



XI JINPING SAYS MACAU IS IMPROVING

Chui Sai On concluded his annual duty visit to Beijing, having been received by President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang

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CARITAS HEAD SLAMS 'BLUE CARD' POLICY

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SAIPAN CASINO BOND ON HOLD

Imperial Pacific planned to raise USD200m to fund the construction of a new casino on the remote Pacific island

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Times

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"THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'"

WORLD BRIEFS



RUSSIA Fragments of a plane were dragged out of the Black Sea yesterday amid a massive search operation as Russian officials declared that their investigation into the crash would focus on technical faults or pilot errors. **More on p14**

CHINA Four men in eastern China accused of murder and rape have been exonerated after a 16-year legal ordeal in the latest instance of Chinese courts overturning deeply flawed verdicts. A Jiangxi province high court announced it cleared the men accused of killing a woman in 2000, apologized and offered them an opportunity to seek compensation.

THAILAND Police charged a suspect with participating in recent hacking attacks on government computers that were billed as a protest against a restrictive law governing internet use.

MONGOLIA Hundreds of Mongolian protesters demanded the government do more to address worsening air pollution that they fear is sickening their children and shortening their lives. **More on p11**

TURKEY has complained about a lack of aerial support from the U.S.-led coalition for its operations against the Islamic State group in northern Syria, calling on the coalition "to carry out its responsibilities."

More on backpage

AT LEAST SIX KILLED

Storm spoils Christmas in the Philippines

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Public Prosecutions Office sacks Ho Chio Meng's nephew

P7

CHIEF Executive Chui Sai On announced that the Central Government has affirmed the SAR Government's work and will continuously pledge its full support to Macau for further economic development and enhancement of local residents' livelihoods.

Chui was speaking to reporters in Beijing on Friday as he concluded his annual duty visit, having been received by President Xi Jinping and the Premier of the State Council, Li Keqiang.

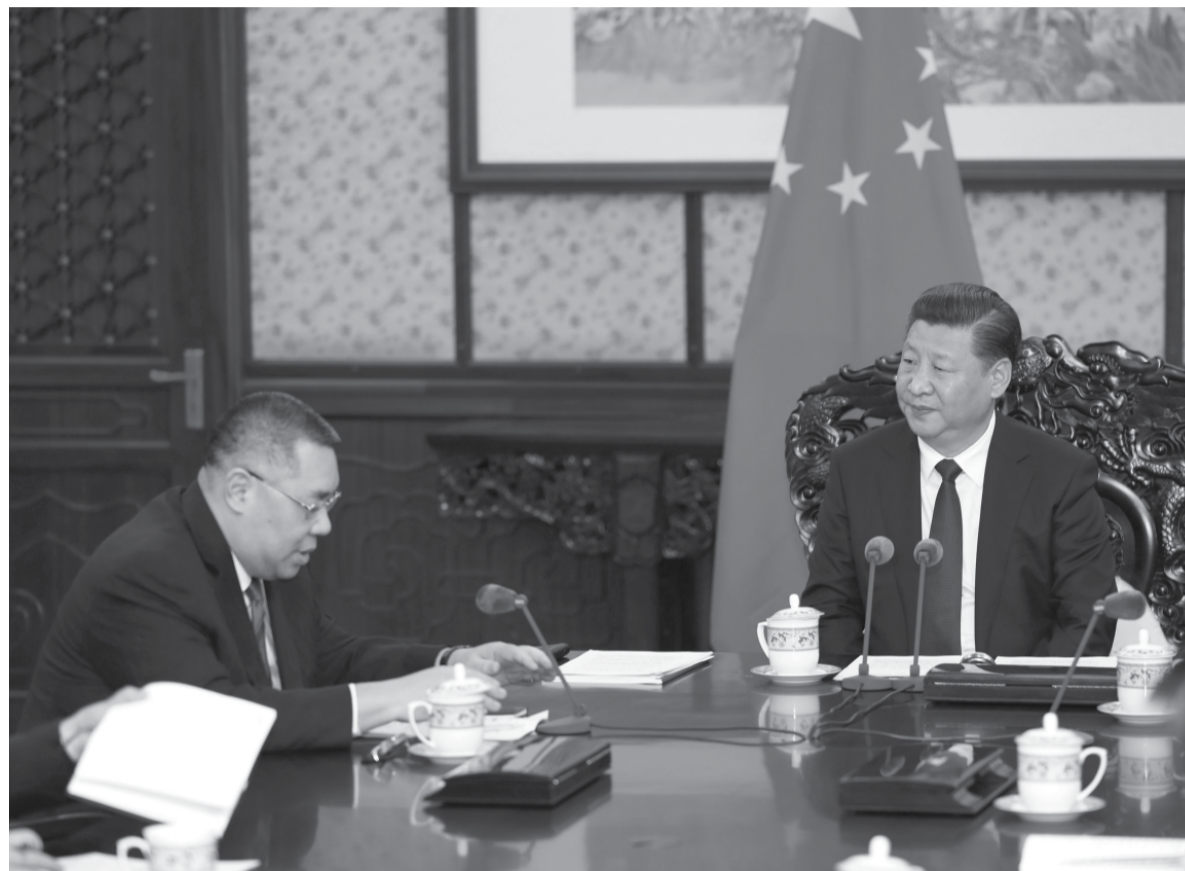
During his meetings with the state leaders, the Chief Executive presented his report on Macau's current situation and development over the past 12 months, and outlined the Government's policies for 2017.

At a meeting on December 23, Xi Jinping said that under Chui's leadership, the MSAR government had focused on policies to boost the economy, improve people's livelihoods and ensure stable development. He added that the Macau government has undertaken a lot of work in advancing public administration reform, promoting "appropriate diversification" of its economy, keeping gaming industries in check and handling major issues in accordance with the law.

Xinhua said in a report that Xi had described the general situation in Macau as good, and said that the economy and people's livelihood are improving. Xi acknowledged the strength of local patriotism and that Macau is a role model in terms of implementing the 'one country, two systems' policy and the Basic Law, as well as protecting state security and endorsing the unification.

During his four-day visit, Chui also met with the direc-

CE: Beijing supports direction of MSAR government work



Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) meets Chui Sai On in Beijing

tor of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office of the State Council, Wang Guangya, and the chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Zhang Dejiang.

Chui said the state leaders had affirmed the direction of the government's efforts in implementing several policies over the past year, including the efforts made to develop Macau's strategic position as a world centre of tourism and leisure, and as a commercial and trade cooperation servi-

ce platform between China and the Portuguese-speaking countries. He also gave the assurance that the works done under the region's Five-Year Development Plan are aligned with the country's 13th Five-Year Plan.

Chui said that, under a plan approved by the Central Government, Macau will be more involved in the development of the country's Silk Road Economic Belt, as well as the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (collectively known as the "Belt and Road" initia-

tive).

Chui also commented on Macau's economic prospects for 2017. He believes that the city's economy will expand next year, and noted that the government has been able to maintain balanced finances and budget surpluses during the economic adjustment period between 2015 and 2016.

The CE stressed that public expenditure for long-term policy mechanisms related to social welfare will not be negatively affected by economic adjustment.

Regarding the development of the surrounding waters under Macau administration, Chui said the local government plans to take three steps to gradually prepare for the economic development of the 85 square kilometres in question.

The measures cover such topics as the preparation of legislation, the strengthening of management processes, and research relating to the local maritime economy and the overall development of Macau.

When addressing an idea already expressed by some people – that allowing the

Xi said that the general situation in Macau is good and the economy and people's livelihoods are improving

importation of non-resident workers for driver positions would be positive for the region's economy – Chui said that the government needs to study the matter in depth to ensure a "scientific approach" when making decisions on the subject. **JZ**

Macau, Korea ease immigration clearance system

MSAAR electronic passport holders can use the automated immigration clearance system of the Republic of Korea from tomorrow.

To be in line with the immigration facilitation that the Republic of Korea granted Macau residents, holders of the passport of the Republic

of Korea can also use the MSAR's automated immigration clearance system after successful enrollment.

According to the Identification Bureau, local residents aged 17 or above who hold a valid Macau SAR electronic passport and have no criminal record in the Repu-

blic of Korea can register directly for this service at enrollment centers.

After successful enrollment, individuals can use Smart Entry Service (SES) to enter and exit the Republic of Korea.

There are 16 locations for registration in South Korea including Incheon International Airport

and Jeju International Airport.

Eligible applicants can register at enrollment centers after entering the country through traditional counters. Eligible applicants must provide MSAR electronic passports which are valid for at least 30 days from the date of enrollment. After

successful enrollment, a sticker will be affixed to the visa page of the passport.

When using SES, passport holders must scan their passports and undertake fingerprint verification as instructed by the automated clearance system.

Meanwhile, Korean ci-

tizens aged 11 or above who hold a valid passport of the Republic of Korea which are valid at least 30 days from the date of enrollment and have no criminal record in the MSAR can register for use of the Automated Passenger Clearance (APC) system of Macau.

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Daniel Beitler

POPULATION BY-CENSUS 2016

17.8 percent population growth since 2011

THE total population of Macau has risen over the last five years at a faster rate than the number of households in the territory, according to a statement from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). At the same time, the average number of occupants per household has also fallen. No explanation for the phenomenon was offered in the statement.

The analysis originates from the 2016 Population By-census, which shows that the MSAR population increased by 17.8 percent over the last five years, reaching around 650,900 compared to around 552,500 in the 2011 census.

In that five-year period, the number of non-resident workers living in the territory soared by 68.8 percent to a total of 105,200, while the resident population (excluding non-resident workers and foreign students) increased by 10.5 percent to 536,400.

Accordingly, the average annual growth rate of the population of Macau was 3.3 percent over the past five years, according to DSEC's analysis. This figure is considerably higher than the average growth rate between 2006 and 2011, which



measured 1.9 percent.

