cheong struggles with Mandarin in Beijing

A Macau lawmaker speaking at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in Beijing has caught netizens' attention for his strong accent.

A television clip, which has gone viral on social media, shows Chui Sai Cheong – the elder brother of Chief Executive Chui Sai On – struggling to express his opinions in Mandarin as he talked about Beijing's "One Belt, One Road" initiative and the 13th Five-Year Plan at the meeting on Sunday, according to a report by news website hko1.com.

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

Netizens were seemingly more interested in his strong accent than the contents of his speech.

Other netizens who viewed the clip, which reportedly went viral after being broadcast by TV channels, admired Chui and his younger brother



Chui Sai Cheong

for being "courageous" enough to speak Mandarin on significant occasions despite their "very heavy accent."

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

Hotel Estoril ineligible for protection

THE members of the Cultural Heritage Council have overwhelmingly voted in favor of the government's decision not to list the old Hotel Estoril for protection as a cultural heritage site.

The President of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), Ung Vai Meng, told TDM that 13 delegates of the 15-member council had agreed that the deteriorating building had no architectural or historical value. Ung added that throughout the Estoril's lifetime, the building had undergone numerous archi-



Marreiros admitted that demolishing the hotel is now the most likely course of action

tectural revisions and had now lost the cultural characteristics it once had.

However he noted that there had been not been a decision on whether the iconic façade of the building would be preserved.

Another council member, Carlos Marreiros, admitted to the broadcaster that demolishing the hotel is now the most likely

course of action.

The Hotel Estoril, located in Tap Seac Square, opened in the 1960s but has been in disrepair for more than two decades.

Meanwhile the government is likely to now move forward with its plans to transform the site into a youth center and a space of cultural and educational activities. **DB**

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Infectious diseases facility 'arranged behind the scenes,' accuses lawmaker

Daniel Beittler

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

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

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

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

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

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

“The government has already made the decision. [The fact that there has been no consultation implies] there is dirty business behind the decision,” he told reporters on the roof of a residential building overlooking one of the historic structures to be demolished.



This building is expected to be demolished to give place to the infectious diseases facility

According to SSM, the infectious diseases building must commence operations by 2019, lest the government be unable to control the spread of diseases in future.

One resident told reporters that she is concerned about the

close proximity of the facility. According to protestors, the building will be located just 3.5 meters away from her residential building and just 30 meters from a large kindergarten and school.

The resident, who declined to be identified, expressed her concerns about the potential spread of infectious diseases to herself and her son.

SSM has previously asserted that the World Health Organization (WHO) has no guidelines regarding the locations of infectious diseases facilities. They claim that the facility's proposed location is “absolute-

ly safe” and “in accordance with all WHO standards,” provided that there is an adequate ventilation system.

However, demonstrators noted yesterday that while WHO may have no specific guidelines, the Chinese Ministry of Health prescribes clear regulations over such issues, decreeing that any facility “should avoid densely populated areas such as schools, residential zones and water supplies.”

“To prevent cross-infection, the density of buildings should remain low to ensure natural flow of air,” state the Chinese Ministry of Health's guidelines,

as cited by the demonstrators. “Thus the infectious disease center should be at least 20 to 25 meters away from other hospital buildings and [...] should be far away from kindergartens, schools and other populated public facilities.”

The protestors said that they have written to WHO for their professional opinion on their alleged endorsement of the project, but have not yet received a response.

Asked what they hope to achieve from yesterday's rooftop protest, the demonstrators voiced their demands for the government to halt the project and consider relocating it to a less densely populated area, such as Coloane. In the words of lawmaker Coutinho, “The government needs to rewind and rethink [the project].”

Coutinho also believes that Coloane would be a superior location for the new facility. “Coloane is a better choice, near the new hospital [that is under construction], and far away from the densely populated areas of Macau,” he remarked. “But the government never considered other places to build the infectious diseases building.”

He also agreed that the new public hospital in Coloane should take priority over the proposed facility, thus giving the government an alternative location for the infectious diseases building before beginning construction.

The government needs to rewind and rethink.

PEREIRA COUTINHO

Cultural heritage threatened

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

A demonstrator, who identified himself solely as Mr Cheang, showed 'before

and after' photos of Macau's landscape and downtown area. The 'after photo' featured an artist's impression of the 60-meter-high building, which noticeably altered and obstructed parts of Macau's landscape.

The construction of the new facility

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

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

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

Alexis Tam defends project as per int'l standards

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

During a meeting that took place after the visit,

the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Alexis Tam, pledged that “the buildings are designed with World Health Organization [WHO] standards, they are completely safe, regardless of the facilities inside the buildings or the transportation procedures.”

Alexis Tam in addressing Mr Zhang, a resident

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

Zhang had previously requested officials to indicate the number of infectious buildings that exist in the United States, and

to clarify how close they are to residential communities.

Zhang posed that “if there are one hundred infectious disease buildings in the US, then on average there will be two for each state, and each state of the US is [individually] bigger than Macau.”

To this, Alexis Tam replied: “our websites pro-

vide all the needed information. [...] We thoroughly follow WHO guidelines. [...] As to the size, the US is a big country [while] Macau is small. Our standards are not the same as the US standards.”

One member of ANM who was present requested the authorities to provide the public with more details of the project. In

response, Alexis Tam said that they “are willing to provide the documents to the public.”

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

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Founded just 12 years ago, Anbang made a splash in the United States in 2014 with its USD2 billion purchase of New York City's Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

Since then, it has plowed more billions into acquiring insurers in Belgium, the Netherlands, Iowa and South Korea. Last week, it agreed to pay \$6.5 billion for Strategic Hotels & Resorts, an American hotel chain.

On Monday, it went after even bigger game, launching a surprise \$14 billion bid with partners for the Starwood hotel chain.

Anbang makes no secret of its global ambitions. It aims to become one of the "top 10 comprehensive financial groups in the world," its website says.

That is a break with a Chinese industry in which bigger, older companies have stuck to their home market. But it reflects the growing space for innovation as regulators loosen controls in hopes of making Chinese financial industries more competitive and productive.

The driving force credited with propelling Anbang's rise is chairman Wu Xiaohui, who news reports say got his start in the rental car business before founding Anbang in 2004. He rarely talks to reporters or appears in public.

Anbang started with a single outlet in Beijing. Its biggest shareholder, at 20 percent, was state-owned car maker Shan-



A taxi passes in front of the fabled Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York

ghai Automotive Industries Corp. The following year, a state-owned oil company, Sinopec, bought a 20 percent share.

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

Its global expansion coincides with encouragement from the ruling Communist Party for Chinese companies to "go abroad" to diversify away from

dependence on a slowing domestic economy.

