



### CHEONG U AWARDED WITH 'GOLDEN LOTUS'

The decorations, medals and certificates of merit for 2016 were announced yesterday

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### FATHER OF INJURED BOY WINS CASE AGAINST GOV'T

A boy suffered a severe injury when playing at the at Hac Sa beach. The ensuing legal case is now concluded

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### MASS KILLING REPORTED IN ALEPPO

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"THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'"

## WORLD BRIEFS



**US** Donald Trump's choice to lead the country's foreign policy is known for his longstanding support of free trade, international law and an expansive presence in the Middle East that doesn't fit with Trump's pitch to supporters. ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson also is known for his Russia connections and would be Trump's most concrete outreach yet to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

**CHINA's** foreign minister warned that any moves to damage Beijing's core interests will be self-detrimental after U.S. President-elect Donald Trump said he could use the way in which America deals with Taiwan as a bargaining chip. [More on p9](#)



**HONG KONG** Billionaire Edwin Leong, one of Hong Kong's largest retail landlords, got around Hong Kong's new property curbs and saved almost USD17 million on his tax bill. [More on p10](#)

**SOUTH KOREA's** conservative ruling party is on the verge of a split following President Park Geun-hye's parliamentary impeachment last week. [More on p13](#)

**PHILIPPINES** Abu Sayyaf gunmen have freed two Indonesian tugboat crewmen kidnapped by the ransom-seeking militants six months ago and held in the jungles of the southern Philippines.

More on backpage

## IFFAM

# 'The Winter' wins best film, festival concludes

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## Ronaldo voted top footballer for 4th time

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## DECORATIONS

# Cheong U awarded with 'Golden Lotus'



Cheong U

THE decorations, medals and certificates of merit for 2016 were announced yesterday. Thirty-six individuals and organizations were awarded.

Former Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Cheong U and NPC Macau delegate Lei Pui Lam both received the "Decoration of Honor – Gol-

den Lotus," the highest award under the MSAR honors and awards system.

Kou Hoi In and Van Kuan Lok both received the "Decoration of Honor – Silver Lotus."

Among other award recipients, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) head Helena de Senna Fernandes

won the "Medal of Merit – Tourism," while the "Medal of Merit – Professions" went to the Identification Bureau. In the field of education, the medals of merit went to Leong Lai and the University of Macau.

Veteran artist Mio Pang Fei and the Macau Artist Society both received the "Medal of Merit – Culture".

## IPIM and DSPA promote 2017 MIECF in Portugal and Beijing

DELEGATES from the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) and the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) – the host coordinators of the event – organized a series of activities to promote the 2017 Macao International Environmental Cooperation Forum and Exhibition (MIECF) to the mainland and overseas environmental protection industries.

According to a statement issued by IPIM the two entities visited Portugal and Beijing earlier this month to organize such events in a bid to enhance the exhibition's effectiveness.

The 2017 MIECF will be held in the region from March 30 to April 1, 2017, under the theme "Innovative Green Development for Sustainable Future."

During the visit to Portugal, a 2017 MIECF promotional seminar was held at the Macao Economic and Trade Office in Lisbon.

The statement noted that a number of networking activities were organized to strengthen the publicity of MIECF in Portugal. Secretary for Economy and Finance Leong Vai



Tac, as well as representatives from various trade, economic and environmental protection associations in Portugal attended and participated in these activities.

IPIM also organized the MIECF roadshow activities in Matosinhos and visited environmental protection enterprises and invited them to participate in the event.

The Portugal section of the project commenced this year with the immediate objectives of collaborating in order to effectively access the mainland market and to invest in environmental technology transfer.

Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2017, MIECF aims to promote Macau as a co-operation and networking platform between the EU, China and Portuguese Speaking Countries.

### LEGAL WISE BY MdME

Liliana Faria\*



## THE KEY TO ATTRACT INVESTMENT? GOOD CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

There was never a time when transparency and good corporate governance practices were more spoken of in Macau; the outcome of the recent launch of the Macau Corporate Governance Institute (MCGI). Good and transparent corporate governance practices have long been a concern for our neighbours in Hong Kong, which is now acclaimed as a benchmark and an example to follow.

One of the ways of achieving better corporate transparency is listing on a reputable stock market. Despite the fact that the stock market will always primarily serve to raise capital, the stringent listing requirements certainly lead any corporation to increase their level of disclosure and compliance activity.

Paradoxically enough, Macau is not included in the list of acceptable overseas jurisdictions that the Hong Kong Stock Exchange (HKEx) formally considers to be acceptable as an issuer's place of incorporation is based upon an assessment of each jurisdic-

tion's level of shareholder protection and – of course – corporate governance standards.

So, why is corporate transparency so important? It profoundly affects the market value and creditworthiness of any corporation. In the corporate world, there is no such thing as too much information. Ask investors or bankers what kind of information they want companies to disclose and the answer will most probably be "more and better". Investors often steer clear of companies that lack transparency in their commercial operations, financial statements or business strategies, as they represent riskier and potentially less valuable investments. Hence the importance of creating standardized efficient control mechanisms and more transparent and responsible corporate management, ensuring that directors, supervisors and managers of companies are held properly accountable to their shareholders (all of them, including minority shareholders). This is particularly crucial for Macau SMEs: with an increasing

number of start-ups and entrepreneurs looking for funding and investment in Macau, it is crucial to create awareness of the importance of good corporate governance as a means of increasing the attractiveness of their businesses and lowering the risk for investors.

The MCGI's first announced objective is the organisation of a conference focused on corporate governance practices in Hong Kong with a view to preparing a general proposal to be presented to the Macau Government with the aim of improving local corporate governance. Training is one of the many aspects in which the MCGI could also be involved: it is important that directors thoroughly understand their Macau specific duties and obligations – made accessible to them in a clear and concise manner – so as to earn the confidence of shareholders and investors.

Legal professionals, members of corporate bodies, prospective investors, fund managers and bankers certainly await with

expectation the results of MCGI's efforts, especially at a time when cross-continent mergers and acquisitions have become commonplace and the trading of stocks has assumed an international dimension. We hope that more and more professionals and companies of all sectors and industries collaborate towards the creation of a benchmark that can later be translated into guidelines and, finally, a code. Also, we hope that future initiatives and proposals come with an understanding that the Asian market is influenced by characteristics that set it apart from the markets in Europe and North America, and that such unique characteristics are respected on the road to their implementation and enforcement.

Good corporate governance should be a shared concern and facilitated by governmental entities, professionals and businesspeople alike; it is proven to benefit each and every market player, and enhances the economic welfare and image of sophistication of a jurisdiction. With this, we hope to finally see Macau joining the list of acceptable overseas jurisdictions for listing with the HKEx soon and, when that happens, Macau corporations can look for endless new sources of funding and investment.

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IFFAM

# Jury announces winners, festival closes



Emiliano Torres (center), director of "The Winter"

Daniel Beittler

**T**HE six-day International Film Festival & Awards – Macau (IFFAM) came to a close last night with the five-member international jury announcing the 10 awards bestowed on the Competition films.

Among others, the Best Film award went to "The Winter", Best Director to Marco Martins for "Saint George" and Best Actor to Nuno Lopes for his role in the same film, and Best Actress to Lyndsey Marshal for her part in "Trespass Against Us".

At a press conference after the award ceremony, four of the five-member international jury panel shared their thoughts on the winning Competition films and the decisions they had collectively reached. Last night's panel was comprised of Japan's Makiko Watanabe, Hong Kong's Stanley Kwan, Giovanni Fulvi from Italy, and jury president Shekhar Kapur.

Festival organizers had instructed

## SHORTS ONLINE VOTING DISPUTED

**ACCORDING TO** a statement from the organizers, a dispute over the voting process for the Macao Short Film Competition Award has meant that the announcement of the winner and the subsequent award presentation will be

delayed until further notice. "The online Organizing Committee will look into the matter with the Selection Committee in order to ensure a fair competition," the statement read. The poll was due to close at 11:59 p.m. on Monday night.

jury members that no one film was to be awarded more than one accolade. However, the jury decided to ignore the instruction and to grant the 10 awards to whichever of the 12 competing films they saw fit.

Portuguese-language film "Saint George", directed by Marco Martins, was awarded twice, receiving the Best Actor (Nuno Lopes) and Best Director (Marco Martins) awards. "The film was so strong for me and the actors [conveyed] such emotion," said Japan's Makiko Watanabe about the film. "I felt something in the story... the film gave me something that sank in."

Jennifer Yu, who plays Kay in local production "Sisterhood", directed by Tracy Choi, was the recipient of the Best Young New Actress award, while the Best Actress award went to Meanwhile, "The Winter", directed by Argentinian filmmaker Emiliano Torres, was also highly praised by the jury during the press conference, receiving Best Film. "I think we as a jury responded to the minimalism of the film," said Kapur, "and in that minimalism we found ourselves deeply immersed within the story."

"The film is gorgeous; every single frame is a perfect frame [...] and the acting was excellent," added Fulvi. "There was also an impending sense of danger that really unsettled me... I had a very emotional reaction to the film."

"Of all the competition films, [The Winter] had the least dialogue and the least [prominent] plotline," said Kwan, "but cinema allows us to have the imagination to fill in what the film is trying to tell us. The Winter managed to do this amazingly."

Kapur commented on how difficult the decisions had been, with the various jury members challenging each other on which films deserved the 10 awards up for grab.

"It has been a hard fight," he said last night. "As the chairman I had to stop the jury members [from] 'beating each other up.' What that means is that the films were really good, because otherwise you don't feel that passionate about them."

"My only request to my fellow jury [members] was look at the films emotionally. Yes, you have a mind, but you also have a heart. And you're in Asia and Asia is all about the heart," he explained, before assessing that "that was a mistake, because they did open their hearts and then I was in trouble!"

## Kapur 'surprised' by festival's success



Shekhar Kapur

**S**PEAKING to media on the red carpet ahead of the IFFAM award ceremony, jury president Shekhar Kapur said that the festival had been largely successful. Kapur also made suggestions for how the festival might develop in future years.

"A film festival is a festival and that means it needs to be festive. Filmmakers the world over need to come

to the festival and enjoy themselves, so gradually there will be other things that are added [to the next IFFAM] – not just films but [also] discussion groups," said Kapur. "I think [the second edition of IFFAM] should expand and add more ideas and [activities] for filmmakers from China, the rest of Asia and all around the world."