Macau-based sociologist Larry So told the Times that Macau's growing population would result in greater housing pressures in the region but would not affect education much, as most of the city's institutions are still seeking to attract more

students.

"I think there is a lot of concern over housing," said So. "If the population is increasing this much, the government will have a problem calculating how many new houses will be needed. We still don't have an exact number of those waiting for public housing."

"However, it will definitely not be so much of a problem for education as there are many institutions still trying to attract students and [are now looking] to mainland China for that," added the Macau-based academic.

Among the total population, just over 40 percent (265,100) of those living in Macau were born in the territory, while 43.6 percent (284,100) were born in mainland China.

The total number of households in the territory reached 188,600, up by 10.4 percent compared to five years ago. The

average household included 3.06 people in the latest census, a slight decrease from the 3.08 recorded in 2011.

The government will have a problem calculating how many new houses will be needed.

LARRY SO

According to DSEC's analysis, the population density of the MSAR was up by 15.9 percent in 2016, from 18,478 persons per square kilometer to

about 21,400.

In a statement, the bureau extrapolated that "the completion of public housing units in Taipa and Coloane, coupled with an increase in foreign students" resulted in significant population growth in certain parts of the MSAR.

The areas of Coloane Island, Pac On and Taipa Grande, and Universidade and Baía de Pac On each registered explosive population growth of 531 percent, 127 percent and 99 percent respectively. At the same time, Areia Preta and Iao Hon remained the most populous district, accounting for 11.8 percent of the territory's total population.

Other data collected in the census revealed that the median age of the total population increased from 37 in 2011 to 37.5 in 2016, whereas that of the Macau resident population rose by 0.7 years to 38.8.

The male population in the MSAR totaled 314,000 and the female population numbered 336,800, accounting for 48.2 percent and 51.8 percent of the total respectively.

The gender ratio was therefore 93.2 males per 100 females, marking a slight increase from 92.3 in 2011. The gender ratio of the resident population was lower at 90.2, a further decline from 92.7 five years ago.

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Banks ensure ATM cash supply

The Monetary Authority of Macao has urged all banks providing ATM services in Macau to put in place "pertinent arrangements" in order to ensure a steady supply of available banknotes. The request was made specifically to avoid a shortage of banknotes for residents and citizens during the Christmas holiday season. The arrangements include enhanced surveillance of functioning ATMs for timely replenishment of banknotes, as well as clearly displayed 24-hour customer service hotlines for citizens and visitors to contact the relevant banks.

High-speed rail expands links to Macau

Three new high-speed rail lines connecting Zhuhai to Shanghai, Changsha, and to Guiyang, will open on January 5, the People's Government of Guangdong Province announced. The lines will consist of two weekly connections between Zhuhai and Shanghai, one daily connection between Zhuhai and Guiyang, and another daily one between Zhuhai and Changsha. The Guangdong Government said that the rail links between Zhuhai and different locations in China would enable more convenient travel for Macau and Zhuhai residents who intend to move around the country.

LABOR

Employees request salary increases and compensation for overlapping holidays



Pereira Coutinho (left), Tam Choi Wan (2nd from left) and Loi Ngai Wai (2nd from right)

Julie Zhu

FOUR members of Ngan Yu Yuen Kung Luen Mang Wui (an alliance association consisting of employees of Macau Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd), organized a press conference last week at the Macau Civil Servants Association (ATFPM) to urge their employer to make changes to their salaries and holiday policies.

The conference was held following an attempt by the association to submit their requests to the gaming operator, which failed to receive any response.

Loi Ngai Wai, president of the association, informed that Ga-

laxy's employees are making three main requests: adjustment of salaries, provision of bonuses at the end of the year, and compensation for employees when holidays and weekends overlap.

Loi remarked that Galaxy had increased salaries every July over recent years, however did not do so in July this year. The company claimed that salaries remained on par with 2015 as a result of lower gaming incomes.

Loi told the media that in the third quarter of this year Galaxy recorded a revenue growth that had both quarterly and yearly similarities to that of 2015.

According to Loi, Galaxy has historically increased its em-

ployees' salaries by two to five percent each year. Moreover, in the first half of 2016, five gaming operators, not including Galaxy, reportedly gave their employees a bonus which was the rough equivalent to one month's salary. By comparison, during this time Galaxy offered a bonus equivalent to 65 percent of one month's salary. After a meeting with Galaxy's senior officials, employees managed to obtain an extra MOP2,888.

In Loi's words: "Galaxy's whole business has recorded a relatively big increase this year when compared to 2015. [Due to that], employees are calling on Galaxy to issue bonuses equal to their monthly salaries, rather than discounted ones."

The association also raised concerns that Galaxy is allegedly arranging weekly days off within public holidays on purpose. Loi informed that the association received a great number of complaints from employees about having to work during Golden Week for a period that would extend over 10 consecutive days.

Loi pointed out that there are already in Macau gaming operators granting workers extra days off when holidays overlap with weekends.

As told by Loi, Galaxy has so far responded to none of the aforementioned concerns. Tam Choi Wan, vice-president of the association, said that their procedures for salary increases are in line "with Macau's inflation rate."

Lawmaker Pereira Coutinho who is also the ATFPM head voiced the expectation that "the Chief Executive and the six operators can really give some hope to the people that are working at all hours in the casinos." He expressed the hope that in 2017 salaries for such individuals will increase according to the inflation rate.

He said that overlapping holidays and weekends is a problem that has not yet been solved, and it is something that can be done if the gaming operators "have a nice heart," and if they "really take them [the employees] as human beings instead of machines." JZ

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Caritas head criticizes new policy for non-resident workers

Lynzy Valles

NON-RESIDENTS who leave their employment or whose jobs are terminated now face another setback in the region, as local immigration authorities amend the relevant policies.

Previously, local immigration authorities granted 10-day visas to these employees, but have now shortened their length to eight days. Furthermore, if non-residents have been working in Macau for less than half a year, they will only be able to remain in the territory for two days after their employment is terminated.

Paul Pun, secretary general of Caritas Macau, has criticized the MSAR government for decreasing the number of days given to non-residents once they leave their job.

"It would be problematic for them. They may go back to their hometown. Somehow the government policy intends to not let them look for another job," he explained.

Pun explained some challenges that these domestic workers may face under the new visas, such as difficulty in finding affordable plane tickets. "If it's just a short time, the price of the ticket is more expensive. Two days could make big difference."

Although employers are



Paul Pun told the Times that the number of low-income residents under Caritas Macau's Food Bank program remains stable

responsible for purchasing a one-way plane ticket for employees, Pun explained that the employer might refuse to provide additional allowance to compensate employees for costly tickets.

"The anxiety level is high," he added. "The visa expires in just eight days; they don't even have time to adjust before going home. This is also difficult. Ten days is [already] not enough."

Pun believed that the move is probably a crackdown to limit the region's growing number of domestic workers.

Separately, the Caritas head told the Times that the number of low-income residents under Caritas Macau's Food Bank program will be more or less the same compared to

last year's figures.

According to the Caritas head, the short-term food assistance program reached 2,028 families as of December 11, a figure "quite similar" to last year.

Pun noted that in 2015, there were 2,015 families taking part in the program. Those families included 3,714 individuals.

"It's gradually increasing because of the promotion," he told the Times. "There is still more [days] to count so we are not sure if there is an increase, [but] probably it's more or less the same."

In recent years, Pun noted that some low-paid residents were not comfortable accepting food assistance from the government.

The non-government association hosted dialogues amongst these families, encouraging them to participate in the short program.

According to Pun, they had to explain the benefits of the assistance to the families, implying that such residents find it embarrassing to accept food aid.

Somehow, the government policy intends to not let them look for another job.

PAUL PUN

"More people know about the program and have accepted the service," he explained.

Meanwhile, the secretary-general also emphasized that the number of the program's users in Coloane has grown, citing that several families have moved from Macau to the Seac Pai Van public housing complex.

As of December 11, 1,369 individuals in Coloane received weekly food packages from Caritas Macau, a 32.3 percent increase compared to 2014.

Questions over abandoned land raised

Lei Cheng I has urged the government to release a public explanation regarding a plot of land next to one end of Ponte Governador Nobre de Carvalho which has been abandoned for many years. In a written inquiry to the government, Lei pointed out that the land has been leased since 1997. The government once revealed that the land would be used to build a theme park, although no project was ever initiated. Lei said that many construction materials were left on the site for more than ten years and questioned whether the government had started procedures to retake the land.

80-year-old lady dies in car accident

A local 80-year-old female resident died in a car accident last week at R. da Ribeira do Patane. The victim was collecting paper waste on the street when she was dragged under a private vehicle which had just started to move. The driver called the police after he looked under the car and realized what had happened. The male driver, who is in his 30s, passed a breathalyzer test. A shop manager who provided CCTV records to the police said that the driver had not noticed the old lady's presence.

Couple released from isolation after negative bird flu test

The couple admitted into quarantine on December 14 was released from the isolation ward they had been subjected to since testing positive for the H7N9 avian influenza virus, the Health Bureau (SSM) said in a recent statement. They were the first humans in Macau to contract the virus. Their individual medical conditions have improved after being treated in isolation in Conde de Sao Januario Hospital (CHCSJ) with antiviral drugs, and tests that showed no presence of the virus in their system. SSM concluded that medical observation and release were the appropriate next steps, as their tests are now clear. The bureau also stated that they would follow the individuals' medical conditions for 10 days after their release from hospital.

CHRISTMAS

Bishop's message encourages fellow believers to 'bring friends to the church'

IN his first Christmas message to the Catholic community since becoming Bishop of Macau, Stephen Lee encouraged believers to strive to bring more people to the church.