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

According to the Chinese press, Wu is married to Zhuo Ran, a granddaughter of former

supreme leader Deng Xiaoping, though the business magazine Caixin reported last year the couple had separated.

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

Last year, the newspaper Southern Weekend reported Anbang's real owner was Chen Xiaolu, the son of late Chen Yi,

a member of the ruling inner circle that founded the communist government in 1949.

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

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

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

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

That reduced founding investor SAIC's stake to less than 1 percent. It also increased its registered capital fivefold to 62 billion yuan (\$9.5 billion), the biggest among Chinese insurers, even though the company doesn't rank among the top 10 property insurers or in the top 30 in life insurance.

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

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

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

"Insurance money is ordinary people's pensions and life insurance. It must be invested in the best companies," Wu told a business conference, the newspaper China Business Journal reported on its website. He said insurers must "protect small investors." AP

corporate bits

WYNN CO-ORGANIZES SME PROCUREMENT MEETING

Wynn Macau announced that it is partnering with the Macau Chamber of Commerce to organize the "2016 First Quarter Wynn Local SME Procurement Partnership Meeting - Food & Beverage Session" on April 14.

The event, which will focus on Food & Beverage suppliers and procurement, will see small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the sector showcase their products and services to Wynn Macau. The policy, according to a statement from Wynn Macau, aims to support the policy of the MSAR government of giving priority to local suppliers.

SME suppliers in the following areas are cordially invited to send representatives to the meeting: Meat, Seafood, Dairy Products,



Fruits and Vegetables, Fresh Bakery and Pastry Products, General Food Grocery, Dried Seafood, Non-alcoholic Beverage, Alcoholic Beverage, and Food and Beverage Supplies.

Interested suppliers can participate in the partnership meeting by registering on Wynn Macau's website: www.wynnmacaulimited.com, and visiting the "Company Information - Macau SMEs" webpage.

10TH ASIAN FILM AWARDS CEREMONY IN MACAU

The 10th Asian Film Awards will be held tomorrow at The Venetian Macao where a jury composed of 12 respected film industry professionals, festival programmers and critics from around the world will announce the winners of various film categories.

Organized by the Asian Film Awards Academy and sponsored by Sands Resorts Cotai Strip Macao and The Venetian Macao and with Cotai Water Jet as the official ferry operator, the ceremony will be attended by notables and nominees from Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, the Philippines, Ja-

pan and South Korea.

This year 77 nominees of 36 films from nine countries are competing for the Asian Film Awards across 15 categories; Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor, Best Supporting Actress, Best Newcomer, Best Screenwriter, Best Cinematographer, Best Editor, Best Composer, Best Production Designer, Best visual Effects, Best Costume Designer, and the newly added Best Sound.

The award ceremony, now in its 10th year, moved to Macau in 2014. Previously it was hosted in Hong Kong.

PACHA MACAU INVITES INT'L PERFORMERS

Pacha Macau at Studio City is set to welcome British DJ and record producer Paul Oakenfold to perform on April 9, followed by Dutch DJ Afrojack on April 16.

Pacha's international agenda also includes dance/trance German-American DJ Markus Schulz rocking his beats over the Easter weekend on March 26. Electro house favorite DJ Chuckie takes over the decks on April 2, DJ Mark Knight on April 23, Egyptian trance music duo Aly & Fila on April 30, and American rapper and DJ Lil Jon on May 13.

Pacha Macau will also feature local Macau dance collective favorites, Macau Dance Music Association. They will play this Saturday, as well as alongside

Mark Knight on Saturday 23.

Moreover, Pacha's newly launched 'Chic Ladies Night' allows ladies to enter and drink for free from 10 p.m. until 2 a.m. every Friday night.



Paul Oakenfold

Wayne Parry, Trenton (NJ)

GAMING ALERT

New Jersey voters to decide on new casinos in November

VOTERS will be asked in November whether to approve two new casinos in the northern part of the state under a ballot question authorized yesterday [Macau time] by the Legislature.

It will mark the first time in 40 years that the state's voters will have a say about expanding casino gambling in New Jersey. And it could have far-reaching consequences for Atlantic City, which has already lost more than half its casino revenue to competitors in neighboring states.

On a packed general election ballot that also will include presidential candidates, voters will be asked whether to amend the state constitution to repeal a provision that limits casinos only to Atlantic City. It would authorize two new casinos in separate counties at least 72 miles from Atlantic City.

It doesn't specify locations, but the two most-talked-about proposals are in the Meadowlands sports complex in East Rutherford, where the NFL's Jets and Giants play, and in Jersey City, just across the Hudson River from Manhattan.

Applications would be accepted only from casino operators presently licensed in the state. The process would be open to other operators if 60 days pass without bids. The bidders must be willing



This undated illustration shows what the proposed Hard Rock Casino Meadowlands in East Rutherford, N.J., would look like

to commit USD1 billion on the projects, with a portion of revenue going to public improvements in struggling Atlantic City.

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

MGM Resorts International, which co-owns the Borgata in

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

Other operators include Caesars Entertainment Corp., Atlantic City's largest casino company with

three properties; and Tropicana Entertainment Corp., controlled by billionaire Carl Icahn.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 2006, Atlantic City's casino revenue was \$5.2 billion; last year it had fallen to \$2.56 billion. In 2014, four of the city's 12 casinos went out of business. **MDT/Agencies**

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CHINA'S draft plan for a tax on currency trading is getting a cold reception in the foreign-exchange market.

Mizuho Bank Ltd. says the so-called Tobin tax on yuan transactions would reduce liquidity in a currency with bid-ask spreads already five times wider than those of the yen. A levy would set back China's push to make the yuan a reserve currency and could heighten investor anxiety over capital outflows, according to Commonwealth Bank of Australia. The proposal is "short sighted" and would drive away foreign investors, Citi Private Bank said.

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

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

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

The People's Bank of China has been fighting to drive out traders who take advantage of the difference in the yuan's rates at home and abroad. The

ECONOMY

Tobin tax riles analysts as Citi warns of foreign exodus



PBOC drove the currency's offshore borrowing costs to records in January, increasing short-selling costs, and instructed banks on the mainland to restrict sending yuan overseas.

Among the biggest Tobin tax concerns cited by analysts is that the levy would sap market

liquidity. One gauge of the ease of trading the yuan - the currency's bid-ask spread against the dollar - was about 0.05 percent on average in March, versus 0.01 percent for the dollar-yen rate, according to data compiled by Bloomberg Intelligence.