"I see Macau as an incredible opportunity," he added.

Kapur also made clear that he thought "the people who [organized the festival] this year were fantastic. They did a great job [and] I was surprised by how good it was."

On the other hand, he said, a replacement for Marco Müller will be necessary. "We need somebody who is experienced and has relationships with international filmmakers. Whoever takes over next time to select the films will have a difficult job on their hands," said Kapur. "But it's always difficult... it's never easy."



Director Tracy Choi (forward, center) of the film "Sisterhood"



Guests and winners of the competition section give a toast on stage



From left: Charlene Choi, Erica Li and Michelle Wai at the red carpet



Jennifer Yu was the "Best Young New Actress" award winner



Marco Martins, winner of the "Best Director" award



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Lynzy Valles

**T**HE father of a boy who suffered a severe injury at Hac Sa beach in 2012 recently won the court case he filed against the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau (IACM).

Keith Lawson recalled to the Times that his son Thomas Lawson (Tommy) had been playing at the beach. His child, who was then eight years old, had jumped onto the sand, which was concealing a concrete block with four pieces of rebar sticking up.

As the Times reported previously, one of the metal spikes went straight through his foot to protrude above his ankle.

Lawson suggested that the metal rod was part of the debris left behind on the beach by government employees or contractors, presumably after the demolition of the old structures whilst the new sea wall was being erected at Hac Sa.

After the accident, the father contacted the IACM to inform them of the incident and hoped they would inspect the area.

As there are limited playgrounds in the territory, Lawson was worried that it could also happen to other children who play at the beach, which led him to report the incident to the IACM. "As sort of public duty, we [asked] IACM [if] they're going to take responsibility and clean up the beach, at which the reply was no, they're not going to," he told the Times.

Lawson clarified that he informed the government entity they would be forced to take it to court if no action was taken – to which the IACM allegedly did not respond.

The court case began in 2014 and the verdict was given two years later. The court found in favor of the father and awarded him approximately MOP80,000 along with the reimbursement of his son's medical bills, which amounted to approximately MOP1,500. The compensation was collected on November 14.

"We have said that whatever monies left over from what we're awarded, and after legal costs, we will give the balance to charity," he explained.

According to Lawson, his son decided to donate the remaining amount of money (after deducting the court fees) to the Fountain of Hope Association, a community for orphans and children in care.

He added that their retained law firm would also donate part of their legal fees to the charity, to demonstrate that the legal action they took was

# Father of injured boy wins case against gov't



Thomas Lawson being assisted at the hospital



The place where the incident occurred

**This is a matter of public safety and our belief is that the government is here to provide safe infrastructure for the people.**

KEITH LAWSON

not for profit but for public safety.

When questioned about his initial reaction on the IACM's alleged non-action, Lawson said it was a feeling of "slight disbelief."

"Because this is a matter of public safety and our belief is that the government is here to provide safe infrastructure for the people to live and prosper [...] we felt they were hiding behind politics," said Lawson.

"They weren't taking their duty very responsibly. [...] At least we hope that by speaking up and doing something that they would actually cause them to reexamine and take actions on this on the issue of the beach," he stressed.

According to the message that came down to the court, four departments share joint responsibility for the beach.

Lawson emphasized that they had visited the beach in the summer and had still found pieces of rebar and debris beneath the sand. This led him to believe that the government has failed to take the case seriously.

"And for that reason I think it's right to raise the issue again. They may have paid out and may have lost the court case but now what we would like to know is what they're going to do about it," he lamented.

According to Lawson, Tommy suffered psychological damage as he has become wary of taking part in sporting events.

The father cited his belief that the government is capable of providing a safe environ-

ment for its citizens. He commented on how the MSAR is "very overprotective" in many areas in town.

"They seem to take public safety very seriously which is why we can't quite work out why they have not taken this very [case] seriously. It's bit of a puzzle. But I think perhaps maybe it's politics," he said.

Meanwhile, the government is not necessarily obliged by the court to do something about the case as they were only held guilty of incompetence.

"I think the terminology was something like 'incompetent'. They found them guilty of incompetence," Lawson reaffirmed.

He also stressed that Macau's beach is a relatively small area for authorities to keep clean and safe.

"They work for the people [and] that's their job. And I think that sometimes they totally forget about that," he criticized. "If they can't do that, they shouldn't be doing the job. [...] Just do it, clean up and stop acting like it's somebody else's responsibility."

## 26 percent of interviewees intend to change job next year

Twenty six percent of the respondents of a survey conducted by the Macau Management Association plan to change their jobs within one year, because they feel unsatisfied with their current salaries and the welfare programs they are entitled to through their employment. The survey, which comprises of 1,308 valid questionnaires, further indicates that 68 percent of the respondents have worked less than three years in their current jobs. Nearly 70 percent considers the current employment trend to be unsatisfactory. Close to 30 percent of those who work in gaming and hospitality industries and in non-profit organizations expect to change jobs next year, whereas only less than 10 percent of civil servants have similar plans.

## Woman attempts suicide after being required to leave shelter

A 46-year-old female resident, who previously resided in a public shelter in Rua do Asilo, Barro da Ilha Verde, attempted to jump from a building on Monday in order to commit suicide. The woman sat on the railing of the seventh floor of her previous shelter for more than an hour before the police force eventually persuaded her to return to the ground. Prior to her suicide attempt, the woman had been required by her shelter to move out of the premises, after causing disturbances and violating the center's regulations multiple times. The case has been forwarded to the Social Welfare Bureau.

## UM students awarded at business plan competition

Three master's students from the University of Macau Faculty of Business Administration won a silver award at a national inter-varsity business plan competition in the 'Entrepreneurship in Action' category. In addition, the students' business plan was rewarded with a bronze award at another inter-varsity business plan competition in mainland China, as well as the Best Case Study Award at the University Startup World Cup held in Copenhagen, Denmark. The final round of the competition received 399 business plans from 220 universities in mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau. From these, 110 were submitted to the 'Entrepreneurship in Action' category.



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Julie Zhu

# Less drug use recorded in the first half of the year

A total of 374 Macau residents were caught consuming drugs in the first half of this year, eight of whom are under the age of 21, the Narcotics Control Committee announced yesterday after its second plenary meeting of 2016.

According to the committee, the number of drug users decreased 4.6 percent year-on-year, and, most noticeably, drug users under the age of 21 saw a 43.8 percent drop compared to the same period of last year.

The youngest user is 16 years old, while the oldest one is 70 years old. About 18 percent of drug users are women, a slight increase compared to last year's 16.3 percent. Thirty-five percent of drug users took methamphetamine, and 26.1 percent have reported that they have used heroin.

On average, they each spent MOP7,489 on drugs every month, which is a 3.8 percent decrease compared to 2015.

Around 67 percent used drugs in Macau, while 30.2 percent used them in mainland China. Among the youth, only 10 percent used dru-



Judiciary Police agents show apprehended drugs

gs in mainland China.

Most drug users took drugs at home, and 21.7 percent took them at their friends' homes.

As for the reasons behind the drug usage, 30.8 percent said that they used drugs after being influenced by their friends and 26.2 percent said they had sought to relieve pressure.

Almost 90 percent are from Chinese ethnicity, and 47.1 percent are single.

The committee discussed

recent issues regarding the restrictions preventing minors from leaving Macau by themselves.

In relation to the aforementioned restriction, the head of the Department of Prevention and Treatment of Problem Gambling and Drug Dependence of the Social Welfare Bureau, Hoi Va Pou, stated that the committee considered that the amendment of the related law will account for public opinion, and that detailed

plans will only be announced when the government and the public reach a consensus.

Hoi also stated that amendments involving the city's laws regulating drug-related issues will be discussed at the Legislative Assembly (AL) soon.

Once the amendment is passed in the AL, drug dealers, when caught, will be sentenced to jail for a minimum of five years, two more than the current three-year incarceration period. Drug users will face a maximum of one year in jail, compared to the current maximum sentence of three months.

During the meeting, the committee also arranged its schedules for next year.

In 2017, it will assign commissioners to inspect Macau's anti-drug service and facilities, visiting Guangdong to exchange experiences of these matters, as well as to organize their attendance of drug abuse prevention seminars in Hong Kong.

## 'Latin Parade' photo submissions end Dec 23



The submission period for the photography contest "Parade through Macau, Latin City" will close on December 23, according to a statement from the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC). The contest will accept works featuring scenes from the parade, such as performances, artists and activities. The works may be submitted under two categories: "Youth" for residents aged between 13 and 24, and "Public" for residents aged 25 and above. Each category includes prizes for first, second and third places, as well as 10 honorable mention awards. Participants are able to submit up to 10 works before the December 23 deadline. The photography competition is being held "to encourage the public to actively participate in local cultural events," according to the IC statement.

## Live poultry sales halted

Sales of live poultry in Macau are suspended after authorities detected the avian influenza subtype H7 in birds that had been imported yesterday and had not been put to sale yet. According to a statement issued yesterday by the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau, the sales will be halted for at least three days.

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Workers rest during lunch break outside a construction site at the Central Business District in Beijing

## ADB trims growth forecast for Asia due to slowdown in India

**T**HE Asian Development Bank yesterday trimmed its economic growth forecast this year for developing Asia to 5.6 percent.

The revision was slightly below the previous projection of 5.7 percent due to a slight slowdown in India, one of developing Asia's biggest economies. Forecast growth for the entire region next year remains unchanged at 5.7 percent.

ADB said in a report that India's surprise demonetization of large banknotes will likely dampen growth this year to 7 percent from a previous forecast of 7.4 percent. But South Asia is the most dynamic part of the region, with growth expected at 6.6 percent this year, down from the previous

forecast of 6.9 percent. South Asia's growth is estimated at 7.3 percent in 2017.

The report says regional giant China is on course to grow 6.6 percent this year and 6.4 percent in 2017.

East Asia as a whole is seen to expand by 5.8 percent this year and 5.6 percent in 2017 as growth stabilizes in line with earlier forecasts.

The report said growth in the major Southeast Asian economies in the third quarter met projections and even surpassed them in Malaysia and the Philippines. The sub-region is forecast to expand by 4.5 percent in 2016, and picking up to 4.6 percent in 2017.