"Encourage all your fellow parishioners to bring friends, especially those who have been away from the church," Lee said in the message published December 23 on the website of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Macau. The message was titled: "Going back to the Father's embrace."

In a message that emphasized the ideals of "mercy" and "reconciliation", Stephen Lee wrote, "I hope the Diocese of Macau will keep promoting a merciful culture during the upcoming few months" and quoted Pope Francis' Apostolic letter "Misericordia et Misericordia" from late November this year, which focused on "mercy" and "reconciliation".

"We are sinners and we bear the burden of contradiction between

what we wish to do and what we do in fact. Yet grace always precedes us and takes on the face of the mercy that effects our reconciliation and pardon," he quoted. He used Pope Francis' quote to comment on the topic of reconciliation, in which he is said to be particularly interested. Lee said that he plans to publish a book next year with reports on reconciliation. In his preparations for the book, he requested fellow believers to help send him personal stories on the

topic.

Another topic addressed in the message was the "availability" of people for the religious sacraments.

"This event [the sacrament], allows us to feel God's embrace: he comes out welcoming us, restoring our grace, letting us become his children once again, [...] through this event [the sacrament], we confess our sins, and then we see, we acknowledge, we feel and embrace God's great love," he concluded. RM



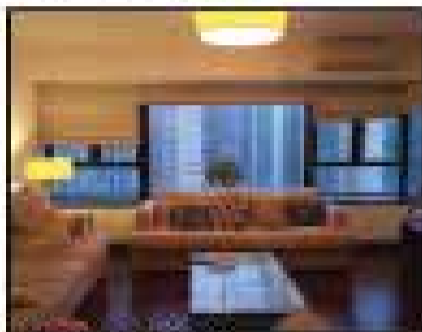
Stephen Lee

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Ref: 16120630
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Hellene Gardens, Lot 4, D Unit
Ref: 16120631
1,881sq. ft. HKD 12,500

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Macau, One Central Residences
Ref: 16120632
1,820sq. ft. HKD 25,000

Fully furnished, 3 bedroom apartment. Full club facilities. Excellent views over from Victoria and back across Macau city. Central location next to Wynn & MGM hotels in Macau. Available for rent with a 2 year agreement.



Calçada da Surpresa, 12, Ching Fai Court, Macau
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D Unit, Manhattan Taipa
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For Sale



Bauhinia Court, Hellene Gardens Appealing Apartment
Ref: 16120636
1,200sq. ft. HKD 7,380

Ref: 16120636
1,200sq. ft. HKD 7,380
Ref: HKD 4,770sq. ft.
Three good size bedrooms, master bedroom with ensuite. Open style kitchen, made lease for incorporating the original master quarters and back balcony. Living/dining area has a great layout with built in balcony. Views from the living room across the Cotai Strip mountains and from the kitchen over the swimming pool towards the South China Sea. With only 7 floors in this block the apartment can be considered a low rise building. Renovated 10 years ago the property could benefit from a face lift although with some TLC it could also be a great rental property.

Office: (853) 2835 2699



Nam Long, Taipa
Ref: 16120637
615sq. ft. HKD 3,380
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Ho Chio Meng nephew's contract terminated by MP

LAST Friday, Ieong Chon Kit, nephew of former Prosecutor General Ho Chio Meng, learned that his contract to work at the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) had been terminated, according to a notice published last week in the Official Gazette.

Ieong was a technical specialist at the MP. On August 1, 2014, Ieong commenced duties as the head of the Judicial Affairs Division of the Judiciary Assistance Department of the MP. Ieong was hired to perform his duties for a two-year period.

However, in November 2015, Ieong was demoted to the position of technical specialist. This situation officially came to light during Ho's trial on December 12.

The notice announcing Ieong's termination was signed by the Chief of Cabinet of the MP, Tam Peng Tong.

According to a report by Macau Concealers, Tam is also the husband of Sonia Chan, the Secretary for Administration and Justice.

Ieong's case is linked to Ho's because according to Ho's trial, some evidence in Ho's accusation was found in one of Ieong's USB pens.

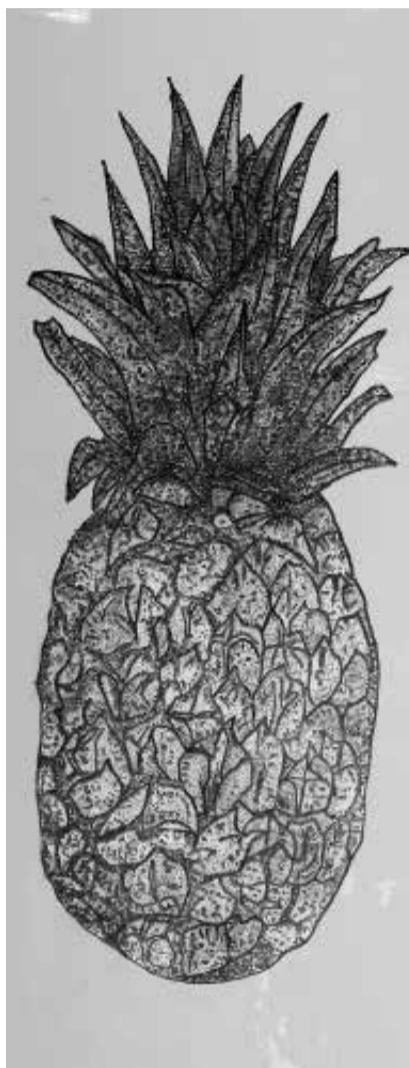
Ho has been accused of traveling to northern Europe in 2005 using public treasury funds, while accompanied by his wife and nephew. Ho claimed that his nephew was still a minor back then. The nephew mentioned in the trial happens to be Ieong.

Ieong, the youngest department head at MP, graduated with a bachelor's degree in management from the Macau University of Science and Technology.

In 2008, he was employed at the Judicial Affairs Division of the Judiciary Assistance Department of the MP.

ARTS

'Tropicalia Club' on show next month



CREATIVE Macau's first exhibition of 2017, which will be hosted between January 12 and February 18, will be "Tropicalia Club" by Portuguese artist Alexandre Marreiros.

Marreiros is a Macau-based artist involved in architecture, illustration, photography and painting.

"My main activity is architecture," Marreiros notes on his website.

"However, the desire and the need to express myself through drawing led me to develop activities in parallel with architecture - illustration, painting and photography."

Born in 1984, the artist graduated in architecture from the Arts and Architecture College of the Lusíada University in Lisbon. While living in Brazil, Marreiros developed his art and participated in numerous events and exhibitions before having his work showcased at

prestigious galleries back in Portugal.

Marreiros said that "having grown up with two different cultures, western and eastern" has helped him develop an "enthusiasm for the spaces, the cities and their stories, and the landscapes."

Marreiros currently resides in Macau but regularly travels between the MSAR and Lisbon. He has been awarded an honorable mention from Portuguese Contemporary Illustration and has had six of his photographs selected by the jury of the international Nikon Photo Contest.

Marreiros has also previously exhibited at the Script Road Macau Literary Festival 2016 and at the Macau Art Museum. Earlier this month, he participated in a group exhibition at the Military Club of Macau.

The exhibition's official launch will take place at 6.30 p.m. on January 12 at Creative Macau.

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Carrie Hong and Daniela Wei

A bond offering that gaming operator Imperial Pacific International Holdings Ltd. planned to use to fund construction of a new casino on the remote Pacific island of Saipan has been put on hold, according to people with knowledge of the matter, raising questions about the project's future.

The firm had planned to raise USD200 million to \$400 million, according to the people, who asked not to be identified as the discussions are private. Investors wanted a higher yield than the 10 percent to 11 percent that the Hong Kong-listed company was willing to offer, the people said. Imperial Pacific, with a market value of \$1.9 billion, planned to use the funds for the first phase of its new casino in the U.S. territory that was slated to open next year. It's currently operating there from a temporary facility.

With the bond off the table for now, Imperial Pacific loses a key source of financing for its casino project, ultimately envisioned to cost \$7 billion and encompass 20, six-star hotels and 11 casinos. Its current facility, Best Sunshine Live casino, posted daily per-table VIP revenue of about \$170,000 in the first half of 2016, almost eight times the average of Macau's largest casinos, according to company filings.

Imperial Pacific declined to comment on the status of its bond offering or its operations generally.

Some potential bond investors traveled to Saipan to tour the construction site in late September and met with the island's tourism board and the casino commission that oversees Im-

Saipan casino bond on hold risks future of USD7b resort



The construction site of the new resort

perial Pacific, according to the people. Subsequently, investors and the company couldn't agree on terms, the people said.

The reason, they said, was that the pricing of the security didn't sufficiently compensate them for the possible risk that Saipan's gaming laws could someday change and make it more difficult for Imperial to operate there. The deal was dropped by two of the lead underwriters in October, the people said.

The casino commission didn't

respond to an e-mail and phone messages seeking comment on the investors' trip and their concern about possible regulatory changes.

Last month, Moody's Investors Service assigned Imperial Pacific a B2 credit rating, five levels below investment grade, and put it under review for a possible downgrade because of the delay in selling bonds to help finance the project.

The company's receivables, which mainly comprise credit

loaned to customers for gambling, tripled in the first half on unpaid bills of VIP gamblers, and it had enough cash to cover 18 percent of its short-term debt as of June 30, according to a company interim report.

Imperial Pacific shares dropped 1 percent to close at HKD0.104 in Hong Kong Friday. They are down 38 percent this year.

Moody's said its review will focus on the company's "ability to secure sufficient long-term fun-

■ The new resort is aimed at attracting more Chinese gamblers and becoming a tourist draw within Asia

ding" as well as the "management of money-laundering risk to ensure that its gaming business in Saipan is sustainable."