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

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

While people familiar with the draft rules said they aren't designed to disrupt hedging and other foreign-exchange transactions undertaken by companies, costs for those trades would probably increase anyway because more documentation will be needed to differentiate between hedging and speculation, said Charlie Chan,

a former Credit Suisse Group AG proprietary trader who runs the USD150 million Splendid Asia Macro hedge fund in Singapore.

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

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

Not everyone thinks the tax is a bad idea. Mobius, the exe-

cutive chairman at Templeton Emerging Markets Group, said in an interview in Kuala Lumpur that the move would help authorities stem a \$790 billion slide in foreign-exchange reserves since June 2014. The PBOC has tools to address the tax's impact on liquidity, such as adjusting banks' reserve-requirement ratios, according to Banny Lam, co-head of research at Agricultural Bank of China International Securities Ltd. in Hong Kong, a unit of one of China's largest state-run lenders.

"Targeting speculators is a good idea," Lam said. "It will help stabilize the onshore and offshore markets, which will be good for the economy."

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

It's unlikely that China will end up implementing the tax, said Tommy Ong, managing director for treasury and markets at DBS Hong Kong Ltd., who cited a history of unsuccessful or aborted attempts to implement such levies in countries around the world. The Tobin tax takes its name from U.S. economist James Tobin, who in 1972 suggested taking a cut of foreign-exchange trades to limit currency speculation.

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

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

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

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

SEAN YOKOTA
SKANDINAVISKA ENSKILDA BANKEN,
SINGAPORE

Stocks rise for third day amid suspected state-fund buying

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

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

knowledge of the matter.

China is stepping up intervention in its financial markets after stocks extended last year's USD5 trillion selloff and the yuan fell to a five-year low in February. The Shanghai Composite has risen 6.6 percent this month amid suspected buying by state-backed funds in some of the nation's biggest companies as policy makers gather in Beijing for the National People's Congress that closes today.

"As expected, the market staged a rebound toward the close as state institutions emerged to buy," said Castor Pang, head of research at Core-Pacific Yamaichi Hong Kong. "The market is also waiting for some policy signals from the NPC today

[Tuesday]."

The Shanghai gauge climbed to 2,864.37 at the close, capping a third day of advances. Gauges of consumer-staple and utility companies rose at least 1.4 percent on the CSI 300 Index, which advanced 0.3 percent. The Hang Seng China Enterprises Index declined 0.9 percent in Hong Kong, while the benchmark Hang Seng Index lost 0.7 percent.

The yuan traded in Hong Kong fell 0.18 percent to 6.5058 a dollar, heading for its biggest two-day retreat in four weeks.

The Shanghai Composite has lost 19 percent this year at yesterday's close, still the most among 93 global peers tracked by Bloomberg. Bloomberg

Beijing reaffirms its commitment to North Korea sanctions

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

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

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

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

AP PHOTO



A man watches a TV news program showing footage of the missile launch conducted by North Korea, at Seoul Railway Station

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

"In discussing the Korean

Peninsula nuclear issue, the two sides agreed that [...] the sanctions must be fully and completely implemented, while during the process of implementing the resolution, ways

be explored into how to restore a means of resolving the peninsula nuclear issue through negotiations," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

In their phone conversation

earlier in the week, the two foreign ministers also discussed the often-strained relationship between their countries, with Wang urging Japan to make "constructive efforts" to improve ties, the ministry said.

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

Relations between the two neighbors have been generally calm since violent anti-Japanese riots broke out in several Chinese cities in 2012 after Japan nationalized a chain of uninhabited islands claimed by China.

Yet, while a brief 2014 meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe marked a restoration of high-level contacts, ties have since moved at a glacial pace. **AP**

AEROSPACE

China plans first commercial rocket-launch company, Xinhua says

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

China Sanjiang Space Group Co. is preparing to enter the commercial-rocket business with a launch slated for 2017, Xinhua reported yesterday, citing the company's chief engineer Hu Shengyun. Some Internet companies have expressed interest in collaborating on commercial launches, Hu said.

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

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

TAIWAN

Former finance minister named future premier

PRESIDENT-ELECT Tsai Ing-wen yesterday named a former finance minister as Taiwan's next premier, tasked with reinvigorating the island's slowing high-tech economy and stabilizing relations with neighbor China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory.

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

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

Tsai has pledged no change to the status quo of tense-but-sta-

AP PHOTO



Taiwan's President-elect Tsai Ing-wen poses with former Finance Minister Lin Chuan – her choice for premier – at the Democratic Progressive Party headquarters in Taipei

ble peace and robust economic exchanges between the sides. However, China says it isn't satisfied with that stance and insists she endorse Beijing's claim that the two are part of a single Chinese nation.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said earlier this month that China won't budge on that demand, regardless of political

changes on the island of 23 million. China would "resolutely contain Taiwan independence secessionist activities in any form," Xi told delegates to China's ceremonial legislature on March 5.

Tsai takes over from China-friendly Nationalist Party President Ma Ying-jeou, who oversaw the signing of a series

of agreements during his eight years in power establishing closer economic ties between the sides. Her election was seen as a rejection of closer economic ties between the sides that many younger Taiwanese see as threatening their economic futures.

A Japanese colony for 50 years, Taiwan was reabsorbed

by China in 1945. It then split away again after Chiang Kai-shek's defeated Nationalists moved their government to the island in 1949 after the Communist seizure of power on the mainland.

Apart from occasional criticism in state media, China has largely held its fire over Tsai's election.

Wearing a black turtleneck and dark jacket, Lin promised to respond to all questions from the island's freewheeling media, in keeping with the accessible and down-to-earth image of Taiwanese politicians that contrasts starkly with the secrecy and aloofness of China's communist leadership. However, Lin asked for some degree of privacy, saying: "If you all call me at home, I'll never get any sleep." **AP**

Eric Talmadge, Tokyo

SKEPTICS of North Korea's nuclear threat, and there are many, have long clung to two comforting thoughts.

While the North has the bomb, it doesn't have a warhead small enough to put on a long-range rocket. And it certainly doesn't have a re-entry vehicle to keep that warhead from burning up in the atmosphere before it could reach a target like, as it has suggested before, Manhattan.

North Korea yesterday suggested it will soon show the world it has mastered both technologies.

That would require a huge jump in the North's suspected nuclear capabilities, so it may be just the latest case of Pyongyang saying with vitriolic propaganda something it cannot demonstrate in tests. But if it delivers, it will put to rest one other comforting thought: that it's safe for policymakers in Washington and elsewhere to take North Korea's claims as mainly just bluster.

"We have proudly acquired the re-entry technology, possessed by a few countries styling themselves as military powers, by dint of self-reliance and self-development," North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was quoted as saying. The authoritarian country's state-run media reported he made the comment after meeting scientists and technicians, following what it said was a successful ground test of a re-entry vehicle.