"Asian economies continue their robust expansion in the face of global economic un-

certainties," said ADB Deputy Chief Economist Juzhong Zhuang. "Structural reforms to boost productivity, improve investment climate, and support domestic demand can help maintain growth momentum."

ADB said the combined growth for the major industrial economies exceeded expectations, ticking up 0.1 percentage point to 1.5 percent in 2016. The growth forecast for 2017 is maintained at 1.8 percent, with robust consumer spending supporting the U.S. economy, and monetary policy and improved labor markets fueling growth in the euro area.

Japan's expansion, meanwhile, will be buoyed by strong exports, despite a stronger currency, the report said. **AP**

## Italy's largest bank to shed USD18.8b in bad loans, cut jobs

**I**TALY'S largest bank, UniCredit, said yesterday it will unload 17.7 billion euros (USD18.8 billion) in soured loans, raise billions in new money and shed thousands of jobs as it seeks to re-launch the company under new management.

The move to reduce the bank's risk profile emerged in a new strategic plan that includes increasing by 6,500 — to 14,000 — the number of jobs it will cut by 2019.

It comes amid broad concerns about Italy's banking system, with speculation that one, Monte dei Paschi di Siena, might need a state bailout before the end of the year. Italy's banks are weighed down by some 360 billion euros in bad loans that won't be repaid due to the weak economy.

UniCredit is the country's biggest by assets and has significant operations outside Italy, particularly in Central Europe, but it too has large amounts of bad loans that are festering on its balance sheets.

CEO Jean Pierre Mustier said the "decisive actions" to dispose of the bad loans seeks "to improve and support recurring future profitability to become one of Europe's most attractive banks."

The strategic plan announcement comes the day after Italy swore in a new government, creating hopes that a renewed period of political stability would help its troubled bank sector to tap investors to improve its capital position.

UniCredit shares were trading up 3 percent at 2.49 euros in Milan after the announcement.

The bank forecast it would make net income of 4.7 billion

euros by the end of the 2016-2019 business plan period and that its Core Tier 1 ratio, which provides a measure of a bank's health, would be above 12.5 percent, from 10.8 percent at the end of the third quarter this year.

The bad loans will be offloaded in two separate transactions in the first half of 2017 to new independent entities in which UniCredit will hold a minority interest.

The bank will book another 8.1 billion euros in provisions in the fourth quarter to cover bad loans, part of a total 12.2 billion euros in one-time charges in the quarter.

The bank is asking shareholders to support a 13 billion capital increase, subject to a shareholder vote on Jan. 12. Under the business plan, shareholders will get no dividends in 2016, but the bank foresees an annual cash payout of 20 percent to 50 percent of earnings for the remaining period of the plan.

Since Mustier took over nearly six months ago, the bank has sold its Polish subsidiary Pekao and the Pioneer investment arm, as well as a 30 percent stake in the Fineco internet banking business.

The plan calls for a focus on its retail and corporate clients in western Europe while strengthening its position in central and eastern Europe. The job cuts will reduce personnel costs by 1.1 billion euros, with total annual cost savings expected at 1.7 billion euros.

At the same time, the bank is investing 1.6 billion in internet technologies through 2019. **AP**

### corporate bits

#### WYNN DONATES MOP500,000 TO TUNG SIN TONG



In response to Tung Sin Tong's annual fundraising campaign, Wynn has made a donation of MOP500,000.

The donation represents the 11th consecutive year that Wynn has supported the charity.

The donations were made in support of the charity's poverty alleviation efforts and its provision of social welfare services.

Wynn said in a statement that it has been participating in various types of charitable activities, with the aim of extending a helping hand to those in need and providing an "ongoing commitment to serving the community."

A cheque presentation ceremony to mark the contribution was held yesterday at Wynn Palace.

Wynn has partnered with Tung Sin Tong since 2006, supporting and offering contributions to local charitable services.

#### MACAU TOWER CELEBRATES 15TH ANNIVERSARY



The Macau Tower held the 15th Anniversary Cocktail Reception yesterday, unveiling a series of promotional offers for visitors.

To commemorate the event,

a special gallery is now open at the Macau Tower, featuring story-telling photos to share with visitors the significant moments that have taken place in the Macau Tower in past

years.

According to a statement released by the Macau Tower, Macau residents can enjoy a special price of MOP15 for an admission ticket to the Observation Decks, while non-local visitors are entitled to a 15 percent discount from today until January 31.

Until December 20, customers of its selected restaurants can enter an instant lucky draw. A total of 15 lucky winners per day will enjoy 85 percent off their bills.

On designated dates, Santa and his helpers will parade through the Tower singing Christmas carols and giving out presents.

Furthermore, an art exhibition featuring works by Takashi Murakami and various artists will be held until January 5.



Christopher Bodeen, Beijing

## ANALYSIS

# Why China sees Taiwan issue as non-negotiable

**P**RESIDENT-ELECT Donald Trump's questioning of long-established U.S. policy toward Taiwan is sparking a growing backlash in China and warnings about a potentially dangerous disruption in relations between the world's two largest economies.

Trump broke diplomatic precedent by talking on the phone with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on Dec. 2. Then, this past weekend, he said he might use America's recognition of Beijing as leverage for gaining advantages in trade and other areas.

That is placing him perilously close to touching on China's bottom line that brooks no formal recognition of Taiwan or challenge to its claim to sovereignty over the island. A look at the highly sensitive issue of Taiwan in China-U.S. relations:

**WHERE THE U.S. STANDS**

A former Japanese colony, Taiwan was taken over at the end of World War II by the Chinese Nationalist forces, who then moved their government to the island after fleeing the mainland in 1949 ahead of the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war. Beijing threatens to use military force to unify with Taiwan.



In this Nov. 10, 2016 file photo, a man reads a newspaper with the headline that reads "U.S. President-elect Donald Trump delivers a mighty shock to America"

Washington, which changed its recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979, technically maintains only unofficial ties with Taiwan, although U.S. law requires the government to ensure that the island has the ability to defend itself and to treat all threats to it as issues of national concern.

The U.S. and China have signed three communiques that guide Washington's approach to Taiwan policy, including acknowledging Beijing's claim to the island and pledging to reduce

weapon sales to Taiwan as long as China takes a peaceful approach to unification.

However, a pair of former officials with the George W. Bush administration, Dan Blumenthal and Randall Schriver, recently argued in favor of re-examining that approach, a move that would deeply unsettle those overseeing relations in both Beijing and Washington.

**WHY IT MATTERS**

China's bottom line is that it will not allow any formal U.S.

recognition of Taiwan's government or a change of position by Washington that would view the island as independent from China. China would likely respond to such a move by severing diplomatic ties and suspending cooperation with the U.S. across a wide range of military, economic and political issues.

Trump's statement is an "act of incredible brinkmanship and hubris — something that threatens some four decades of diplomacy that has preserved peace and promoted prosperity," Boston University China expert Joseph Fewsmith said in an email.

Although Beijing has so far been restrained in its response, should Trump continue on this tack, "China will react, and strongly," Fewsmith said.

China has cut off links with Taiwan's independence-leaning leader since her election in January over her refusal to endorse China's claim that Taiwan and

the mainland are part of a single Chinese nation. The number of Chinese tourists visiting the island has been drastically reduced and China has intervened to prevent Taiwan's participation in international forums ranging from the International Civilian Aviation Organization to world police body Interpol.

**WHAT TO WATCH FOR**

As Trump seeks to carry out campaign promises to rebalance trade with China, Taiwan will serve as an "essential part of the mission," Miles Yu Maochun, an expert on Chinese politics at the U.S. Naval Academy, said in an email.

A re-evaluation of U.S. policy toward Taiwan might not be a bad thing if it more closely aligns with current realities, Yu said. At the time the U.S. broke official ties with Taiwan, the island was ruled by a military dictatorship that insisted it was still the sole representative government of all China. Today, Taiwan stands as a standard bearer for liberal, multi-party democracy.

"The Trump administration is a revolutionary departure from the established system of diplomatic nuances and 'strategic ambiguity,'" Yu said. "As such, it may well ditch the mother of all diplomatic double-talk called 'the One China policy.'" AP

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Frederik Balfour

**H**ERE'S how billionaire Edwin Leong, one of Hong Kong's largest retail landlords, got around Hong Kong's new property curbs and saved almost USD17 million on his tax bill.

He managed to qualify as a first-time homebuyer, purchasing three luxury apartments on the Peak for HKD1.2 billion (\$155 million) on the same day last month. Previously, Leong had held no real estate in his name - despite owning more than 300 other properties, including apartments, hotels and shopping malls, through his company, Tai Hung Fai Enterprises Co., and having an estimated net worth of \$4 billion.

Wealthy buyers are finding legal ways around restrictions designed to cool home prices in the world's least affordable city, where leaders are grappling to shrink a yawning wealth gap. Hong Kong property prices have risen to near-record highs and sales volumes have surged since Chief Executive Leong Chun-ying announced the latest round of curbs on Nov. 4, underscoring the challenges in taming the market.

"Since the policies of C.Y. Leung were introduced, most of the tycoons have been finding ways around them," said Alan Wong, director of the Hong Kong market at Landscape Christie's International Real Estate.

About 70 percent of new apartments sold since last month's measures in Hong Kong have involved first-time buyers who qualified for the lower rate, compared with about 30 percent before the new tax was imposed, said Henry Mok, regional director of markets at Jones Lang LaSalle Inc. The government doesn't publish figures on buyers who purchase multiple homes.

Leong, who announced last week that he would not seek a second term, has been trying to quell discontent over high housing costs, a factor that led to student protests in 2014. The government has tried to increase supply by releasing more land for sale, although prices have continued to climb because of the influx of mainland Chinese developers seeking a foothold in Hong Kong.

Prices in the secondary housing market have risen 0.8 percent since early November to just 1.4 percent below a September 2015 record, according to Centaline Property Agency Ltd. Adrian Cheng, executive vice chairman of New World Development Co., said the company was seeing a higher percentage of first-time buyers than before the new tax.

Apart from the first-time exemption, another method employed by the wealthy involves buying a shell company that owns a property, which is treated

# Billionaires buying first homes skirt Hong Kong curbs



Billionaire Edwin Leong, chairman of Tai Hung Fai Enterprises

as a share transfer and only incurs a stamp duty of 0.2 percent. If the company is registered offshore, the tax is zero.