"Potential investors would start to question what other alternatives might be available for the company," said Raymond Chia, head of credit research for Asia ex-Japan at Schroder Investment Management Ltd. in Singapore.

Mark Brown, Imperial Pacific's chief executive officer and a former senior executive in U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's Atlantic City casino operations, said in an interview last month that the Saipan operation complies with all relevant money-laundering and other regulations, and that bets are closely monitored by local and U.S. regulators. The new, multi-billion-dollar resort is aimed at attracting more Chinese gamblers and becoming a tourist draw within Asia, he said. **Bloomberg**

More foreign Vegas visits don't equal more tips, workers say

SERVERS and dealers on the Las Vegas Strip say they're worried that as more foreign visitors hit the restaurants and casinos, they'll receive smaller tips because the tourists are coming from countries like China, where American-style, 20 percent gratuities are uncommon.

"It's very difficult when you're serving or relying on tips and the majority of your guests are foreign. They don't tip you, or they may have a USD200 meal and tip you a dollar per person," said Cheryl Holt, who has been a food server on the Strip since 2011.

With a \$200 dinner check, Holt said as a ser-



People protest along the Las Vegas Strip. The November 29 protest was part of the National Day of Action to Fight for \$15. The campaign seeks higher hourly wages, including for workers at fast-food restaurants and airports

ver, she'd typically have to pass on about \$10 to the rest of the service staff, including a bartender,

busser and food runner. If she receives a small tip, Holt said she's paying for those customers to eat at

her table.

Holt told the Las Vegas Review-Journal that in her experience, visitors from Canada tend to tip about 10 percent. European tourists give smaller tips and Chinese visitors give about \$1 per person.

Hotels and resorts should help educate visitors, perhaps by displaying signs at dealer tables noting that the dealers expect tips, according to Xiaosheng Huang, a Chinese immigration lawyer in Las Vegas.

"Chinese normally think service workers are paid by the boss and need not to be paid separately," Huang said. "This is a side of cultural

Chinese normally think service workers are paid by the boss and need not to be paid separately.

XIAOSHENG HUANG

misunderstanding."

Dealers in the casinos, who receive about 80 percent of their income in gratuities, worry about stingy tips too, according to Joseph Carbon, who represents dealers at Caesars Palace, Harrah's Las Vegas, Bally's, Paris Las Vegas, and Wynn Las Vegas as the head of

the Transport Workers Union of America's gaming division. "Let's face it, this is a tip town," Carbon said.

Chinese tourists have an obligation to learn the culture they're visiting, but tourism officials need to help too, according to Michael Boyd, with China Ni Hao, a New York firm that was hired to help McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas welcome Chinese visitors.

"We may just have to accept the fact that we want that business, we want them to come here, but if they feel gouged for a tip, they may go somewhere else," Boyd said.

Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority spokeswoman Heidi Hayes said the agency does not have any program in place to educate foreign visitors about the culture. **AP**

ANGOLA

Projected population over 67 million in 2050

PAULO BARBOSA



Luanda, the Angolan capital (pictured), is the second most expensive city worldwide and the most expensive in Africa for expatriates, according to a recent survey

ANGOLA will have an estimated population of 67.92 million inhabitants in 2050, indicates the 2014-2050 Population Projection produced by the country's National Statistics Institute (INE) and presented last week in Luanda.

The document was presented by INE official Eliana Quintas, who specified that in that year the country will count 33.54 million men and 34.87 million women; 40 million people will live in urban centers and the other 27.89 million in rural areas.

Angola's population density will more than double from 21.5 inhabitants per square kilometer in 2014 to 54.5 inhabitants per square kilometer, Quintas said.

The projection of the country's total rural and urban population and for each province, as well as demographic characteristics, was estimated using the RUPAGG program developed by the Census Bureau of the United States of America and provides information about Angolan population trends broken down by age group, sex and area of residence.

To produce the 2014-2050 Population Projection the INE worked with the Health Ministry and received technical assistance from the United Nations Children's Fund, ICF International via the Demographic and Health Survey Program, and the United Nations Population Fund.

The 2014 Population and Housing Census revealed that Angola counted 25.78 million inhabitants that year, 12.49 million of them males. **MDT/Macauhub**

Azores Airlines to begin flights to Cape Verde in 2017



AZORES Airlines, a subsidiary of Portugal's SATA group, will begin flying connections to Cape Verde and Barcelona in the 2017 IATA summer season (April to October), the group's CEO Paulo Menezes announced.

The operation will use company aircraft, Menezes said while presenting the summer 2017 operational plan along with new Azores Airline products.

The chair of the SATA (Serviço Açoriano de Transportes Aéreos) group's board of directors explained that flights to Barcelona would begin in April and those to Cape Verde only in June, "two routes that we have iden-

tified as having great potential."

The regional secretary for transport and public works, Vítor Fraga, said that SATA's operational plan "clearly shows the commitment of Azores Airlines to the region," using the islands "as a hub between Europe, North America and Macaronesia (Azores, Madeira, Cape Verde and Canary Islands).

The current fleet of Azores Airlines comprises one A330 aircraft, three A310s and three A320s. Plans call for it to receive its first A321 "in the last quarter of 2017" and another aircraft "in the first quarter of 2018." **MDT/Macauhub**

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CHINA re-established diplomatic ties with Sao Tome and Principe, cementing the small West African island nation's shift in allegiance from Taiwan. The two countries signed a communique yesterday at a ceremony in Beijing attended by Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

The switch highlights Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's growing risk of isolation amid tensions with China. It cuts to 21 the number of nations that recognize the government in Taipei, rather than Beijing.

China has shown a willingness to use its economic and military might to pressure Tsai's Democratic Progressive Party, which swept the more Beijing-friendly Kuomintang from power in January. The Communist Party considers the self-governed island a province and has criticized Tsai's refusal to accept that both sides belong to "One China," its precondition for ties. China accounts for around 40 percent of Taiwan's exports.

Wang told reporters in Beijing that China welcomed Sao Tome and Principe's decision, saying it was made under the One China principle. "This relationship could bring solid results to both nations," Wang said. "The two sides will start cooperation in all areas based on the principle of mutual trust. China is willing to provide support to the economical and social development of Sao Tome and Principe within its capacity."

Sao Tome and Principe, with a population of about 197,500, consists of two archipelagos that lie within 320 kilometers off the northwestern coast of Gabon. It established ties with China in 1975 only to switch to Taiwan in 1997.

China revives ties with African nation in blow to Taiwan



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, right, prepares to shake hands with his Sao Tome counterpart Urbino Botelho after a joint press statement at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing

"We hope more and more Chinese interests will invest in Sao Tome and Africa," Urbino Botelho, Director da Politica Externa of Sao Tome and Principe, said at the Beijing briefing. "We hope more Chinese tourists will come visit."

Sao Tome and Principe had sought more than USD100

million from the government in Taipei, Taiwan's Central News Agency reported last week, citing an unidentified foreign ministry official.

Sao Tome and Principe Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada said last week that breaking relations with Taiwan "was the most correct decision" because "we have a commit-

ment to the people to improve their living conditions," according to Taiwan's United Daily News. Trovoada also denied that he had approached Taiwan for money.

In March, Beijing formally reestablished relations with Gambia - another former Taiwanese partner in West Africa - and has stepped up

communications with others, such as Panama and the Vatican. China had refrained from actively wooing away any of Taiwan's diplomatic partners during the eight-year tenure of Tsai's predecessor, Ma Ying-jeou, who advocated increased ties with the world's second-largest economy.

Tsai visited Panama and Paraguay two months after taking office and plans a similar Central American tour next month, including Guatemala and Honduras. That

■ Sao Tome and Principe established ties with China in 1975 only to switch to Taiwan in 1997

could provide an opportunity for a transit stop in the U.S., where the incoming president, Donald Trump, has expressed a willingness to reconsider long-standing U.S. policy toward China.

Trump's recent protocol-breaking phone call with Tsai and his attacks on China on Twitter, have sparked friction between the world's two biggest economies before he takes office. After the call, China flew a bomber around Taiwan in what it called a normal flight operation. **Bloomberg**

Country's 1st aircraft carrier sails into South China Sea

CHINA'S first aircraft carrier and five other warships passed by Taiwan and sailed into the contested South China Sea yesterday, Taiwan's Defense Ministry said.

The ships, led by the Liaoning, sailed past the Pratas Islands, also known as the Dongsha Islands, a Taiwan-controlled atoll in the northern part of the South China Sea, according to the ministry.

China's Defense Ministry said Saturday that the Liaoning had set off for a routine open-sea exercise in the Western Pacific as part of its annual training. But its entering into the politically sensitive South China Sea follows rising tensions between Beijing and Taipei over the status of the self-ruled island.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen has refused to endorse Beijing's concept that Taiwan is a part of China. Beijing claims

the self-governing island as its own territory and says failing to endorse the one-China principle would destabilize relations.

The Taiwanese ministry said the Liaoning and warships had on Sunday sailed 90 nautical miles south of Taiwan in the Bashi Channel, a waterway between Taiwan and the Philippines.

Tensions have mounted in the South China Sea, where the U.S. and China accuse each other

of engaging in a dangerous military buildup. China claims nearly all of the sea and is pitted against smaller neighbors in multiple disputes over islands, coral reefs and lagoons.