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

As with all such reports, it's hard to separate Pyongyang's wishful thinking from the current reality.

North Korea's most likely candidate for an intercontinental ballistic missile is generally known as the KN-08 — in North Korea it's called the Hwasong. The three-stage rocket has an estimated range of 5,000-6,000 kilometers (3,100-3,700 miles), longer if



Missiles are flaunted during a military parade during celebrations to mark the 70th anniversary of North Korea's Workers' Party

ANALYSIS

N. Korea nuke threat not all bluff and bluster

modified further.

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

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

But the Pentagon has often expressed incredulity over the reliability of the KN-08 because North Korea has never tested it "end-to-end" — meaning from launch through re-entry and

warhead delivery — to prove it works.

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

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

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

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

"Well, let's see: They've paraded two different ICBMs through Pyongyang, conducted four nuclear tests, showed us a compact nuclear design sitting next to a modern re-entry vehicle in

front of one of those ICBMs, and hung a giant wall map of the United States marked with targets and titled 'Mainland Strike Plan,'" he wrote. "Here's a wild guess: They are building nuclear-armed ICBMs to strike the United States! Why is this so hard to grasp?"

The timing of Pyongyang's recent moves is crucial.

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

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

The country is also conducting a 70-day "loyalty campaign" ahead of a once-in-a-generation ruling party congress in May. The congress could be some-

thing of a coming-out party for Kim, a venue to emerge from the shadows of his father and grandfather and more firmly establish himself at home and abroad as North Korea's supreme leader. He could also lay out his own long-term domestic and international agenda.

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

Standing firm on nukes bolsters his credibility with hard-liners in the military and reinforces his regime's defiant, dangerous reputation with Washington and its allies. It also has domestic propaganda value, showing how North Korea, singlehandedly and against all odds, can make breakthroughs few countries have accomplished.

Of course, that logic breaks two ways: If the country hasn't made major advances, exaggerating them is the next best thing, since its technology is notoriously difficult to evaluate.

But Lewis and other experts have expressed concern that Washington, in particular, has a pattern of not taking the North's purported capabilities seriously enough until a successful test proves their complacency to have been misplaced. While it might declare success prematurely — most outside experts doubt the recent H-bomb claims — it has an established track record of eventually getting there.

Seoul, meanwhile, was holding to its skeptical line.

Its Defense Ministry said yesterday it remains unconvinced the North has achieved re-entry vehicle technology. Spokesman Moon Sang Gyun said the assessment is based on South Korean and U.S. intelligence. He refused to elaborate. **AP**



People watch a TV screen showing North Korean leader Kim Jong Un during a news program, at Seoul Railway Station

BANGLADESH

Bank chief quits amid USD101 million hacking uproar

Julhas Alam, Dhaka

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

Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman's resignation was accepted, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's spokesman Ihsanul Karim.

Rahman, who held the bank's top post for seven years, told reporters he resigned voluntarily.

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

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

However, the New York Fed said it found no evidence its own systems were compromised, and attention increasingly has focused on suspected vulnerabilities in Bangladesh Bank's cybersecurity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dequito has denied any wrongdoing and offered to provide details during the Senate hearing in a closed-door executive session. RCBC's President and chief executive officer, Lorenzo Tan, said he was unaware of the



Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman who resigned yesterday gestures as he speaks during a press conference in Dhaka

alleged money laundering and refused to answer many questions, invoking bank secrecy, irritating committee chairman Sen. Teofisto Guingona III.

"This was stolen and a foreign government is asking us to help them," Guingona said, asking the RCBC officers why the funds were withdrawn up to Feb. 9 when the Bangladesh Bank already alerted RCBC and asked for a stop payment on Feb. 8.

Guingona later told reporters it was clear there was a conspiracy but it was not clear at what level. He said it probably could not have happened if casinos were covered by the country's

anti-money laundering law.

"The trail ends at the casinos, call it a black hole," he added.

Bangladesh Ambassador John Gomes, who observed the hearing, said he was satisfied with the investigation and that he would request he be allowed to also observe closed-door, executive sessions.

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

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

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

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

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

THAILAND

Court begins major human trafficking trial



Prisoners are escorted by Thai correction officers from a bus to the Criminal Court on their arrival in Bangkok

after his findings implicated "influential people" in Thailand who wanted to silence him. Paween said he was too afraid to

return to Thailand and planned to seek political asylum in Australia.

Several high-ranking officials were charged,

including Lt. Gen. Manas Kongpaen, a senior army officer who was based in southern Thailand, several policemen, a powerful provincial mayor and local politicians. The 92 defendants have been charged with human trafficking and a variety of other charges. All have pleaded not guilty.

They were led into Bangkok's Criminal Court in prison uniforms and were shackled at their ankles.

Human rights groups have long accused Thai authorities of collusion in the trafficking industry, but officials have routinely denied the claims.

A sweeping investigation was launched after 36 bodies, believed to be migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh, were exhumed from abandoned jungle camps near the Thai-Malaysian border last May.

The first witness yesterday was a Rohingya man, whose name was not disclosed to the media, who said he was trafficked from Rakhine state in western Myanmar. He said a broker approached him several times offering construction work and a better future in Malaysia. He said the broker told him he would travel

on a big boat and have a private room with TV, air-conditioning and three meals a day. Once on the boat he found 270 people crammed on board, strict rules that barred walking around and constant surveillance by guards armed with rifles. During a two-week boat journey, he said, he was served one meal a day of rice with a single chilli.

In addition to those charged, dozens of police officers in southern provinces were removed from their posts and investigated for possible involvement in trafficking syndicates. **AP**



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Michael Weissenstein, Washington

USA

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

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

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

Yesterday's action is the fifth round of measures aimed at punching holes in the embargo on Cuba through executive action while Congress leaves the embargo itself in place. More than a year after Obama and President Raul Castro announced the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, U.S. companies can now manufacture goods in Cuba, export to the Cuban government and fly regularly scheduled flights

Obama administration loosens rules on Cuba travel, dollar



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

to Cuba. The Starwood hotel chain says it soon expects to get U.S. approval to manage hotels in Cuba.

"Today's steps build on the actions of the last 15 months

as we continue to break down economic barriers, empower the Cuban people and advance their financial freedoms, and chart a new course in U.S.-Cuba relations," Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew said.

Rather than swiftly responding to Obama administration measures with matching openings in Cuba's state-controlled economy, the Castro

government has moved slowly enough to raise questions about whether there will be significant trade between the two countries before Obama leaves office.