That's the tactic used in the Nov. 28 sale of a free-standing home with a yard and swimming pool in the Kowloon district that was appraised at HK\$410 million, according to a filing with the Hong Kong stock exchange. If it had been sold as a home rather than through the British Virgin Islands-registered company that holds the property, the sale would have triggered 45 percent in taxes, including a flip tax because it was purchased earlier this year - a total of more than HK\$180 million. Instead, the tax bill will be \$0.

The buyer, China Soft Power Technology Holdings Ltd. whose chairwoman is mainland property developer Lin Yuehe, didn't respond to e-mail and phone requests for comment.

In 2011, more than half of Hong Kong's homes worth more than HK\$20 million were sold via companies, according to government data. Although the practice was virtually halted after the government in 2013 began taxing companies buying properties at higher rates than individuals, thousands of properties are still held in this way and can offer significant tax savings when they are resold.

Wong from Landscape said he gets many requests from foreigners, mostly rich mainland Chinese, looking to buy one of these companies, as they would otherwise face the new 15 percent tax plus an extra 15 percent tax on non-permanent residents. In fact, the property agency's website promotes the practice.

"Beat the stamp duty hike," the site says. "Intimidated by the 15 percent stamp duty? No worries! Our key persons have sourced an array of properties that can be sold via share transfer (of course you will need a lawyer to handle the process)."

Still, because due diligence on the companies can be costly and complicated, only about 5 percent of luxury homes are bought in this way, Landscape's Wong said.

Leong's purchase at the Mount Nicholson development, a mountain-nestled enclave where his units have four marble bathrooms, his and hers walk-in closets, and private elevator lobbies, set a record for the most ever paid per square foot for a property in Asia, according to Jones Lang LaSalle. By being able to pay a lower stamp duty for first-time buyers, Leong saved 10.75 percent in taxes. Leong, though his company, said he liked the "prestigious" address, while declining to comment on the tax savings.

Two of the new apartments

are adjacent units on the 16th floor and could be combined into more than 8,700 square feet of living space for Leong as his principal residence, more

**The government is trying to cool the market, but there is no evidence that previous measures have done that.**

DAVID WEBB

than 10 times the average size of a Hong Kong apartment. The third apartment, measuring 4,566 square feet, is nine floors below and belongs to Leong and his family, his company said.

Last month's new tax is the latest in a series of measures since 2011 aimed at making it easier for low-income families to get onto the property ladder while increasing the costs for investors and foreign buyers. These include a tax that penalizes people who resell within three years and an extra stamp duty of 15 percent for non-per-

manent residents.

The government's new 15 percent stamp duty replaced taxes ranging from 3 percent on homes worth less than HK\$3 million to a maximum of 8.5 percent on those worth more than HK\$21.7 million. The rates are half that for first-time buyers, which includes people who may have owned homes in the past but currently do not.

"This is clearly a loophole," said Raymond Yeung, chief economist at Australia & New Zealand Banking Group Ltd. in Hong Kong. "The government hadn't thought about this before they launched the measure."

Singapore, which has been successful in driving down home prices since rolling out curbs in 2009, also levies a 15 percent tax on foreigners and companies, while first-time homebuyers face lower stamp duties. Singapore and Hong Kong both define a first-time buyer as someone who currently does not own property in their name, regardless of whether they previously owned a home. Unlike Hong Kong, however, Singapore doesn't allow first-time, multiple property purchases at lower rates.

"The government is trying to cool the market, but there is no evidence that previous measures have done that," David Webb, a Hong Kong-based shareholder activist who bought his own home 10 years ago through a company registered in the Seychelles. "There has been a whole series of misguided measures that have not had their intended effect."

A spokesman for the government's Transport and Housing Bureau said the measures are beginning to have an effect.

"More time is required before we can have a better assessment of the impact of the new stamp duty measure on the market," the spokesman, Leo Law, said in a e-mail. "Nevertheless, market intelligence suggested that after the government announced the latest round of measures, the property market has shown signs of cooling down. Trading activities quietened down, and the uptrend in prices also slowed."

Still, nobody's talking about making getting around tax measures more difficult, said Denis Ma, head of Hong Kong research at Jones Lang LaSalle. "These are loopholes that haven't been closed, and I don't think they can be," he said. "Hong Kong prides itself on being a very free market, and government intervention is not very high." **Bloomberg**



## LABOR

# Women migrant numbers high in Thai construction

Dake Kang, Bangkok

**T**HEY toil high on scaffolding, pouring concrete and twisting iron bars. At night, they squeeze into shipping containers with their husbands by the dozens to get some rest.

They are female migrant construction workers, a rarity in most parts of the world, but not in Thailand. The International Labor Organization said in a report released yesterday that more than 200,000 women from Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos work in Thailand, accounting for almost 40 percent of the migrant construction workers in the country.

By comparison, less than 9 percent of construction workers in the U.S. are women, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and a 1990 survey found that among 49 developing countries Thailand was the only one where women made up more than 10 percent of the construction workforce.

They work alongside men to smooth walls, lay bricks, and carry bags of cement on Bangkok's high rises and railway digs.

But their large numbers don't shield them from the same problems women in the workforce face around the world. They're paid less and trained less. Their shipping container homes provide little security from rowdy male workers. Having a husband for protection is almost a prerequisite.

"Employers think of hiring



Cambodian migrant construction workers leave a building site in downtown Bangkok, Thailand

women migrant workers as a 'package' with their husbands," said Rebecca Napier-Moore, a co-author of the study. "They don't value them as highly as men and think of them as secondary or 'tag-alongs.'"

For migrants building stadiums in Qatar or skyscrapers in Dubai, stringent salary requirements for family visas mean that young men tend to leave their families, working to feed mouths thousands of kilometers away in India, Pakistan and Nepal. But proximity and relatively porous borders allow

“Employers think of hiring women migrant workers as a ‘package’ with their husbands.”

REBECCA NAPIER-MOORE

Cambodians and Burmese to come together as a family to don hard hats in Thailand.

"Thailand's long land borders often run through remote areas," said Nilim Baruah, a migration expert at the ILO. "Many migrant workers enter Thailand informally."

For decades, Thai law has required men and women to receive equal pay for equal work, but managers say that migrant women are paid less because they are less capable. Most women work as manual laborers, cleaning up the site or moving materials around, while men do more skilled work such as welding or masonry.

More than 70 percent of the

women surveyed earned wages as low as \$5.34 a day. Employers often don't pay on time, and will ask employees to lie about their wages on their contracts to get away with paying below the minimum daily wage of about \$8.40.

Some women, eager to earn more, stick around for hours of overtime every day and live in fear of getting pregnant.

Thai labor legislation provides for 90 days of paid maternity leave, but many companies get around this by firing women if they're discovered to be pregnant. Companies skirt safety regulations as well.

"Women go up high places. The structures are makeshift. Boards are tied together. There is no safety equipment, like belts," said Thong Kham, a former construction worker. "It's difficult and dangerous."

Though construction fatality statistics are unreliable, the ILO estimates that construction in developing countries is three to six times riskier than in Western nations. But even though the dangers are high for both men and women, some women reported that men had safety equipment training that women were excluded from.

The perils don't stop with chemical burns and heavy machinery. At night, women retreat to company-provided container housing with clean water and electricity, but with dim lighting, thin walls, and no locks, prompting some to wire their doors shut, scared of the drunk men outside. Some rely on their husbands to keep them safe.

But the tough conditions haven't stopped Cambodian and Burmese women from pouring into Thailand. Many like the relative freedom of construction work, where unlike household cooks and maids they aren't on-call 24 hours a day. **AP**

## MYANMAR

# Reporter killed while investigating illegal logging

Esther Htusan, Yangon

**A** Myanmar journalist was killed yesterday while reporting on illegal logging in the northwest of the country, police said.

"The journalist who was killed was working for the local newspaper the Daily Eleven.

We found bruises and injuries on his face and head. We are still investigating the incident and for the culprit," said Thein Swe Myint, a local police officer.

The journalist, Soe Moe Tun, was a local-based journalist in Monywa in the Sagaing region where he was killed.

led. He had worked for the Daily Eleven, part of Eleven Media Group, since early 2015.

The Myanmar Journalist Network that represents journalists across the country released a statement expressing condolences to Soe Moe Tun's family. It urged the government to in-

vestigate the killing.

Journalists are often threatened in Myanmar because of their reporting, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said a statement last month that "ending impunity on all the harassment against

journalists is the most important step toward guaranteeing the safety of journalists."

In 2014, a freelance journalist Aung Kyaw Naing was shot dead by the military after being arrested while reporting on clashes between the military and an ethnic armed group on the Myanmar-Thai border. At least three other journalists have been killed recently in Myanmar, according to the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

"This is the fifth case

that a journalist has been killed since 1999," said Zayar Hlaing, a member of the Myanmar Press Council. "The government must make sure there is no impunity for the culprits and the rule of law should be implemented."

The council said there have been life threats against another journalist reporting on illegal logging, and that local police had failed to act.

Zayar Hlaing said the police must act quickly "because there had been examples of impunity in the past." **AP**





Members of the New People's Army communist rebels march with firearms at their guerrilla encampment tucked in the Sierra Madre mountains southeast of Manila

## Philippines rejects rebels' condition for cease-fire

Jim Gomez

**T**he Philippine defense chief yesterday rejected a demand by communist guerrillas for government troops to withdraw from rebel-influenced communities in the countryside for the insurgents to extend a months-long cease-fire.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said troops would con-

tinue to be deployed in all rural areas where they have to suppress lawlessness and added that the New People's Army guerrillas cannot claim any part of the country as their territory.

"They always say we are encroaching on their area. What areas are they talking about?" Lorenzana said.

"The president says you don't have any area," he said, address-

ing the Maoist guerrillas. "This is the Republic of the Philippines."

The Communist Party of the Philippines warned Duterte last week that the guerrillas may be forced to end their cease-fire and resume fighting if he doesn't suspend the government's counterinsurgency program and withdraw troops from rebel-influenced areas.

If Duterte fulfills the demands by January and releases what the insurgents call political detainees through an amnesty, the rebel party said it can guarantee the cease-fire's extension.

Duterte has separately declared an indefinite cease-fire, and the truce declarations by both sides have helped foster peace talks brokered by Norway.