The U.S.-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative think tank said this month that satellite imagery showed China building large anti-aircraft guns on artificial islands in the contested waters, where China has



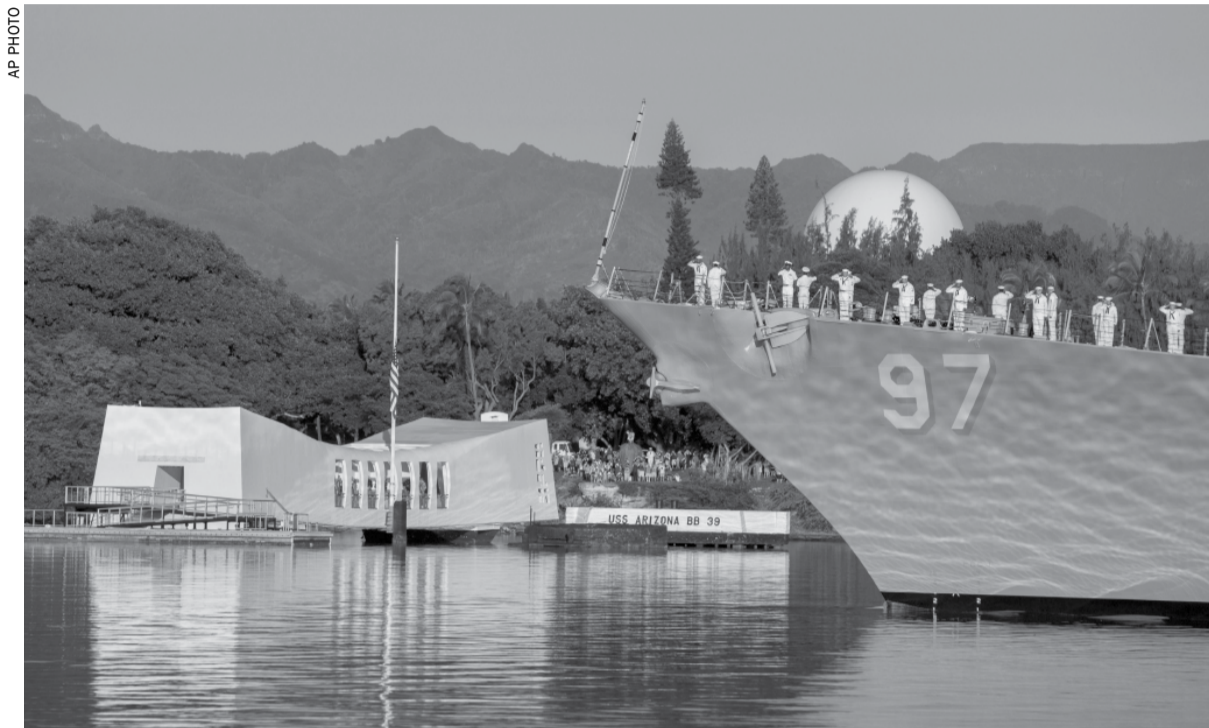
Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning cruises for a test in the sea

also laid airstrips, built communications facilities and deployed suspected missiles.

China has characterized its moves as defensive in nature and accused U.S. warships of making provocative passes through the region.

The Liaoning, commissioned by the Chinese navy in 2012, first sailed to the South China Sea in 2013, when it docked at a navy base near the Chinese holiday resort of Sanya. The vessel at the time was not outfitted with a full aircraft complement. **AP**

Japan ex-PM Yoshida's forgotten Pearl Harbor visit recounted



Sailors on the USS Halsey salute while passing by the USS Arizona Memorial during a moment of silence at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Honolulu

Mari Yamaguchi, Tokyo

JAPANESE Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who will visit Pearl Harbor with President Barack Obama today, wasn't even born when Japan's former leader Shigeru Yoshida went there just six years after the country's World War II surrender, by himself and feeling awkward.

Yoshida is best remembered for signing the San Francisco peace treaty with the U.S. and others in 1951, allowing Japan back into international society after its war defeat. His Pearl Harbor visit, which he made on his way home from San Francisco, was largely eclipsed by the historic treaty.

Archival writings and photos unearthed by The Associated

Press reconstruct Yoshida's visit, from his aim to win U.S. trust to how he was put at ease by the U.S. Navy commander's dog.

Yoshida arrived at Pearl Harbor on Sept. 12, 1951, shortly after requesting a courtesy visit to the office of Adm. Arthur W.R. Radford, commander of the U.S. Pacific fleet. The office overlooked Pearl Harbor, offering a direct view of the site of the Japanese attack of Dec. 7, 1941.

Radford recalled that he thought Yoshida might feel uncomfortable because of his office's location. "I could almost see the wreck of Arizona" out of the window, he wrote in his memoir, "From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam," referring to a battleship that sank in the attack.

Yoshida, westernized and fluent in English, showed up in a white suit, wearing his trademark brimmed hat and carrying a cane, apparently looking a bit stiff.

Then Radford's dog broke the ice.

His little Scottish Terrier, which was stretched out in front of Radford's desk, walked slowly to Yoshida to be patted, while sniffing around his shoes and ankles.

"That started a dog conversation that took most of the visit," Radford wrote.

Yoshida was a dog fancier, and had bought terrier puppies just before leaving San Francisco, his grandson Taro Aso, currently Japan's finance minister, has said. Yoshida named the pair "San" and "Fran" after his

successful trip.

Years later, Yoshida told Radford's wife how he was embarrassed when he walked into the office after seeing Pearl Harbor, and how happy he was that the dog was able to settle him down.

A Navy archival photo obtained by the AP shows the two men shaking hands, with a smiling Yoshida looking up at the much taller Radford. Yoshida spent about 20 minutes at the office, according to an AP story from Sept. 13, 1951.

Yoshida's visit to Pearl Harbor was actually on his second Hawaii stopover, having stopped there on his way to San Francisco as well.

But he was more relaxed the second time after completing the important mission in San Francisco, where he also signed the original Japan-U.S. security pact.

On his way to California, Yoshida landed in Honolulu on Aug. 31, 1951, when Japan was still technically an enemy.

During that visit, he laid flowers for the war dead at Honolulu's National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, a military cemetery better known as Punchbowl. Three other Japa-

nese prime ministers have since followed suit. A local Hawaii newspaper recently reported that two others also had visited Pearl Harbor later in the 1950s.

Yoshida's daughter, Kazuko Aso, who was traveling with him, recalled that security was extremely tight in Hawaii on his first stopover, before the peace treaty was signed, and that Yoshida, who stayed on the top floor of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, was instructed not to leave the hotel for safety reasons.

"But that old man insisted he wanted to go out [...] to pay tribute to the war dead," Aso said in an interview published in the Bungei Shunju monthly magazine weeks after the trip.

She said the Japanese delegation unexpectedly received a warm welcome. Photos in the Japanese newspaper Mainichi showed Yoshida's face nearly buried in Hawaiian flower necklaces because he had received so many of them at the airport.

At the Sept. 12, 1951, reception attended by U.S. military and Hawaiian officials, Yoshida sought further U.S. economic assistance and cooperation to reconstruct his war-devastated country and pledged to never use aggression.

Two days later, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin welcomed his speech as "a notably frank admission of Japan's war guilt and a pledge that Japan will do everything possible to repair the enormous damage done by her armies, navy and air force." **AP**

JAPAN, US SET TO SIGN PACT TO LIMIT US BASE WORKER IMMUNITY

JAPAN AND the U.S. have agreed in principle on guidelines for limiting immunity from Japanese prosecution for civilian workers at American military bases, following a murder case this year on a southern Japanese island involving a Marine-turned-

contractor, officials said yesterday. Since July, the governments have been negotiating several points concerning U.S. civilian contractors at American bases who are subject to protection under the countries' Status of Forces Agreement.

Ganbat Namjilsangarav

HUNDREDS of Mongolians braved frigid weather yesterday to stage a protest in the country's capital demanding that the government do more to address worsening air pollution that they fear is sickening their children and shortening their lives.

The demonstrators gathered in a public square in front of government offices, holding banners with slogans such as "Let's give fresh air to our future children," "Smog is silent killer" and "We can't breathe."

"We are desperate and

we are organizing this demonstration to make authorities feel our frustration and anger," said Purevkhuu Tserendorj, one of the protest's organizers and a mother of two.

The air temperature hovered around minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus 4 Fahrenheit).

According to UNICEF, the United Nations' children's agency, air pollution is linked to the three diseases that have resulted in the most "lost life-years" in Mongolia.

The agency said in February that pneumonia and other respiratory infections were among the

Despite frigid weather, Mongolians protest worsening smog

leading causes of death among Mongolian children under the age of 5. It said that the lungs of children living in highly polluted districts of Ulaanbaatar, the capital, do not function as well as those living in rural areas, with real risks of them suffering chronic respiratory diseases when they're older.

The protesters demanded that the government

increase the number of beds in hospitals that have been overcrowded with sick children and develop a plan to reduce air pollution by 80 percent by 2018. They also urged the government to install air filters in kindergartens in the capital's slum areas, which are worst-hit by the pollution.

Ulaanbaatar is one of the world's coldest capi-

tals, with temperatures sometimes falling to -40 C (-40 F) in January, the coldest month of the year. More than half of the city's 1.3 million residents have to rely on burning raw coal, plastic, rubber tires and other materials to stay warm and cook meals in their homes. Such areas, where residents live in traditional round tents that do not have centralized heat-

ing, have been shrouded in choking smog in recent days.

Responding to the protesters' calls, Mongolian Minister of Environment and Tourism Oyunkhorol Dulamsuren said that between 2011 and 2015, the government spent more than USD37 million while international donors spent \$47 million on measures aimed at curbing air pollution. **AP**

Bullit Marquez

A powerful typhoon blew out of the northern Philippines yesterday after killing at least six people and spoiling Christmas in several provinces, where more than 380,000 people abandoned celebrations at home to reach emergency shelters and other safer grounds.

Typhoon Nock-Ten cut power to five entire provinces due to toppled electric posts and trees, dimming Christmas revelries in Asia's largest Catholic nation. More than 300 flights were delayed or re-scheduled and ferries were barred from sailing, stranding more than 12,000 holiday travelers.