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

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

Washington to block oil drilling in Atlantic

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

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell made the announcement yesterday on Twitter, declaring that the administration's next five-year offshore drilling plan "protects

the Atlantic for future generations."

The announcement reverses a proposal made last year in which the administration floated a plan that would have opened up a broad swath of the Atlantic Coast to drilling. The January 2015 proposal would have opened up sites more

than 80 kilometers off Virginia, North and South Carolina and Georgia to oil drilling no earlier than 2021.

The Interior Department said the latest decision responds to strong local opposition and conflicts with competing commercial and military ocean uses. **AP**

TURKEY

Military says 45 Kurdish rebels killed in air strikes

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

Turkish F-16 and F4 jets struck Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, positions across the border in Iraq on Monday, a day after the attack which killed 37 people and wounded dozens of others. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the Ankara attack, which authorities say was carried out by a female bomber and a possible male accomplice. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davuto-



A friend of Mehmet Alan, 29, killed in Sunday's explosion in Ankara, cries over his Turkish flag-draped coffin, during the funeral procession at Fatih Mosque in Istanbul

glu said there were "almost certain" indications that the PKK carried out the attack.

The attack escalated tensions with the Kurds and further complicated Turkey's place in the region as it battles a host of enemies across its bor-

ders including the Syrian government, Kurdish rebels in both Iraq and Syria, and the Islamic State group. Turkey also has been forced to absorb 2.7 million refugees from the conflict.

Authorities yesterday declared a curfew in

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

Turkey this week also declared 24-hour curfews and launched large-scale operations against Kurdish militants in the towns of Nusaybin and Yuksekova and the city of Sirnak, in the mostly Kurdish southeast region.

Police meanwhile pressed ahead with a security sweep across Turkey, detaining 55 people suspected of being members of a

group that is considered the youth wing of the PKK in six provinces, Anadolu reported.

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

"They will not be successful," Erdogan said. "They will not bring Turkey to its knees; on the contrary they will be the ones kneeling." He was speaking at a joint news conference with visiting Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev who arrived in Ankara in a show of solidarity.

The military said Monday's air strikes in the Qandil mountains, where the PKK's leadership is based, killed 45 rebels and destroyed two arms

depots and two rocket launcher positions. The claim could not immediately be verified.

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

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

A brief military statement on the issue said: "The claims are untrue." **AP**

what's ON



MACAU ARTS WINDOW – RESTRAINED HUGS
– INSTALLATION BY ELLA LEI
TIME: 10am-7pm
(no admittance after 6:30 pm, closed on Mondays)
UNTIL: April 10, 2016
VENUE: Macau Museum of Art,
Av. Xian Xing Hai, s/n, NAPE
ADMISSION: MOP5
(Free on Sundays and public holidays)
ENQUIRIES: (853) 8791 9814

“GETTING INTO SALON”
– EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKS
BY KONG IU LAM AND HIS STUDENTS
TIME: 9am-10pm (Institute for Tourism Studies,
Colina de Mong-Ha); 12pm-10pm (Educational
restaurant, Institute for Tourism Studies,
Colina de Mong-Ha)
UNTIL: April 30, 2016
ADMISSION: free
ENQUIRIES: (853) 2856 1252

‘WONDERFUL TIME’
– CHEONG SOU MAN ART EXHIBITION
TIME: 10:30am-6:30pm
(Closed on Mondays and public holidays)
UNTIL: May 29, 2015
ADMISSION: Free
VENUE: 10, Calçada da Igreja de S.Lázaro, Macao
ENQUIRIES: (853) 2835 4582

ONE CENTURY OF AUSTRIAN ART 1860-1960
TIME: 10am-7pm
(Closed on Monday, no admission after 6:30 pm)
UNTIL: April 3, 2016
VENUE: Macau Museum of Art,
Av. Xian Xing Hai, s/n, NAPE
ADMISSION: Adult MOP5
(Free admission on Sundays and public holidays)
ENQUIRIES: (853) 8791 9814

MA-BOA / LIS-CAU,
DRAWING AND LITHOGRAPHY EXHIBITION
TIME: 2pm-7pm (Closed on Sundays)
UNTIL: March 19, 2016
VENUE: G/F Macau Cultural Centre Building,
Xian Xing Hai Avenue, Macau.
Free Admission
ENQUIRIES: (853) 2875 3282

**“HEART CARVING - XUE YIHAN’S SCENES
OF MACAU PRINTMAKING EXHIBITION”**
TIME: 12pm-8pm (Tuesdays to Sundays); 3pm-8pm
(Mondays, open on public holidays)
UNTIL: April 22, 2016
VENUE: Albergue SCM – A2 Gallery, Calçada da
Igreja de São Lázaro No.8, Macau Gallery A2
ADMISSION: Free
ENQUIRIES: (853) 2852 2550 / 2852 3205

Offbeat

**ETISALAT REMOVES ICONIC BUILDING
‘GOLF BALLS’ AFTER STORM**

The iconic “golf balls” on Etisalat buildings are coming down.

The Emirati telecommunications company has taken down the spheres atop their buildings at their headquarters in Abu Dhabi and in Dubai.

The move came after a major thunderstorm struck the United Arab Emirates last week, bringing strong winds and rainfall that caused flooding.

The state-run WAM news agency reported late Friday that the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority asked Etisalat to remove the sphere from its Abu Dhabi headquarters as it was “severely damaged by strong winds.”

Etisalat is one of two telecommunications companies in the UAE. It is 60 percent government-owned and opened its shares to foreign investors in September.

TV canal macau

13:30	News (RTPi) Delayed Broadcast
14:30	RTPi Live
18:10	Trail of Lies (Repeated)
19:00	TDM Entrevue (Repeated)
19:30	Non-Daily Portuguese News (Repeated)
19:35	Soap Opera
20:30	Main News, Financial & Weather Report
21:00	Montra do Lilau
21:30	Criminal Minds Sr.9
22:10	Trail of Lies
23:00	TDM News
23:30	Champions League Highlights
23:50	Drama
00:40	Main News, Financial & Weather Report (Repeated)

cinema

CINETEATRO

10 MAR - 16 MAR

GODS OF EGYPT_

ROOM 1

2.30, 4.45, 9.30 pm

Director: Alex Proyas

Starring: Brenton Thwaites, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, Gerard Butler

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 127min

MERMAID_

ROOM 1

7.30 pm

Director: Stephen Chau

Starring: Deng Chao, Show Lo, Zhang Yu Qi

Language: Cantonese (Cantonese/English)