New People's Army guerrillas, however, will be forced to engage troops if the president presses the military's deployment of troops in what the rebels claim as "guerrilla zones" in the countryside, the outlawed party said in a statement.

While no fighting has erupted since both sides declared separate cease-fires in August, the Maoist guerrillas have complained that troops continued to be deployed in rebel areas to carry out surveillance and other counterinsurgency operations in what they say are violations of the government's own truce.

Lorenzana said he favored proposals for separate cease-fires declared by the government and for the rebels to be strengthened into a signed joint truce with mutually agreed terms that he hopes could restrict rebel crimes being continuously committed, including extortion.

Duterte has also said he would no longer support the release of more insurgents after he worked to free several rebel leaders, adding that he would maintain his position even at the risk of the peace talks being terminated by the guerrillas. The rebels, he said, has asked him to free 130 detainees.

"I conceded too much too soon," Duterte told troops Sunday at a military camp. "I'll lose my cards. I always release."

"I said, 'That's my limit. Now it's up to you if you'll terminate it ... I've freed all your leaders,'" Duterte said.

Battle setbacks, surrenders and infighting have weakened the rebel group, which is black-listed as a terrorist organization by the United States.

A confidential Philippine government assessment obtained by The Associated Press says the guerrillas declined to 3,800 fighters with more than 4,500 firearms in the first half of the year, with about 700 of the country's 42,000 villages affected by the insurgency. **AP**

## Singapore, Malaysia sign final accord for high-speed rail link

Kyunghee Park,  
Chong Pooi Koon

**S**INGAPORE and Malaysia signed a final agreement to build a high-speed rail that will link the city-state to Kuala Lumpur by December 2026.

The accord was signed yesterday in the presence of Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his counterpart Najib Razak in Putrajaya, Malaysia's administrative capital, paving the way for the development and execution of the 300-kilometer line connecting the two cities.

The long-envisioned plan, six years behind an earlier target, is aimed at trimming the land journey between the two Southeast Asian cities to 90 minutes, from about five hours now, with trains plying at a top speed of more than 300 kilometers an hour, the two governments have said.

The link, when commissioned, is set to challenge budget carriers such as AirAsia Bhd. and Singapore Airlines Ltd.'s Tiger Airways, which fly passengers from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur in about an hour. The two countries will jointly award the tender for a development partner in early 2017, according to a statement from Singapore and Malaysian transport authorities.

The two countries had in 2013 set the deadline for completion of the rail link for the end of this decade, with Najib calling it a "huge game changer" that will transform the way the neighbors do business. **Bloomberg**

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Hyung-Jin Kim, Seoul

SOUTH KOREA

# Park's impeachment could split ruling party

**S**OUTH Korea's conservative ruling party is on the verge of a split following President Park Geun-hye's parliamentary impeachment last week.

Kim Moo-sung, leader of anti-Park lawmakers in the Saenuri Party, yesterday called Park loyalists her "political slaves" in an escalation of harsh rhetoric between rival factions in the largest political party in South Korea.

He told a televised conference that he and fellow lawmakers are considering leaving the party to create a new political group.

The feuding has intensified after dozens of Saenuri Party lawmakers aligned with a coalition of liberal opposition lawmakers to impeach Park on Friday because of a scandal involving her longtime, shadowy confidante.

Park supporters in the party criticized anti-Park members for betraying the embattled



Kim Moo-sung, former chief of the ruling Saenuri Party, speaks during a press conference at the National Assembly in Seoul

leader and told them to leave the party.

"It's really hard to tolerate the fact that some people, who had enjoyed all the benefits and political conveniences under the big 'Park Geun-hye' roof, took the initiative in the impeachment in a harsher manner than opposition parties," Choi Kyung Kwan, a senior party member who served as Park's finance minister, said on his Facebook page Monday.

But Kim said it was Park who betrayed the public and the party, describing her ties with her loyalists as similar to those of "gangsters."

Park's presidency will for-

mally end if the Constitutional Court approves the impeachment. That would lead to an election to pick her successor.

If that happens, then the anti-Park lawmakers could try to establish a new political party involving outgoing U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and some liberal opposition politicians. Ban has not said if he would run for president, but opinion polls put him in second place behind Moon Jae-in, a former leader of the main opposition Democratic Party, to replace Park.

The scandal revolves around allegations that Park allowed her friend of 40 years, Choi Soon-sil, to manipulate government affairs and extort money from businesses. Choi and several top presidential and government officials have been indicted over their alleged roles with the scandal. Park has avoided prosecutors' questioning because she has immunity from prosecution while in office. **AP**

## Jakarta Governor sobs as blasphemy trial begins



Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, popularly known as "Ahok", center, enters the courtroom prior to the start of his trial hearing at North Jakarta District Court in Jakarta, Indonesia

Tatan Syuflana,  
Stephen Wright

**T**HE minority Christian governor of Indonesia's capital sobbed in court yesterday on the first day of his blasphemy trial as he recalled the role of Muslim godparents in his childhood and said he would never intentionally insult Islam.

The national upheaval over the governor's alleged blasphemy has challenged Indonesia's reputation for prac-

ticing a moderate form of Islam, shaken the government and exposed religious and racial fault lines in the world's most populous Muslim nation.

Protests against Gov. Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama, led by hardliners and which drew hundreds of thousands of people, have kept Jakarta, the capital, on edge in the past six weeks. A Nov. 4 protest there turned violent, with one death and dozens of police and protesters injured.

Ahok, an ally of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, faces up to five years in prison if found guilty. He is the first ethnic Chinese governor of Jakarta and the first Christian in more than half a century.

"As a person who grew up among Muslims, it is not possible for me to intentionally insult Islam because that is the same as disrespecting the people I appreciate and love," Ahok said.

He broke down in tears twice while making his statement, in which he talked about the affection of his godparents and remembered how he helped poor Indonesians perform the Hajj pilgrimage when he was a district chief a decade ago.

The blasphemy contro-

### ■ Several hundred members of anti- and pro-Ahok groups gathered outside the court

versy erupted in September when a video circulated online in which Ahok lightheartedly said that people were being deceived if they believed his detractors who asserted that the Quran prohibits Muslims from having a non-Muslim leader. He is seeking a second term as governor in elections due in February.

State Prosecutor Ali Mukartono told the court that Ahok insulted Islam and desecrated the Quran by using one of its verses to fool people and boost his chances of winning the Jakarta election.

In his statement, Ahok said that his comments were not an interpretation of the Quran and that he was only referring to certain politicians "who exploited the verses incorrectly because they do not want to compete fairly in the election competition."

Several hundred members of anti- and pro-Ahok groups gathered outside the court, but were kept apart by police. The trial, which is being broadcast live, could take two to three months.

Ahok's lawyers asked the five-judge panel to throw the case out and the trial was then adjourned until Dec. 20.

Police investigators and religious experts were divided about whether Ahok should be prosecuted, but the case proceeded as political pressure on the government mounted. **AP**

## MH370 search ship leaves Australia for perhaps final time

**A** lone survey vessel has left an Australian port for perhaps the final time to search for the Malaysian airliner that mysteriously crashed into the southern Indian Ocean two years ago, officials said yesterday.

The Dutch survey ship Fugro Equator left Fremantle on Monday night to continue the search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 alone, Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Darren Chester's office said.

Whether the voyage is the ship's final monthlong deployment from Fremantle before the search was completed after more than two years would depend on the weather, Chester's office said.

Chester thanked China for the services of a Chinese ship that in February joined the search of a 120,000-square-kilometer area where authorities calculate that the Boeing 777 crashed with 239 people aboard on March 8, 2014. The Chinese ship started making its way back to Shanghai this month.

Fugro Equator is using a highly maneuverable drone known as an autonomous underwater vehicle to get sonar images of difficult terrain that could not be reliably searched with towed sonar equipment.

The deep sea search has failed to find any trace of the airliner that flew far off course during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. But debris confirmed or suspected to be from Flight 370 has washed ashore on the western Indian Ocean at Reunion Island, Mozambique, Tanzania, Madagascar and Mauritius.

Australia is overseeing the search on Malaysia's behalf. The two governments agreed with China in July that if the aircraft was not located in the current search zone, the search would be suspended in the absence of credible new evidence leading to the identification of a specific location.

Passengers' relatives hope that drift analysis of the washed-up debris will provide the new evidence to continue the search. **AP**



# Venezuelans rush to stash cash before biggest bill is voided

Andrew Rosati

**VENEZUELAN**s were wearily rushing to deposit bank notes or dump their cash savings entirely on Monday following an announcement by President Nicolas Maduro that he was invalidating the country's biggest bill because of what he says is an attack on the nation's liquidity.

The socialist leader shocked the country on Sunday when he said the 100-bolivar note would be removed from circulation within 72 hours. For months, the South American nation has suffered a hard-cash shortage as inflation spirals toward 500 percent, which Maduro insists is the product of an "economic war" and an attempt by his political foes to smuggle currency out of Venezuela.

Maduro doubled down on those claims Monday evening, ordering an "inevitable, necessary, radical" measure to close his country's border with Colombia for three days while authorities yank the bills from circulation.

Higher-denominated bills are scheduled to be released this week, but Venezuelans, already reeling from a deep recession marked by triple-digit inflation and rampant shortages of consumer basics, seemed to let out a collective groan as they added an unscheduled trip to the bank to their list of woes.

"This is madness," Leopoldo Lopez, a 54-year-old insurance salesman, said as he waited in



line to deposit a thick wad of banknotes at an automated bank machine in eastern Caracas. Lopez griped that, just days before, he had endured a long wait to get cash, only to be forced to line up yet again to deposit it. "At this point I have no idea where we're headed," he said.

According to a report by Torino Capital, a New York investment bank, the 100-bolivar notes account for more than three quarters of Venezuela's cash outstanding and 11 per-

cent of the nation's money supply, making Maduro's decree a difficult task for a nation in the throes of an economic crisis.

Long lines extended from many ATMs around Caracas on Monday, but authorities showed no signs of relenting on the deadline. Speaking at a press conference, Interior Minister Nestor Reverol insisted the country had endured a financial attack led by the U.S. to "leave Venezuela without liquidity."

Reverol accused the U.S. Treas-

ury Department of working to spirit the country's 100-bolivar notes to Europe to destabilize the Venezuelan government. The U.S. Treasury Department declined to comment.