Six people died from drowning or by being pinned by fallen trees, poles and a collapsed concrete wall in the provinces of Quezon and Albay, southeast of Manila, after the typhoon made landfall in Catanduanes province Sunday night, officials said.

Many military camps and outposts in Catanduanes and outlying provinces were damaged and some troops were injured, the military said.

Nock-Ten, locally known as Nina, then blew westward across mountainous and island provinces, damaging homes, uprooting trees and knocking down communications.

Typhoon kills 6, spoils festivities in Philippines



A Filipino boards one of several fishing boats that took shelter from Typhoon Nock-Ten in Manila

After weakening on landfall, the typhoon had sustained winds of up to 120 kilometers per hour and gusts of 180 kph when it blew into the South China Sea after battering the congested provinces of Batangas and Cavite, south of Manila, government forecasters said.

A cargo ship with about two dozen crewmen radioed for help as their vessel started to list off

Batangas. It later ran aground and turned on its side in Mabini town, the coast guard said.

The storm was one of the strongest to hit the Philippines since Typhoon Haiyan left more than 7,300 people dead or missing and displaced over 5 million in 2014. But officials in some provinces found it difficult to convince people to abandon their Christmas celebrations and head

for the shelters before the storm hit. Some officials said they had to impose forced evacuations.

"Some residents just refused to leave their homes even when I warned them that you can face what amounts to a death penalty," Cedric Daep, a top disaster-response official in Albay, said by phone.

Shopping malls and stores were ordered to close early on Christ-

mas Day to encourage people to remain indoors, "but at the height of the typhoon, many cars were still being driven around and people were out walking," Daep said. "We warned them enough, but we just can't control their mind."

Officials in Albay, where more than 150,000 villagers were displaced by the typhoon, declared a "state of calamity" on Sunday to allow faster disbursement of emergency funds.

About 20 typhoons and storms lash the Philippines each year. In the past 65 years, seven typhoons have struck the country on Christmas Day, according to the government's weather agency.

Tens of thousands of villagers, forced to spend Christmas in crowded and powerless emergency shelters, started to return home yesterday to deal with the damage.

"They have left the evacuation centers and we're seeing the sun again," Ann Ongjoco, mayor of the town of Guinobatan in Albay, one of five provinces that lost electricity, said by phone.

But she said her town, where more than 17,600 villagers fled to shelters in schools, will not be able to resume the holiday celebrations because of the post-typhoon mess. "Many houses made of light materials were destroyed," she said. **AP**



The entire roof of a store partially blocks the road after being swept by typhoon Nock-Ten

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INDIA

Long-range nuclear capable missile tested

AP PHOTO



Bibhudatta Pradhan

INDIA successfully test-fired its longest range nuclear-capable missile, confirming its status in the select group of nations with weapons that can travel from one continent to another.

Agni-V, with a range of more than 5,000 kilometers, completed its final firing test at the Defence Research and Development Organization's range on Dr. Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of the eastern state of Odisha yesterday.

"This was the fourth test of Agni-5 missile and the second one from a canister on a Road Mo-

bile Launcher," the Ministry of Defence said in a statement. "All the four missions have been successful."

India's president, Pranab Mukherjee, confirmed the launch with a tweet. "Congratulations DRDO for successfully test firing Agni V. It will enhance our strategic and deterrence capabilities," he wrote. Prime Minister Narendra Modi soon followed with his own tweet: "It will add tremendous strength to our strategic defense."

India's space and missile programs, along with economic growth of more than 7 percent and a bid for a permanent seat in

the United Nations Security Council, is part of the country's efforts to build up its defense capabilities and establish itself as a world power.

The locally-developed Agni-V is capable of reaching as far as Beijing, IANS reported in July. India joined a group including the U.S., Russia, China, France and the U.K that have intercontinental ballistic missiles when it first test-fired Agni-V in 2012.

India's current range of missiles are mostly intended for confrontation with neighboring rivals China and Pakistan. India has fought three wars with Pakistan and one with China.

While differences over border disputes remain, India and China have improved political, economic and military ties in recent years. Relations between India and Pakistan are passing through their worst phase in more than a decade. **Bloomberg**

OBITUARY

Pop superstar George Michael dies of heart failure at 53



Gregory Katz, London

GEORGE Michael's moment of liberation followed what seemed at first to be a time of deep humiliation.

He was blessed with sensual good looks and an exquisite voice, attributes he used to become first a teenybopper heartthrob and then a mature solo artist with videos that played up his considerable appeal. He kept his own sexual orientation private, until he was arrested in 1998 for lewd conduct in a public toilet in Los Angeles after being spotted by a male undercover police officer.

In an earlier era, that might have doomed his career. Instead of retreating, however, he made a single and video — "Outside" — that ridiculed the charges against him and mocked the Los Angeles police officers who busted him.

The memorable image of the two uniformed policemen kissing in the video — both funny and outrageous at the time — helped Michael come out as a proud gay man. He was unashamed, unapologetic and ready to poke fun at himself even as he produced a steady stream of

hits.

But Michael, whose death from heart failure at 53 was announced Sunday, struggled in his later years, fighting health issues and substance abuse problems. His voice remained golden — at times it seemed there was almost no limit to his range — but his behavior in public became ever more erratic.

Despite his great talent, he never found a niche for himself as a senior statesman of the rock world. His fans stuck with him despite it all, and many expected one more comeback. People rooted for Michael, even as they felt he was slipping away, giving in to his torment.

Michael shot to stardom at an early age in the teen duo WHAM! and moved smoothly into a solo career. It was a classic showbiz story — a lad named Georgios Panayiotou with strong Greek Cypriot roots takes the name George Michael and forms a band with Andrew Ridgeley that brings him wealth and worldwide fame.

Photos and videos from that era show Michael with long locks, piercing eyes and a show-stopping smile. He was made for MTV, which was emerging as a dominant force, and he

had a powerful video presence, borrowing some of his dance moves from Elvis Presley and sometimes styling himself as a motorcycle rebel who would have made James Dean or Marlon Brando proud.

He seemed to be on top of the world when he graduated from WHAM! and started scoring his own hits, but later said he was struggling with his sexuality and remembers his late 20s as a very depressing period.

The AIDS crisis was hitting the gay community extremely hard at the time, and he lost one partner to the disease. He said it took him several years to recover.

"I had my very first relationship at 27 because I really had not actually come to terms with my sexuality until I was 24," he said. "I lost my partner to HIV then it took about three years to grieve; then after that I lost my mother. I felt almost like I was cursed."

He was unsettled and unhappy and, at the same time, became that rare artist who enjoys both chart success and tremendous respect from his peers. He sold well over 100 million albums, walked away from awards dinners weighed down with tro-

phies, and recorded duets with the giants in his field.

The long list of people who recorded with Michael includes all-time greats: Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, Luciano Pavarotti and Elton John, for starters. Their willingness to share the spotlight was a sure sign of the way Michael's talents were appreciated by fellow musicians.

Michael struggled in his later years, fighting health issues and substance abuse problems

Critics generally viewed his WHAM! songs as catchy but disposable pop and gave his solo efforts far higher marks. His first solo album, 1987's "Faith," sold more than 20 million copies, and he enjoyed several hit singles including

the raunchy "I Want Your Sex," which was boosted by a provocative video that received wide airplay on MTV.

The song was controversial not only because of its explicit nature, but also because it was seen as encouraging casual sex and promiscuity at a time when the AIDS epidemic was at its height. Michael and his management tried to tamp down this point of view by having the singer write "Explore Monogamy" on the leg and back of a model in the video.

His career was peaking, but a protracted legal dispute with his record company, Sony, took a toll.

As the hits slowed, he became better known for health scares and brushes with the police. He was fond of marijuana and prescription sedatives, a dangerous combination that had an effect on his driving. Several times he was found slumped over his car's steering wheel, not moving.

Some made jokes about his erratic driving, but the underlying problems were serious. In 2010, his driver's license was finally revoked for five years after he drove his Land Rover into the side of a Snappy Snap photo shop with so much force that his vehicle dented the wall.

A witty passer-by remembering Michael's early career wrote the word WHAM on the spot his SUV had hit.

He was arrested a second time in public toilets — this time in North London in 2008 for drug use, an incident that prompted him to apologize to his fans and promise to get his life in order. He seemed to sense that he was wearing out his welcome with the public, offering an apology to everybody "just for boring them."

He said at a press conference in 2011 that he felt he had let young people down with his misbehavior and had made it easier for others to denigrate homosexuals. By that time, many of his songs had become popular gay anthems, including those written and released before he revealed his sexual preference.

Despite these personal setbacks, Michael's musical performances remained strong even as his material moved farther from the teen tunes that first brought him to stardom.

The Telegraph newspaper in 2011 described a London concert appearance as an impressive event, calling his voice, "A rich, soulful instrument, it's capable of serious emotional heft, expertly matching the confessional tone of his own material."

He was straightforward about his reasons for first starting a ska band with Ridgeley and later forming WHAM!

"I wanted to be loved," he said. "It was an ego satisfaction thing." **AP**

Nataliya Vasilyeva,
Veronika Silchenko

Russia: Focus is on faults, not terror, in plane crash probe

A pilot error or a technical fault — not terrorism — is likely to be the cause of the plane crash into the Black Sea, Russia's transport minister said yesterday as the nation held a day of mourning for the victims.

All 84 passengers and eight crew members on the Russian military's Tu-154 plane are believed to have died Sunday morning when it crashed two minutes after taking off from the southern city of Sochi. The passengers included dozens of singers in Russia's world-famous military choir, nine Russian journalists and a Russian doctor known for her charity work in war zones.

Yesterday, the search operation involved more than 3,500 people on 45 ships — including 135 divers flown in from across Russia — sweeping a vast crash site at sea and along the shore, according to the Defense Ministry.