Duration: 92min



THE DIVERGENT SERIES: ALLEGIANT_

ROOM 2

2.30, 4.45, 7.15, 9.30 pm

Director: Robert Schwentke

Starring: Shailene Woodley, Theo James, Jeff Daniels, Naomi Watts

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 120min

LONDON HAS FALLING_

ROOM 3

(10-11, 13-16 Mar) 2.15, 4.00, 5.45, 9.45 pm

Director: Babak Najafi

Starring: Gerard Butler, Aaron Eckhart,

Morgan Freeman

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 99min

THE ROOM_

ROOM 3

7.30 pm

Director: Lenny Abrahamson

Starring: Brie Larson, Jacob Tremblay, Sean Bridgers

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 118min

MACAU TOWER

03 MAR - 23 MAR

GODS OF EGYPT_

2.30, 4.45, 7.15, 9.30 pm

Director: Alex Proyas

Starring: Brenton Thwaites, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau,

Gerard Butler

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 127min

this day in history

**1953 MARSHAL TITO MAKES
HISTORIC VISIT TO LONDON**

Marshal Josef Tito of Yugoslavia has arrived in Britain, the first Communist head of state to visit the country.

The Duke of Edinburgh, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden greeted him at Westminster at the start of his five-day visit.

He arrived by sea from Yugoslavia in the naval vessel Galeb (Seagull). He was then brought up river under Royal Navy escort.

Marshal Tito was invited to Britain last September by Mr Eden who was visiting Yugoslavia to strengthen ties between the two nations.

Talks this week are expected to centre on the aftermath of the recent death of Josef Stalin, who expelled Yugoslavia from the Cominform group of communist nations in 1948 for failing to adhere to Soviet policies.

Since that time Yugoslavia has come to rely on Western aid for certain foods and armaments.

They will also discuss ways of achieving a solution to the problem of the disputed region of Trieste, whose administration was divided last year between the United Nations and Yugoslavia.

Security was tight as the occasion has been marked by a great deal of controversy, especially among those Yugoslav exiles who regard Marshal Tito as a dictator.

Spectators were kept well away from the River Thames embankment where the marshal disembarked this afternoon.

He shook hands with the Duke and made a short speech in faltering English greeting the people of Britain and expressing hope of mutual co-operation, understanding and peace.

“I wish to assure the peoples of Great Britain that they should consider the people of my country as their staunch allies because the people of the new Yugoslavia are striving towards the same ends as the people of Great Britain,” he said.

He then inspected the Guard of Honour and was taken in a bullet-proof car escorted by police motorcyclists to Downing Street.

Later in the afternoon he laid a wreath at the Cenotaph and saluted Britain’s war dead.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Marshall Josef Tito formed Communist Yugoslavia in 1945. He maintained Yugoslavia’s independence from the USSR and developed his own form of communism with power decentralised to workers’ councils.

He dealt with nationalist aspirations by creating a federation of six republics: Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia.

But ethnic tensions were never far from the surface. Although the federation held together for 10 years after Tito’s death in 1980, it fell apart rapidly after Slovenia’s declaration of independence.

In 1954 the city of Trieste in the so-called Free Territory of Trieste and the northern zone of the region were returned to Italy. The rest of the area became part of Yugoslavia.

YOUR STARS

Aries Mar. 21-Apr. 19
If you believe in yourself, all things are possible...

Taurus April 20-May 20
You are emotionally centered today - so much so that you may finally decide to confront that one friend or family member over their recent behavior...

Gemini May 21-Jun. 21
Your people are making life more difficult for you - can't they see that things are already tough enough?...

Cancer Jun. 22-Jul. 22
This day is either a 1 or a 10 - there's not much room in between! You may find that you've got to just hunker down and wait for tomorrow...

Leo Jul. 23-Aug. 22
You are enthusiastic about your new commitment to health, be it through exercise, diet, meditation or something unique to you...

Virgo Aug. 23-Sept. 22
Your fun-loving ways are making people even happier to be around you, and you should find that socializing is its own reward...

Libra Sep.23-Oct. 22
Delve into your history - but try not to live there! You need to dredge up the past a little in order to make sense of a problem that faces you in the here and now...

Scorpio Oct. 23 - Nov. 21
You need to put some of those killer ideas into practice today - otherwise, you may not have the right kind of energy to get started for another month or more!

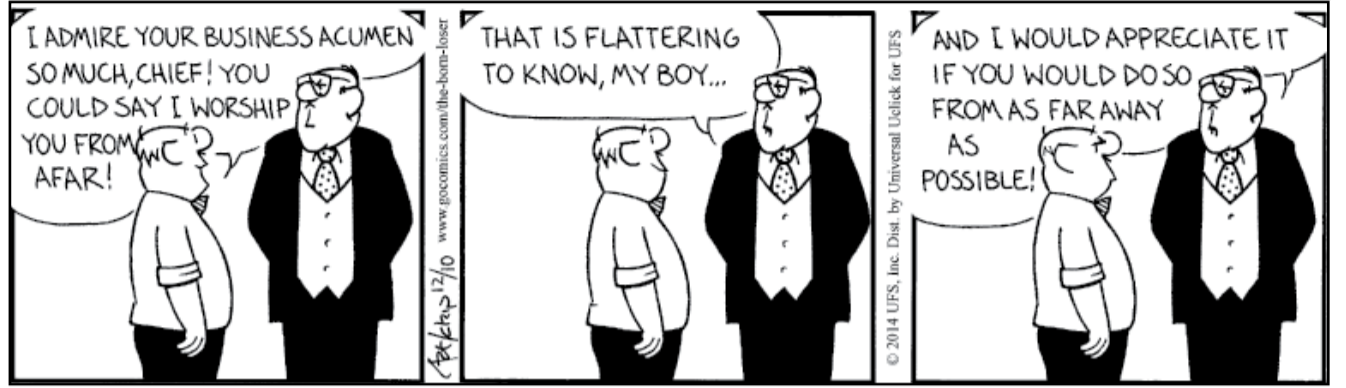
Sagittarius Nov. 22-Dec. 21
It's a good time for reflection - your energy is turned inward somewhat, and you may find that you're starting to question one or more core values...

Capricorn Dec. 22-Jan. 19
You are feeling quite energetic today - which means you could get a lot done, or you could just enjoy yourself and party all night long...

Aquarius Jan. 20-Feb. 18
You feel more exhausted than you should - but it's not a sign of illness or anything else. You're just at a low-point of personal energy...

Pisces Feb.19-Mar. 20
You're part of a bigger system, and you should find that everyone that's part of it has something to add today. It's a good idea to ask for help, but also to offer it whenever you're asked.

THE BORN LOSER by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

Easy

9x9 grid for Easy Sudoku puzzle.