Although the interior minister said he met with the country's banking association to ensure Maduro's orders would be executed smoothly, confusion abounded in the capital because Monday happened to be a bank holiday, creating a bottleneck at ATMs for Venezuelans trying to

■ The 100-bolivar notes account for more than three quarters of Venezuela's cash

protect their cash savings.

"We're not just going to throw them all away," said Israel Usechi, a 30-year-old motorbike messenger, pointing to a gym bag of bills he was waiting to deposit.

While the country's economic crash has reduced the value of the 100-bolivar note on the black market to just a few U.S. cents, cash transactions remain the predominant method for large swaths of the Venezuelan population. Economists estimate that more than a third of Venezuelans don't have a bank account, forcing them to depend on brick-thick bundles of bills for the basics.

Further complicating matters, the country's credit card systems often crash, meaning Venezuelans can't rely on solely plastic. On Dec. 2, much of Venezuela's commerce ground to a halt after the country's leading financial transaction firm, Credicard, had a system failure.

It all adds to the mounting headaches for someone like Lilia Moreno, a 42-year-old hotel janitor who had been stockpiling cash for Christmas presents. Now, she said, she faces a race against time to save her nest egg.

"Here, our lives just keep getting more complicated," she said while waiting outside a supermarket. "Today we're in one line, tomorrow another." **Bloomberg**

## Putin shows off dog to Japanese journalists before trip



Vladimir Putin plays with his Akita-inu dog Yume

**RUSSIAN** President Vladimir Putin showed off an Akita dog given to him by Japan to journalists from the coun-

try yesterday before telling them there is a "chance" to resolve a 70-year territorial dispute during an upcoming visit by him to the

Asian country.

Moscow and Tokyo have never formally signed a treaty ending World War II because of a dispute over the ownership of the Kuril Islands, a chain of volcanic islands that run between Russia's Kamchatka peninsula and Japan's northern island of Hokkaido.

Putin told Japanese journalists that it's difficult for him to say how big the chance is "because it depends on factors including the flexibility of our partners," according to an

interview transcript published by the Kremlin yesterday.

There had been some expectation of a breakthrough on the issue during

■ Moscow and Tokyo have never formally signed a treaty ending World War II

talks between Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Japan on Thursday and Friday, but officials on both sides appear to be urging caution.

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters in Moscow yesterday that a resolution to the issue would involve several rounds of "painstaking" negotiation.

Putin said Moscow could live with the status quo. "We think that we have no territorial problems. It's Japan that thinks that is has a territorial problem

with Russia," he said.

The interview with Putin in the Kremlin began by the Russian leader showing the Japanese journalists a dog called Yume he was given by Japan in 2012. Putin fed the Akita in front of the journalists, who told him they were "scared."

A Japanese official said last week that his Russian counterparts had rejected the idea of presenting Putin with another dog, a companion for Yume, during Putin's forthcoming visit. **AP**



Bassem Mroue, Beirut

# Dramatic appeals as Syrian forces poised to take Aleppo

**S**YRIAN government forces poised for the final sweep to take the last rebel holdouts in eastern Aleppo yesterday as the international community and aid agencies appealed that the lives of thousands of civilians who have “nowhere safe to run” be spared and that those fighting to capture the rebel enclave refrain from atrocities.

The dramatic appeals came a day after the Syrian military announced it now holds 99 percent of the former rebel neighborhoods of Aleppo, signaling an impending end to the rebels’ four-year hold over parts of the city as the final hours of the battle play out.

Retaking Aleppo, which has been divided between rebel and government-controlled zones since 2012, would be President Bashar Assad’s biggest victory yet in the country’s civil war. Aleppo has long been regarded as a major gateway between Turkey and Syria.

But a government win in Aleppo does not end the conflict — significant parts of Syria are still outside government control and huge swaths of the country are a devastated waste-land. More than a quarter of a million



Syrians who were displaced with their families from eastern Aleppo gather at the collective shelter in the village of Jibreen

people have been killed.

The International Committee of the Red Cross in a statement yesterday urged all fighting in Aleppo to spare civilian lives. It said thousands of people with no part in the violence “have literally nowhere safe to run.”

“In order for this to happen, we appeal to the parties to put humanity ahead of military objectives”, said ICRC’s head of delegation in Syria, Marianne Gasser, who is currently in Aleppo. “We stand ready to oversee the implementation of any

mutual agreement that puts civilians first. We cannot urge this strongly enough: this must happen.”

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a statement late Monday that he is alarmed over reports of atrocities against a large number of civilians, including women and children, in the past hours in Aleppo. While stressing that the United Nations is not able to independently verify these reports, the U.N. chief said he conveyed his grave concern to the relevant parties.

Ban also said the U.N. underlines the obligation of all parties on the ground to protect civilians and abide by international humanitarian and human rights law, adding that “this is particularly the responsibility of the Syrian government and its allies.”

In Moscow, which has been Assad’s major ally in the war, the Defense Ministry said yesterday that Syrian forces now control “more than 98 percent” of Aleppo and the rebels are holding out a neighborhood roughly the size of 3 square kilometers.

Several Syrian opposition activists claimed government forces were carrying out summary killings of rebels in the streets in neighborhoods captured on Monday but the Syrian military denied the claims, saying such allegations were “a desperate attempt” to try gain international sympathy.

Turkey’s Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus’ called

for an immediate cease-fire and if that is too late, he called on the international community, European countries, regional countries and Turkey to organize an international aid convoy to people in need in Aleppo.

On Monday, staff members of the last remaining clinic in rebel-held territory in Aleppo huddled in a shelter as Syrian government forces pushed in. “Those killed and wounded are left on the streets,” said the clinic’s administrator, Mohammed Abu Rajab.

“The collapse is terrifying,” said Bassam Haj Mustafa, a rebel spokesman in contact with fighters in the city. Opposition fighters were “doing their best to defend what is left,” he added.

Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said more than 60 civilians and fighters were killed in rebel-held neighborhoods of Aleppo on Monday alone. **AP**

AD

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## what's ON

**A BETTER TOMORROW - EXHIBITION ON THE PROJECT OF THE NEW CENTRAL LIBRARY**

TIME: 10am-8pm (closed on public holidays)

UNTIL: December 31, 2016

VENUE: Macau Central Library

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 6301 2842

**MACAU LIGHT FESTIVAL**

TIME: 7pm-10pm (last Video Mapping starting at 9:55 pm)

Melody of Light

TIME: 7:30-9:30 (A 15min performance in every 30min)

DATE: Every Friday, Saturday, Sunday & December 8, 20, 21, 26

Venue: Anim'Arte Nam Van

FREE ADMISSION

UNTIL: December 31, 2016

TOURISM HOTLINE: (853) 2833 3000

**ARTWORK EXHIBITION "TANUKI'S NEST"**

TIME: 11am-10pm (no admission after 6:30 pm, closed on Mondays)

UNTIL: December 31, 2016

VENUE: Anim'Arte NAM VAN, located at Nam Van Lakeside Plaza at Avenida Panorâmica do Lago Nam Van

ADMISSION: Free

**MACAU GIANT PANDA PAVILION**

TIME: 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm daily (Except Mondays, closed on the following day instead if a public holiday falls on Monday and no admission after 4:45 pm; six viewings per day)

VENUE: Seac Pai Van Park, Coloane

ADMISSION: MOP10

ENQUIRIES: Civil and Municipal Affairs Bureau (853) 2833 7676

**TAK SENG ON PAWNSHOP**

TIME: 10:30am-7pm daily (Closed on the first Monday of every month)

VENUE: No. 396 Avenida Almeida Ribeiro

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2835 7911

**FOLK WISDOM: THE PRACTICAL SCIENCE IN FISHERMEN'S LIFE**

Time: 10AM-6PM (OPENED ON public holidays)

UNTIL: December 31, 2016

VENUE: Macau University of Science and Technology / Avenida Wai Long, Taipa, Macao

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 6375 3464

## Offbeat

## CHINESE TREATED TO CLEAR VIEWS OF ANOTHER 'SUPERMOON'



Another "supermoon" has landed in the skies over China.

The moon shone brightly yesterday night in Beijing, as the smog that often blankets China's capital and most of the industrial north in winter subsided for the evening.

The supermoon phenomenon occurs when the moon, which follows an elliptical orbit around the Earth, reaches a point closer than usual. A supermoon occurred just last month, putting on a show for skygazers worldwide.

Chinese astronomers expect that this supermoon will likely reach its closest point to China this morning, but that last night provided a fine backdrop to view it.

## TV canal macau

13:00	TDM News (Repeated)
13:30	News (RTPi) Delayed Broadcast
14:50	RTPi Live
17:40	Once Upon A Time Sr.1 (Repeated)
18:20	Precious Pearl (Repeated)
19:00	TDM Interview (Repeated)
19:30	Miscellaneous (Repeated)
19:40	Soap Opera
20:30	Main News, Financial & Weather Report
21:00	Non-Daily Portuguese News
21:30	Criminal Minds S10
22:10	Precious Pearl
23:00	TDM News
23:30	Miscellaneous
00:15	Main News, Financial & Weather Report (Repeated)
00:50	RTPi Live

## cinema

## CINETEATRO

08 DEC - 14 DEC

## MY ANNOYING BROTHER

ROOM 1

2.30, 4.30, 9.30 pm

Director: Kwon Soo-kyung

Language: Korean (English and Cantonese)

Duration: 90min

## YOUR NAME

ROOM 1

4.00, 7.45 pm

Director: Makoto Shinkai

Language: Japanese (English and Cantonese)

Duration: 115min

## FANTASTIC BEASTS &amp; WHERE TO FIND THEM

ROOM 2

2.15, 4.45, 7.15, 9.45 pm

Director: David Yates

Starring: Katherine Waterston, Dan Fogler, Alison Sudol

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 133min



## THE YOUNG MESSIAH

ROOM 3

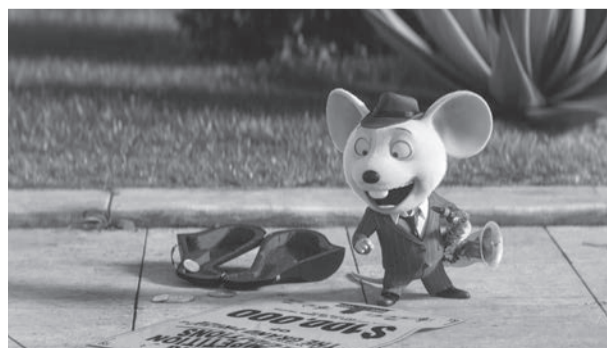
2.30, 7.30, 9.30 pm

Director: Cyrus Nowrasteh

Starring: Adam Greaves-Neal, Sara Lazzaro, Vincent Walsh

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 111min



## SING

ROOM 3

4.30 pm

Director: Garth Jennings

Starring: Matthew McConaughey, Reese Witherspoon, Seth MacFarlane

Language: Cantonese (English)

Duration: 108min

## this day in history



## 1995 BOSNIA PEACE ACCORD ENDS THREE-YEAR WAR

Leaders of Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia have signed the Dayton Accord in Paris to end three-and-a-half years of war in the Balkans. Under the deal Bosnia is preserved as a single state but it is divided into two parts.