Five helicopters and drones were being used to help spot bodies and debris. Two deep-water submersibles arrived yesterday in Sochi to aid the operation, which went on all through the night thanks to powerful searchlights.

The Black Sea search area — which covers over 10 square kilometers (about 4 square miles) — is plagued by underwater currents that can carry debris and body fragments into the open sea.

The search party has not yet found the plane's black boxes, Emergency Situations Minister Vladimir Puchkov told Russian news agencies. Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov said earlier that the plane's flight recorders did not have radio beacons, so locating them on the seabed was going to be challenging.

Speaking on television yester-



Ministry of Emergency Situations employees prepare rescue boats at a pier just outside Sochi

day, Sokolov said that terrorism was not among the main theories for the crash cause, and that authorities were looking into a possible technical fault or a pilot error.

Still, several aviation experts noted factors that could suggest a terror attack, such as the crew's failure to report any malfunction and the fact that debris from the plane was scattered over a wide area.

"Possible malfunctions [...] certainly wouldn't have prevented the crew from reporting them," Vitaly Andreyev, a former senior Russian air traffic controller, told RIA Novosti.

The plane was taking the Defense Ministry's choir, the Ale-

xandrov Ensemble, to perform at a New Year's concert at Hemeim air base in Syria's coastal province of Latakia. It had originated from Moscow's military airport of Chkalovsky and stopped in Sochi for refueling.

Despite the Syrian connection, Sokolov said the government sees no need to heighten security measures at Russian airports.

Emergency crews found fragments of the plane about 1.5 kilometers from the shore Sunday but a deputy defense minister told Russian news agencies that experts estimated the Tu-154 crash site at 6 kilometers from the shore.

By yesterday morning, rescue teams had recovered 11 bodies as

well as body fragments. All were flown to Moscow, where the remains will be identified. Local governor Veniamin Kondratyev told Russian state television that most of the bodies could be still inside the fuselage.

Russia also asked the authorities of Georgia's breakaway republic of Abkhazia, which lies just 7 kilometers east of the Sochi airport, to help monitor the Black Sea for plane debris or bodies.

The Tu-154 is a Soviet-built three-engine airliner designed in the late 1960s. The plane that crashed Sunday was built in 1983, and underwent factory check-ups and maintenance in 2014, the Defense Ministry said.

Yesterday, a nationwide day of

mourning for the plane victims, red and white carnations piled up outside the Moscow office of the Alexandrov Ensemble. One singer who did not get on the plane for personal reasons said he was devastated at the loss of so many talented colleagues.

Soloist Vadim Ananyev stayed behind to help his wife with the kids as they just had a new baby.

"I have lost my friends and colleagues, all killed, all five soloists - I feel in complete disarray," Ananyev told The Associated Press. "It is such a shame. I have known these people for 30 years. I know their wives and children. I feel terrible for the children and for all that I have lost."

Ananyev said he had received condolences from all over Russia and from abroad.

"We were loved all over the world, never mind the political situation," he said.

Mourners also lit candles and brought flowers to Channel One and NTV, whose TV journalists were going to Syria to cover the concert, and to a charity founded by Dr. Yelizaveta Glinka, who was on the plane bringing medicines to Syria.

At Sochi's Adler airport, mourners came to light candles at the airport's chapel and lay flowers at an improvised shrine that featured photos of some of the victims.

Russian TV channels took entertainment shows off their programs yesterday and outdoor seasonal celebrations were scrapped across Russia. AP

TRUMP

Pick for ambassador to Israel has all sides on edge

IF President-elect Donald Trump wanted to show he planned to obliterate President Barack Obama's approach to Israel, he may have found his man to deliver that message in David Friedman, his pick for U.S. ambassador.

The bankruptcy lawyer and son of an Orthodox rabbi is everything Obama is not: a fervent supporter of Israeli settlements, opponent of Palestinian statehood and unrelenting defender of Israel's government. So far to the right is Friedman that even many Israel supporters worry he

could push Israel's hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to be more extreme, scuttling prospects for peace with Palestinians in the process.

The heated debate over Friedman's selection is playing out just as fresh tensions erupt between the U.S. and Israel, punctuated last Friday by the Obama administration's stunning move to allow a U.N. Security Council resolution to pass condemning Israeli settlements as illegal. The move to abstain, rather than veto, defied years of U.S. tradition of shielding Israel from such

resolutions, and elicited angry condemnation from Israel, lawmakers of both parties, and especially Trump.

"Things will be different after Jan. 20th," when he's sworn in, Trump vowed on Twitter.

Friedman, certainly, is different. Presidents of both parties have long called for a two-state solution that envisions eventual Palestinian statehood, and Netanyahu says he agrees. Friedman does not. He's called the two-state solution a mere "narrative" that must end.

Under Obama, the U.S. has worked closely with J

Street, an Israel advocacy group sharply critical of Netanyahu. Not Friedman. He accuses Obama of "blatant anti-Semitism" and calls J Street "worse than kapos," a reference to Jews who helped the Nazis imprison fellow Jews during the Holocaust.

For decades the U.S. has opposed Israeli settlement-building in lands it seized in the 1967 Mideast War. Friedman runs a nonprofit that raises millions of dollars for Beit El, a settlement of religious nationalists near Ramallah. Beit El runs a right-wing news

AP PHOTO



David Friedman

outlet and a yeshiva whose dean has provocatively urged Israeli soldiers to refuse orders to uproot settlers from their homes.

So it's unsurprising that Friedman's nomination has already sharpened the borders of a growing balkanization of American Jews, between those who want the U.S. to push Israel toward peace and those who believe Obama's approach abandoned America's closest Mideast ally.

It's a debate playing out even at Temple Hillel, near the Long Island-Queens border, where Friedman's father was rabbi for almost half a century.

"Clearly, David's opinions do not appeal to everybody in the synagogue, and they appeal to others in the synagogue," said Ken Fink, the synagogue's president and longtime congregant. "But there's a huge amount of pride for the hometown boy." AP

The New Tiguan2. All grown-up



Active Info Display



1.4TSI with 150HP



5 star NCAP



LED Headlight



3D LED Taillight

The Tiguan 2 is a great all-grown-up SUV with distinctive styling which redefines its class and confidently points the way to the future. The new generation Tiguan is the first sport utility vehicle to be based on the modular transverse matrix (MQB), and it sets new standards in design, comfort and functionality. In doing so it of course remains capable of off-road, with a rugged all-wheel drive system that includes premium class technology for use on and off the highway. The Tiguan 2 is, then, both more SUV and more than an SUV.



Volkswagen

PS : 1) The pictures are for reference only.

2) In the event of any dispute, Volkswagen Hong Kong reserves the right to make the final decision.

Volkswagen showroom : Avenida 1^o de Maio N^o680, The Bayview, B/C, G, Macau Tel : 2872 1222

Volkswagen service center : Avenida Son On, Paga On, Lote N, Taipa, Macau Tel : 2885 7533

what's ON



THE STAMP FESTIVAL

TIME: 9am-5:30pm (no admission after 5:00 pm), closed on public holidays

UNTIL: April 7, 2017

VENUE: Communication Museum of Macao / Estrada D. Maria II, No. 7

ADMISSION: MOP10

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2871 8063 / 2871 8570

EXHIBITION "TRACES AND VISION – LONGZHOU 'SHEHUO' FOLK PERFORMANCES, PHOTOGRAPHY BY WU XIAOPENG"

TIME: 9am-9pm

UNTIL: January 8, 2017

VENUE: Temporary Exhibitions Gallery of the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8988 4100 / 2882 7103

'LUI CHUN KWONG THE DISTANT LINE'

EXHIBITION

TIME: 10am-9pm

UNTIL: February 26, 2017

VENUE: Tap Seac Gallery / Av. Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida, No. 95, Macao

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2836 6866

FORMER HOME OF REVOLUTIONARY LEADER YE Ting

TIME: 10am-6pm daily (Except Wednesdays, open on public holidays)

VENUE: 76, Rua Almirante Costa Cabral

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8399 6699

MACAU GRAND PRIX MUSEUM & WINE MUSEUM

Time: 10am-8pm daily (Except Tuesdays)

VENUE: Rua Luis Gonzaga Gomes, 431, basement (Tourism Activities Centre-CAT)

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8798 4108 / 2833 3000

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR EXHIBITION

TIME: 10am-6pm daily, (Except Thursdays, open on public holidays)

UNTIL: February 21, 2017

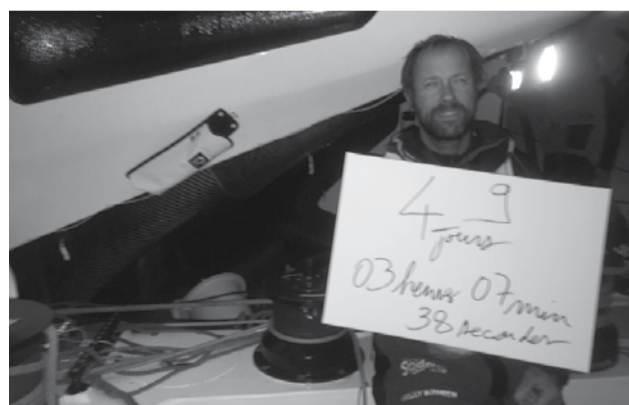
VENUE: Macau Science Centre, Avenida Dr. Sun Yat-Sen

ADMISSION: Exhibition Centre MOP25;

Planetarium MOP60-80

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2888 0822

Offbeat



A little over 49 days — that's all it took Frenchman Thomas Coville to sail around the world alone, to set what French officials say is a new world record.

Coville sailed into the Brittany port of Brest yesterday on his Sodebo trimaran. He rejoined his family, weeping with joy, thanked his support crews and showered the seas with champagne.