Easy+

9x9 grid for Easy+ Sudoku puzzle.

Medium

9x9 grid for Medium Sudoku puzzle.

Hard

9x9 grid for Hard Sudoku puzzle.

WEATHER

Weather forecast table with columns for MIN, MAX, and CONDITION for various cities in CHINA and WORLD.

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Stupid; 5- Ring out; 9- Short literary composition; 14- Hurler Hershisser; 15- Without purpose; 16- Swiftly; 17- Poi source; 18- Fulda tributary; 19- The devil; 20- Lightning; 23- Trauma ctrs.; 24- Peer Gynt's mother; 25- Carbonized fuel; 27- Belle or Bart; 31- Do the crawl; 33- Salinger girl; 37- "Gunsmoke" star; 39- Trojans' sch.; 40- Inter ___; 41- In spite of; 44- Mower brand; 45- Sigh of satisfaction; 46- Home on the range; 47- Copycat; 48- Hardware fastener; 50- Belgian painter James; 51- Colored; 53- Break off; 55- Siouan speaker; 58- Suggestive; 64- Large motor vehicle; 66- Toward the mouth; 67- Yours, in Tours; 68- Goddesses of the seasons; 69- Chinese dynasty; 70- Sportscaster Albert; 71- Boots; 72- Ferrara family; 73- That's ___!

DOWN: 1- Lavish affection (on); 2- Russian range; 3- Trifling; 4- Voting group; 5- Wharves; 6- Whirls; 7- One of the Baldwin brothers; 8- Lyric poet; 9- Snap course; 10- Hot tub; 11- Overfill; 12- Rent-___; 13- Cravings; 21- Ankle bones; 22- Male domestic feline; 26- Heavy; 27- Vixen's master; 28- Scout unit; 29- Cave; 30- Paraphrase; 32- Chinese martial arts; 34- Minor mistakes; 35- "Exodus" actor Sal; 36- ___ beaver; 38- ___ Island Ferry; 42- Good-looking; 43- I ___ vacation!; 49- Occupant; 52- Omigoshi!; 54- Gentle push; 55- Roman emperor after Galba; 56- Drop ___ (moon); 57- Belonging to us; 59- Coloured part of the eye; 60- Writer Janowitz; 61- Romance lang.; 62- Me neither; 63- Bestow; 65- House pet;



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PJ (Open line) 993
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Electricity - Report 28 339 922
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OLYMPICS

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

Stephen Wilson, London

THEY'VE fled war and violence in the Middle East and Africa. They've crossed treacherous seas in small dinghies and lived in dusty refugee camps.

They include a teenage swimmer from Syria, long-distance runners from South Sudan and judo and taekwondo competitors from Congo, Iran and Iraq.

They are striving to achieve a common goal: To compete in the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Not for their home countries, but as part of the first ever team of refugee athletes.

A group of 43 displaced men and women, who range in age from 17 to 30 and have escaped conflicts in their homelands, are being considered for selection to the team called "Refugee Olympic Athletes."

Prompted by the plight of millions of migrants and refugees across the world, the International Olympic Committee is creating a small team of refugees who will compete in Rio under the Olympic flag.

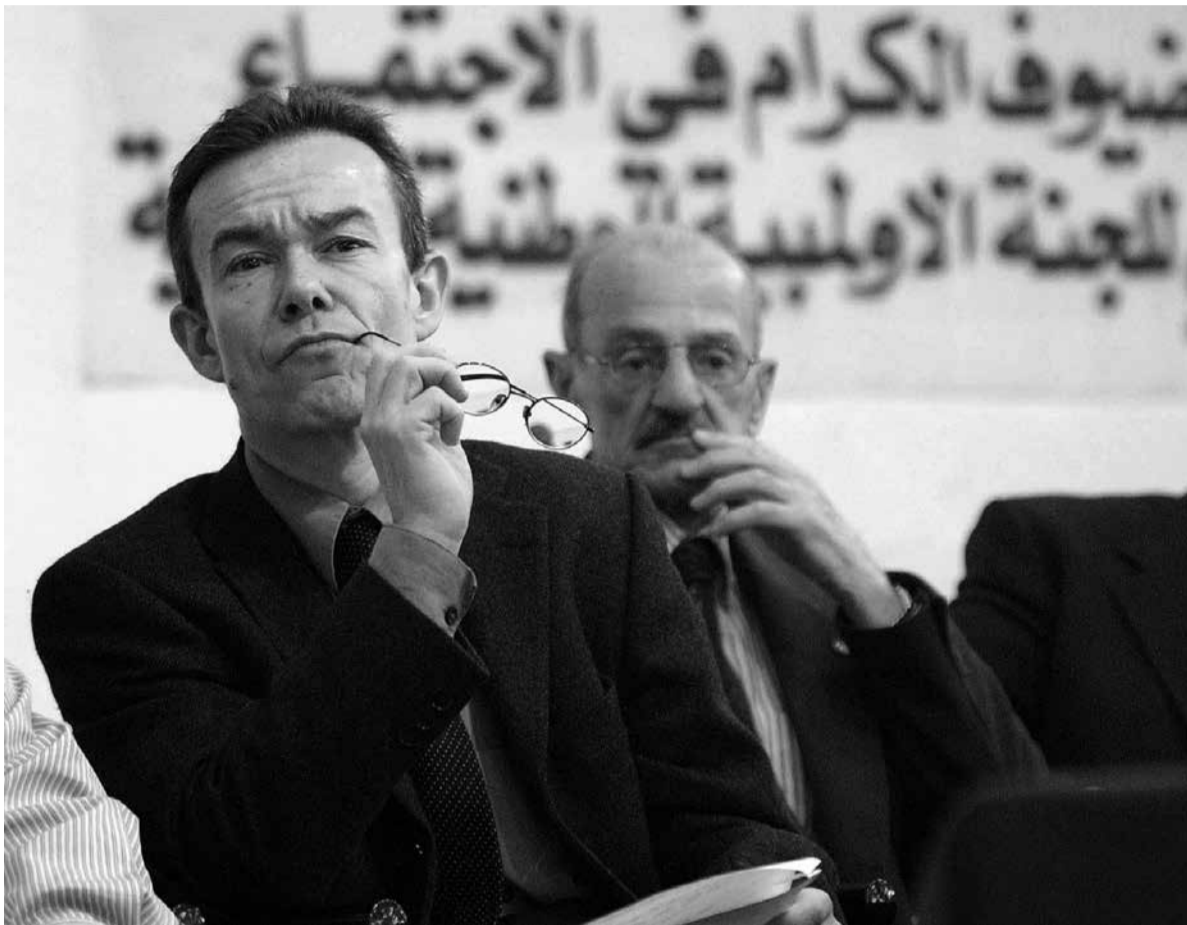
In what will surely be one of the emotional highlights of the opening ceremony, the team will march together into the Maracana Stadium on Aug. 5 behind the white flag with the five Olympic rings. They will walk in just ahead of the team from Brazil, the host nation that marches last among the 206 national Olympic committees in the athletes' parade.