It will be made up of a Muslim-Croat federation representing 51% of the country's territory and a Serb republic holding the remaining 49%. Sarajevo will become a unified city with Serbs giving up some suburbs which they currently control.

The so-called "safe-enclave" of Gorazde will remain under Muslim control but it will be linked by a land corridor to Sarajevo. The three leaders signed the deal surrounded by European heads of state in a Parisian palace before 50 world leaders and international organization chiefs.

Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic said the country had been an outcast for too long. He said: "As to the implementation of the peace agreement and the role of the international peace force, the key of the success of its mission is even-handedness, just as partiality is the key of failure."

Croatia's Franjo Tudjman spoke of his aim for closer ties between his people and the European Union. And Bosnia's Alija Izetbegovic, referring to his dream of a multi-ethnic Bosnia said he felt he was "drinking a bitter but useful medicine".

The deal was driven by President Clinton's team and Nato will move into protect the area - with overriding power - as a temporary measure. The success of maintaining the deal will determine aid for the war-torn country where at least 200,000 people have died in the bloodiest conflict seen in Europe since World War II.

Several million people have been left homeless - some the result of so-called ethnic cleansing operations. Many other refugees fled the country rather than get caught up in the fighting.

The American president told the summit that it was up to the three leaders and their people to ensure peace. "No one outside can guarantee that Muslims, Croats and Serbs in Bosnia can come together and stay together as free citizens in a united country sharing a common destiny," President Clinton said. "Only the Bosnian people can do that."

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Despite the Dayton Summit which formally ended the conflict, tensions remain between the three Balkan neighbors.

But things improved when the political landscape of the region changed. Alija Izetbegovic stepped down in 2001, Slobodan Milosevic was put on trial at The Hague a year later for atrocities in the Balkans over a 10 year period and Franjo Tudjman died in 1999.

The countries' new government leaders are described as moderate. They met for the first time since their predecessors signed the peace accords in 2002.

Many problems of the war persist - most importantly the fate of around 1.5m refugees and displaced persons.

An EU peacekeeping force replaced NATO in December 2004. Official statistics released in 2005 revealed the number of dead in the Bosnian war was lower than first thought. An interim report said the death toll was probably nearer 100,000 than 200,000.



YOUR STARS

Aries Mar. 21-Apr. 19 There's just never a dull moment when you're around...

Taurus April 20-May 20 Getting into the swim of things would be easier if you were willing to dip your toe in the waters...

Gemini May 21-Jun. 21 Your mind is like a high-performance car - it has all these unused gears and speeds...

Cancer Jun. 22-Jul. 22 It's easy to assume that you know everything about someone from just a few moments in their company...

Leo Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Ever walked into a gourmet ice cream store and been excited by the sheer number of flavors available to you?

Virgo Aug. 23-Sept. 22 Someone might be shouting 'Sit down, you're rocking the boat!' but just ignore them for right now.

Libra Sep.23-Oct. 22 Weigh your words carefully, as if they were diamonds. While it might be tempting to blurt out any opinion...

Scorpio Oct. 23 - Nov. 21 Look for ways to be of service right now. It doesn't have to be anything huge, either.

Sagittarius Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Go ahead, and take a chance. Every roll of the dice can be a brand-new opportunity...

Capricorn Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Home isn't just a physical place or location. It's a state of mind -- and one that you can take with you.

Aquarius Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Light bulbs aplenty are going to be glowing over your ever-ready noggin. All this inspiration might even lead to a long-lasting and profound discovery...

Pisces Feb.19-Mar. 20 When you're driving through a fog, you may not be able to see the whole road. You may not have all the answers now, but you have exactly the pieces you need.

THE BORN LOSER by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

Sudoku puzzles categorized by difficulty: Easy, Easy+, Medium, and Hard. Each category contains a 9x9 grid with some numbers pre-filled.

WEATHER

Weather forecast table with columns for MIN, MAX, and CONDITION. Rows include CHINA (Beijing, Harbin, etc.) and WORLD (Moscow, Frankfurt, etc.).

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- One of the Baldwins; 5- Nobelist Bohr; 10- 20th letter of the Hebrew alphabet; 14- Vow; 15- Dam extending across the Nile; 16- Architectural pier; 17- Currency of Turkey...

Down: 1- "You've got mail" co.; 2- Lion's den; 3- French 101 verb; 4- Portable power saw; 5- Civil rights org.; 6- Sharon's land; 7- Decorative pitcher; 8- Mown grass; 9- Move stealthily; 10- Pertaining to skin color; 11- Automaker Ferrari; 12- Ollie's pal; 13- Laughing syllable; 21- Wynnonna's mom; 22- the season...; 25- Rings of a chain; 26- Bubbling; 27- Brief fight; 29- "Who's there?" response; 30- Allow; 32- Pertaining to bees; 33- Spree; 34- Wise ones; 36- Pigeon; 38- Univ. aides; 41- 'Bali -'; 42- More recent; 43- Lessened; 48- Enervate; 49- Bro's counterpart; 51- Animal bite worry; 54- Begin; 56- Meditates; 57- Honey producers; 58- Snakelike fishes; 59- Lulu; 60- Temple; 61- Slippery; 62- Dresden denial; 63- 1959 Kingston Trio hit; 66- Date;

Yesterday's solution crossword grid with filled-in words.

A large crossword puzzle grid with numbers indicating starting positions for clues.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

List of useful telephone numbers including Emergency calls 999, Fire department 28 572 222, PJ (Open line) 993, PJ (Picket) 28 557 775, PSP 28 573 333, Customs 28 559 944, S. J. Hospital 28 313 731, Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333, Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300, IACM 28 387 333, Tourism 28 333 000, Airport 59 888 88, Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283, Water Supply - Report 2822 0088, Telephone - Report 1000, Electricity - Report 28 339 922, Macau Daily Times 28 716 081.



FOR SALE and FOR RENT advertisement for JML Property, including website and contact info.

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JML Property logo and branding, including the text '卓雅物業' and 'since 1994'.





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Tales Azzoni, Madrid

**A**FTER giving a European Championship title to Portugal and another Champions League trophy to Real Madrid, Cristiano Ronaldo ends 2016 with something just for himself — his fourth world player of the year award.

Ronaldo on Monday won his third Ballon d'Or award, which this year is being handed out by France Football magazine separately from FIFA. Ronaldo also took home the Ballon d'Or prize in 2013 and 2014, and the FIFA award in 2008 while still playing for Manchester United.

The Portugal forward is also in contention for FIFA's prize this year, along with Lionel Messi and Antoine Griezmann, who finished second and third to Ronaldo on Monday, respectively.

"This was likely the best year of my career, individually and collectively," Ronaldo said in a pre-recorded video. "It was unforgettable."

Only Ronaldo and Messi have been voted the best in the world since 2007, when Kaka won the prize. Messi won a record fifth award last year.

"For me it's a great honor to receive my fourth golden ball," Ronaldo said. "I never thought in my mind to win (it) four times, so I'm so pleased,

**This was likely the best year of my career, individually and collectively.**

RONALDO

I'm so happy. I have to thank all my teammates, the national team, Real Madrid, all the people, all the players who helped me win this individual award."

# Ballon d'Or: Ronaldo voted best in the world for 4th time



Cristiano Ronaldo warms up with teammates during a training session in Yokohama near Tokyo. Real Madrid and Mexico's Club America will play in the semifinal of the FIFA Club World Cup soccer tournament tomorrow

Messi was runner-up for the fifth time in his career, while Griezmann finished third after a remarkable year with France and Atletico Madrid. Luis Suarez was fourth and Barcelona teammate Neymar fifth in the results announced by the Paris-based magazine.

Ronaldo teammate Gareth Bale, who led Wales to the semifinals at Euro 2016, was sixth. Leicester had Riyad Mahrez finishing seventh and Jamie Vardy eighth. Madrid defender Pepe and Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon tied for ninth.

The 31-year-old Ronaldo was picked from a list of 30 players by a group of international journalists selected by France Football, which for the previous six years awarded the coveted prize in partnership with FIFA. Soccer's governing body, which relies on the votes of coaches, team captains, journalists and — for the first time — an online poll of fans, will be handing out its own award in January.

"I'm happy because I worked very hard to win this," Ronaldo said. "It's not easy to stay at a high level year after year. You can

count on one hand the players who can do it, there are very few who can, and I do it year after year. That makes me very proud."

Ronaldo is receiving the Ballon d'Or award a month after his contract with Madrid was extended until 2021, keeping him in Spain until he is 36 years old.

It has been an up-and-down season for him so far, but he couldn't have finished the previous one more strongly.

Ronaldo converted the decisive penalty kick in a shootout against rival Atletico Madrid

in the final of the Champions League, helping the Spanish powerhouse win the tournament for the second time in three seasons. Ronaldo also won the Champions League title with Manchester United in 2008.

Ronaldo scored a record 11 goals in the group stage of the European competition last season and finished with a total of 16, one short of the record he himself set in 2014. He is the tournament's all-time leading scorer with 95 goals, and is two away from becoming the first player to score 100 goals in European club competitions.

It was with Portugal that Ronaldo achieved one of his greatest feats, helping the nation win its maiden European title after several close calls, including a runner-up finish at home in 2004 when it lost to Greece.

"To win a title for the first time with Portugal was something that was missing from my resume," Ronaldo said. "It was one of the most important moments of my life."

Ronaldo scored one of the goals for Portugal in the 2-0 win over Wales in the semifinals at Euro 2016, then watched from the bench as his teammates defeated France 1-0 in extra time. Ronaldo played only 25 minutes of the final at Stade de France in July before being substituted because of a left-knee injury.

Ronaldo also won the European Super Cup with Madrid, as well as UEFA's award as the best player in Europe last season, a prize he also won in 2014.

Ronaldo is with Real Madrid in Japan to play in FIFA's Club World Cup. **AP**

Adam Schreck, Dubai

**Q**ATAR announced Monday it is introducing long-expected reforms to policies governing its vast foreign-labor force, though the changes still require workers to seek clearance from their bosses before leaving the country.

The new policies follow years of intense criticism from labor and human rights activists over working conditions in Qatar. The natural gas-rich country is in the midst of a torrid building boom tied to its hosting of the 2022 World Cup.

Critics say Qatar's long

-standing "kafala" sponsorship system binding workers to their employer leaves migrants open to abuse, and in some cases can amount to forced labor.

Qatar touted the reforms as abolishing the kafala system altogether. Rights groups say the changes fall far short of what is needed to protect the armies of mostly Asian low-wage workers transforming the tiny country.

A statement released by the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs said the changes are intended to ensure "greater

## 2022 World Cup host Qatar loosens rules for migrant workers

flexibility, freedom and protection" to the more than 2.1 million workers in Qatar.

The minister responsible for labor, Issa bin Saad al-Jafali al-Nuaimi, said Qatar welcomes constructive criticism and he urged outsiders to give the law time to take root before drawing any conclusions. He said the ministry is boosting its monitoring efforts and hiring more labor ins-

pectors to enforce compliance.

"We are doing this because we believe it is the right thing to do and because it provides tangible new benefits to expatriate workers," al-Nuaimi said.

Although the statement suggested the policies take effect Monday, the government subsequently confirmed they would only become law today — a year after the

ruling hereditary emir signed off on the change.

Under the new law, workers will generally be free to leave Qatar so long as they inform their employer first. Employees whose bosses refuse can appeal to a government committee that must address requests within three days.

Workers who have unsettled debts — potentially anyone who has taken out a local credit card, mort-

gage, or car or personal loan — or those wanted as part of a criminal case can be forced to stay.

The law allows workers to change jobs, but only after they complete an existing fixed-term contract or have worked five years on an open-ended one.

Rights activists that have examined the reforms say they continue to leave workers ripe for exploitation by unscrupulous employers. **AP**



opinion

Macau Matters

Richard Whitfield



LEGALIZING MARY JANE

I remember going to university parties in the early 1980's in Australia where many friends illegally smoked pot (Mary Jane) and drank coca-cola but little alcohol. Then, later in the mid 1990's I remember the unforgettable, but frequent, smell of pot in cinemas in Mong Kok in Hong Kong.

Because of fears surrounding its use, cannabis/marijuana/pot/Mary Jane or whatever you want to call it has been a controlled substance for most of the 20th century. It is a psychoactive drug and medicine that originated from Central/South Asia but is now grown in many places, and according to the United Nations is the most widely used illicit drug in the world (accounting for around 2/3 of total global illicit drug use when counted by number of users, and around 1/2 of the illicit trade by value). While it is illegal in most countries there is a growing trend to legalize, or at least decriminalize, pot but not other more dangerous drugs.

Since 1996, over 20 US states and territories have (at least partially) legalized or decriminalized different levels of pot cultivation, distribution and use. Several other countries (including Australia, Canada, Jamaica, Spain and Uruguay) are following suit. This trend is being driven by libertarians (who want to maximize people's personal and commercial liberties) and by conservatives (who want to eliminate criminals from the pot trade and minimize its social costs).

While it has never been my recreational drug of choice, pot has always seemed no more harmful than alcohol to me, in terms of its effects and side-effects. This also seems to be the general medical opinion, but the evidence is sparse - it is difficult to properly evaluate the medical effects of illegal substances. Given the large number of global users, we really do need to know more about the medical and social effects of pot.

Taxes and pricing are one major concern when pot is legalized. Generally, governments want to set prices relatively high to discourage use (especially among price sensitive youth) but low enough to drive the criminal element out of business. This seems to be working in the US states that have legalized pot, where the trend seems to be to initially set the taxes low to drive out the criminals and then progressively raise the taxes to discourage too much growth in use.

Another concern is advertising. Generally, experts advise totally banning advertising and attractive packaging (and forcing the use of child-proof packaging) and limiting the places where pot can be purchased. Experts also seem to advise limiting the use of cannabis based oils to lace foods and drink because they allow people to get higher doses.

At one time there were fears that pot could be a "gateway" drug leading users to other more harmful illegal drugs. The available evidence is that this is not the case, and where pot is legal users seem to stick to it (and because it is legal they actually have less exposure to criminals who might want to "hook" them on more dangerous drugs). The statistics also show no increases in drug related crime after pot legalization.

Very interestingly, since pot was legalized in Colorado, it has quickly become the most favored destination for spring breakers (young people travelling for fun during school/university breaks) in the USA. Macau, as a popular rest and relaxation destination could fill the same role in Asia, and it would certainly diversify our economy.

More seriously, Macau could be regional test-bed and role model for pot legalization, but this is probably something that the conservative local government does not want to hear.

THE BUZZ US, S. KOREA, JAPAN VOW COOPERATION OVER N. KOREA SANCTIONS

Top nuclear envoys from South Korea, the United States and Japan pledged yesterday to implement new sanctions against North Korea, including capping the country's coal exports to choke off cash flowing into its nuclear weapons program.

After meeting in Seoul, the envoys said the countries agreed to maintain an around-the-clock information sharing system to monitor how sanctions are working.

Responding to North Korea's nuclear and missile tests this year, the United Nations Security

Council recently voted to tighten sanctions by limiting the country's coal exports, one of its major sources of foreign currency.

The effectiveness of the sanctions is dependent on the commitment of China, North Korea's most important ally and its biggest buyer of coal. Joseph Yun, U.S. special representative for North Korea policy, said China's announcement over the weekend that it would freeze imports of North Korean coal until the end of the year was an encouraging sign.

Wonder Woman dumped as a special UN ambassador after uproar

Mark Kennedy, New York

THE comic book heroine Wonder Woman has been abruptly fired from her honorary ambassador job at the United Nations following protests from both inside and outside the world organization that a white, skimpily dressed American prone to violence wasn't the best role model for girls.

Rheal LeBlanc, head of press and external relations, said yesterday the appointment of Wonder Woman as an Honorary Ambassador for the Empowerment of Women and Girls would end this week, a move that came less than two months after a splashy ceremony at the U.N., which attracted actresses Lynda Carter, who played Wonder Woman in the 1970s TV series, and Gal Gadot, who has taken on the role in the forthcoming "Wonder Woman" film.

Critics said the appointment was tone deaf at a time when real women are fighting against sexual exploitation and abuse, and that there were plenty of real heroines that could be the face for gender equality. At the time of the appointment, there was no indication it would end so quickly. DC Comics



Lynda Carter, who played Wonder Woman on television, listens during a U.N. meeting to designate Wonder Woman as an "Honorary Ambassador for the Empowerment of Women and Girls"

had no immediate response yesterday.

Wonder Woman's image was to be used by the U.N. on social media platforms to promote women's empowerment, including on gender-based violence and the fuller participation of women in public life. Defenders of the decision pointed to the character's pioneering, feminist roots and her muscular bravery.

But an online petition, started by U.N. staffers and signed by more than 44,000 people, asked the secretary-

general to reconsider the appointment, saying the message the U.N. was "sending to the world with this appointment is extremely disappointing." And during the Oct. 21 ceremony at the U.N., many staffers silently turned their back to the stage, some with their fists in the air.

The Wonder Woman appointment came after many women were dismayed that another man, Antonio Guterres, the former prime minister of Portugal, was chosen to be the next secretary-general, even though more than half the candidates were women.

Several critics took issue with Wonder Woman's skimpy outfit, arguing that the world might not embrace a scantily clad character in a thigh-baring bodysuit with an American flag motif and knee-high boots.

Honorary ambassadors — as opposed to goodwill ambassadors like Nicole Kidman and Anne Hathaway — are fictional characters. The U.N. previously tapped Winnie the Pooh to be an honorary Ambassador of Friendship in 1998 and Tinker Bell as the honorary Ambassador of Green in 2009. AP

THE DECISIVE MOMENT



Xinhua/Cheong Kam Ka

Christmas lights sparkle in Senado Square.

Station	Air quality
Roadside	60-80 Moderate
High Density Residential Area	65-95 Moderate
Ambient	70-100 Moderate

SOURCE: D5M/G

WORLD BRIEFS

**INDONESIA** An enraged mob in central Indonesia forced its way into a police station and beat a man to death yesterday, hours after he was arrested for allegedly stabbing seven children at an elementary school. The children were in stable condition at a hospital, said police spokesman Jules Abraham Abast. They suffered neck, chest and head wounds in the attack yesterday morning on a remote island in East Nusa Tenggara province.

**U.K.** Official figures show that inflation in the U.K. jumped to a 2-year high of 1.2 percent in the year to November in the wake of higher clothing and fuel costs. The scale of the increase from the previous month's 0.9 percent was unexpected.

**SERBIA** The start of the landmark trial in Serbia of eight former Bosnian Serb police officers charged with taking part in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre has been postponed until February amid legal wrangling. Judges said yesterday that the proceedings will resume once the court fulfills the defense team's demand to learn the identities of protected witnesses in accordance with the law.

**BRAZIL** A football player who survived an air crash that killed most of his teammates has returned to Brazil. Doctors say goalkeeper Jackson Follmann of the Chapecoense soccer team is well enough to have back surgery following his arrival in Sao Paulo. The goalie had part of his right leg amputated in Medellin, Colombia after the Nov. 28 crash that killed 71 people, including 19 players. Two other survivors were also returning to Brazil.



AP PHOTO

**FRANCE** Days after the Islamic State group seized back control of the ancient Syrian town of Palmyra, a prescient exhibit was inaugurated in Paris yesterday that aims to educate the public on the wounded wonder that Syrians affectionately call the "Bride of the Desert."