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

The plan was first announced by the IOC at the United Nations last October amid the still-continuing influx of migrants and refugees, many from Syria, into Europe. The IOC set up a USD million fund for refugees and asked national Olympic committees to identify any displaced athletes in their countries who might be able to reach Olympic standard.

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

AP PHOTO



Pere Miro (left) of the International Olympic Committee, as he watches the counting of the ballots during the election of the National Olympic Committee of Iraq, in Dukan

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

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

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

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

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

Mardini and her older sister, Sarah, were on an inflatable boat with other refugees

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

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

Asemani left Iran in 2012 for reasons she has not disclosed and arrived in Belgium, where she works for the postal service and trains with Belgium's national taekwondo team. Fighting under the World Taekwondo Federation flag at the European Olympic qualifying tournament in Istanbul, she clinched a spot for the Rio Games. It's possible she could compete for Belgium if she is granted citizenship.

"It has been such a hard journey. I was lost," Asemani said

on the WTF website. "Many times in my head I thought it would not happen because of politics, visa problems, lack of money and I couldn't travel to [many] ranking events. ... Rio is a dream for me. Hope has carried me to the Olympics. Now I will give all I have to win."

Misenga and Yolande Mabika fled Congo three years ago and sought asylum in Brazil during the 2013 world judo championships in Rio. They have been training with the Brazilian judo federation.

"I've seen too much war, too much death," Misenga told The Guardian newspaper. "I want to stay clean so I can do my sport. I represent everyone. I'll get a medal for all refugees."

The largest number of potential Olympic athletes was drawn from the Kakuma refugee camp in northwestern Kenya, about 55 miles (90 kilometers) from the border with South Sudan, a five-year-old country that has been wracked by civil war since 2013. Tens of thousands have died and at least 2 million people have been displaced from their homes.

The sprawling Kakuma camp houses about 180,000 refugees, mainly from South Sudan, but also from Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Eritrea and Uganda.

■ 43 displaced athletes, who range in age from 17 to 30 and have escaped conflicts in their homelands, are being considered for selection to the team called 'Refugee Olympic Athletes'

"I was touched in seeing how the people live in this camp," said Miro, who traveled to Kakuma in January. "It's in the middle of nowhere. They have nothing to do. The main activity that keeps them motivated and alive is sport."

Tegla Loroupe, the former Kenyan world record-holder in the women's marathon, went to the Kakuma camp to hold tryouts and identify the most talented runners. Twenty-three were selected and transferred to Loroupe's training center near Nairobi.

Speaking to the AP by telephone yesterday from the center, Loroupe said the athletes include an 800-meter runner, a marathoner and several 5,000- and 10,000-meter athletes. She said she expects eight to qualify for the Olympics and will accompany them to Rio for the occasion.

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

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

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

opinion

Made in Macao
 Jenny Lao-Phillips



VILLAIN HITTING

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

Jingzhe, meaning awakening and hibernation, refers to the time when insects and animals wake from hibernation and start searching for food. One story of the origin of ‘hitting the little man’ comes from the practice of sending away the mythical tiger, Bai Hu 白虎. In the agricultural society of ancient China, there was a belief that during Jingzhe, Bai Hu would awake and attack people. To prevent it from hurting the villagers, senior members would make paper tigers and drop pig’s blood on them, sometimes adding a slice of pork, to send the tiger away. Later, instead of sending Bai Hu away, people started using this ritual to send away people whom they considered as having brought bad luck to their lives by hitting a man-shaped paper.

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

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

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

According to an article about a “villain hitting service provider” in Hong Kong years ago, most customers do not have anyone specific in mind. It’s just a practice for good luck. But there are often women who bring photos of other women for hitting, usually ‘rivals in love’, hoping that the ritual will make their men return to them.

So this tradition, be it for bringing good luck or casting away people who have brought us bad luck, has evolved into some voodoo love spell we see in witches’ stories. But whatever the intention, just be careful what you wish for before you try ‘hitting the little man’.

THE CHINESE COMPANY TO RESUME WORK ON SRI LANKAN PORT CITY

A Chinese company said yesterday it will resume construction of a USD1.5 billion port city project in Sri Lanka, about a year after it was suspended because of questions about its environmental impact.

CHEC Port City Colombo said it welcomed the Sri Lankan government’s decision to allow

the project to continue.

The city is to be built on reclaimed land off Sri Lanka’s west coast and include a golf course, marinas, apartments, hotels and malls.

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

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

AP PHOTO



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

Jon Gambrell, Dubai

The 500-year-old wreckage of Portuguese ship piloted by an uncle of explorer Vasco da Gama has been found off the coast of Oman, archaeologists said yesterday, a discovery that included the recovery of an incredibly rare coin.

The Esmeralda sank during a violent storm near al-Hallaniyah Island in the Indian Ocean in May 1503, killing commander Vicente Sodre and all those aboard.

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

da Gama’s second voyage to India.

“The bay where the site is located was almost a perfect geographical match for where the ships’ [the Esmeralda and the São Pedro, another ship in the fleet] wrecked,” the study says.

Among the stone shot, ceramics, a bell and other debris, divers discovered an incredibly rare silver coin

called an Indio, of which only one other is known to exist today, said David L. Mearns, the director of Blue Water Recoveries. The coins were forged in 1499 after da Gama’s first voyage to India, which helps date the wreckage, he said.

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

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

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

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

AP PHOTO



Divers excavate the wreck site

AP PHOTO



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

Station	Air quality
Roadside	50-70 Moderate
High Density Residential Area	50-70 Moderate
Ambient	50-70 Moderate

SOURCE: DSMG

WORLD BRIEFS

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

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

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

AP PHOTO



USA In a major reversal, the Obama administration says it will not allow oil drilling in the Atlantic Ocean. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell (pictured) made the announcement yesterday on Twitter, declaring that the administration’s next five-year offshore drilling plan “protects the Atlantic for future generations.” **More on p15**

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

EUROPEAN UNION leaders will boost support to Greece so that thousands of migrants can be sent from there back to Turkey under a planned deal being thrashed out with Ankara. In a draft text prepared for their summit, EU leaders promise to use “all means to support the capacity of Greece for the return of irregular migrants to Turkey.”