His round-the-world journey, starting from an island in the English Channel, took 49 days, 3 hours, 7 minutes and 38 seconds, according to his website.

It was Coville's third attempt to beat the previous record of 57 days held by Frenchman Francis Joyon since 2008. The record before that, of 71 days, had been held by British sailor Ellen MacArthur.

Joyon, in a statement, was among those congratulating Coville. **AP**

TV canal macau

13:00	TDM News (Repeated)
13:30	News (RTPi) Delayed Broadcast
14:50	RTPi Live
17:40	Precious Pearl (Repeated)
18:30	TDM Sport (Repeated)
19:30	Soap Opera
20:30	Main News, Financial & Weather Report
21:00	Non-Daily Portuguese News
21:10	TDM Interview
21:40	Once Upon A Time S2
22:10	Precious Pearl
23:00	TDM News
23:30	Miscellaneous
00:05	Main News, Financial & Weather Report (Repeated)
00:40	RTPi Live

cinema

CINETEATRO

22 DEC - 28 DEC



ASSASSIN'S CREED

ROOM 1

4:00, 7:45, 9:45pm

Director: Justin Kurzel

Starring: Michael Fassbender, Marion Cotillard

Language: English

Duration: 140min

FALLEN

ROOM 3

2:45, pm

Director: Scott Hicks

Starring: Addison Timlin, Jeremy Irvine, Harrison Gilbertson

Language: English

Duration: 91min



SING

ROOM 3

2:15pm, 5:45pm, 7:45pm

Director: Garth Jennings

Starring: Matthew McConaughey, Reese Witherspoon, Seth MacFarlane

Language: Cantonese (English)

Duration: 108min

MACAU TOWER

22 DEC - 28 DEC



ROUGE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY

ROOM 3

(3D) 2:00, 4:30, 7:00, 9:30pm

Director: Gareth Edwards

Starring: Felicity Jones, Diego Luna, Ben Mendelsohn, Donnie Yen

Language: English (Cantonese)

Duration: 133min

this day in history



1977: STAR WARS FEVER HITS BRITAIN

Thousands of people are flocking to cinemas in the UK to watch the long-awaited blockbuster, Star Wars - a movie which is already setting US box offices alight.

Bracing the cold weather, young and old queued from 0700 GMT in London at the Dominion, and Leicester Square cinemas, to snatch up non-reserved tickets which are otherwise booked until March.

Star Wars, which was first released in America seven months ago, has taken audiences by storm and outstripped last year's blockbuster Jaws to gross \$156m (£108m) at the box office.

Carrie Fisher, Sir Alec Guinness and little known Harrison Ford star in this fairytale set in space. Produced by Gary Kurtz, written and directed by George Lucas who directed American Graffiti, the U-classified sci-fi film is a classic epic of good versus evil.

It has enthralled audiences under a dazzle of special effects with wizards, heroes, monsters in "a galaxy far, far away".

The 900 people involved in the film included giants, dwarfs, artists and the man who built machines for James Bond.

Many of the optical special effects were developed in California by Industrial Light and Magic, a George Lucas company. The on-stage special effects were put together at Elstree studios in Britain.

Filming took the cast to Tunisia, Death Valley California, Guatemala and the EMI soundstage at Elstree.

The build-up and hype has led to store wars over Star Wars with products including T-shirts, sweets, jig-saw puzzle, watches and food to name but a few.

Mr Lucas has published a paperback version and Marvel comics have produced a special edition to meet the thirst for Star Wars' merchandise.

But for those queuing today nothing will satisfy them but a chance to see the film itself - easy targets for touts trying to sell £2.20 tickets for £30.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The low-budget film, which George Lucas feared would be a flop, originally took £294.29m worldwide. In an inflation-adjusted tally the film comes second only to Gone With The Wind, with an international gross of £975,743,340.

It became a worldwide phenomenon and was followed by The Empire Strikes Back and Return of the Jedi both released in quick succession, securing the film in movie history.

The original three films were based on parts 4, 5, and 6 of screen plays Lucas had written on the same theme. The original Star Wars movie was turned into a novel by Alan Dean Foster.

Fans waited almost 20 years to see one of the "prequels" to these - parts 1, 2 and 3 - which were withheld because Lucas wanted to wait until special effects were more sophisticated. In 1999 the first of these prequels, The Phantom Menace, was released and three years later the Attack of the Clones hit the screens. In 2005 the third episode, Revenge of the Sith, was released.

YOUR STARS

Aries
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Your world's an orderly, balanced and bright one, and you're doing your part to keep it that way -- putting selfishness aside and enjoying giving just as much as you're delighting in receiving.

Taurus
April 20-May 20
There's so much good stuff all around you, you'll just want to grab hold of as much as possible and revel in it. It's certainly an appropriate time for indulgence, but you should mix in a balance of activities

Gemini
May 21-Jun. 21
The energy the stars are sending you befits this special day perfectly. You're ready for fun and celebration surrounding family and friends, and everything has a little extra sparkle to it.

Cancer
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Home and all things domestic -- maybe lavish meals, entertaining family and friends, enjoying coziness and comfort -- are in the stars, in a way that seems custom-made for you.

Leo
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
It feels as if other people were put here to grant your wishes, but it's also a reflection of your own generous spirit and accumulated good karma. A very special gift could come your way now.

Virgo
Aug. 23-Sept. 22
Your analytical side goes out the window now, and you're indulging in sweet sentimentality and the joy of the season. It doesn't hurt that you have the day all planned out.

Libra
Sep.23-Oct. 22
With your usual impeccable timing, you have the good energy going full-blast and it's just going to continue to flow. The universe is definitely on your side, and any and all celebrations will be a smashing success.

Scorpio
Oct. 23 - Nov. 21
If life were a reality TV show, you'd be the one who was most excited about the final revealing scene, the one with the surprise twist and the unveiling of the cause of all the buildup.

Sagittarius
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Friends treasure you, family loves you, and you feel totally tapped into it all. Life's a gift, and you're gleefully tearing off the paper and tying the ribbon around the top of your head.

Capricorn
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Letting your industrious side take the day off could prove challenging, but it'll mean a great deal to the family who'd like your complete presence. Whatever's going on at work will definitely be there tomorrow

Aquarius
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Your mind may be wandering to far-off places -- perhaps someone's given you the gift of a plane ticket, even -- but friends and family would still like to feel that you're in the present moment.

Pisces
Feb.19-Mar. 20
Things are just getting better right about now, and today is no exception to the general trend. In fact, gatherings and groups are wonderful today, and you have many an opportunity to strengthen bonds

THE BORN LOSER by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

Easy

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

Easy+

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

Medium

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

Hard

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
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CHINA

Beijing	-7	2	cloudy/clear
Harbin	-25	-15	clear
Tianjin	-5	3	overcast/cloudy
Urumqi	-16	-9	clear
Xi'an	-3	9	clear
Lhasa	-6	6	overcast/clear
Chengdu	4	12	overcast/cloudy
Chongqing	6	11	overcast/cloudy
Kunming	4	8	drizzle
Nanjing	1	5	shower/cloudy
Shanghai	4	9	drizzle/overcast
Wuhan	0	9	overcast/clear
Hangzhou	4	8	drizzle/cloudy
Taipei	16	18	drizzle/moderate rain
Guangzhou	1	18	cloudy/clear
Hong Kong	15	20	cloudy

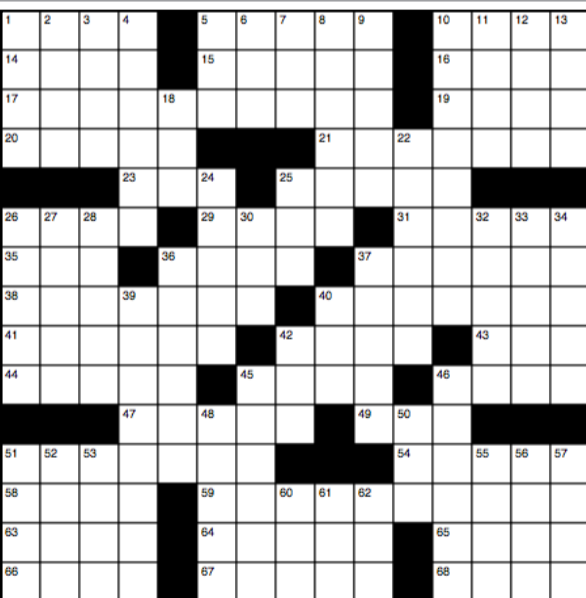
WORLD

Moscow	-2	0	sleet
Frankfurt	3	10	drizzle
Paris	-1	10	sleet/clear
London	0	12	clear
New York	7	9	drizzle

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Rumpole; 5- Good point; 10- Insects; 14- Rapper born Tracy Marrow; 15- ___-car; 16- Razor brand; 17- Device with a snooze button; 19- Shower; 20- Capital of Yemen; 21- Elevations; 23- Absolutely!; 25- High-strung; 26- Medical suffix; 29- Juror; 31- City in Nebraska; 35- Howe'er; 36- Put in order; 37- Humbles; 38- Blast of a trumpet; 40- Breakfast food; 41- Provide bearings; 42- ___-acte; 43- O.T. book; 44- Extra; 45- Needle case; 46- Director Riefenstahl; 47- Digression; 49- Certain Ivy Leaguer; 51- Saliva; 54- Roast host; 58- Mexican money; 59- Free from bondage; 63- ___ want for Christmas...; 64- Challenged; 65- List finish; 66- Prepared to drive; 67- Lauder of cosmetics; 68- Crash wherever convenient;

DOWN: 1-Farrow and Hamm; 2- Arthur Ashe's alma mater; 3- Actor Penn; 4- Wanders away; 5- Circle section; 6- Choice: Abbr.; 7- ___-cone; 8- One engraving; 9- Captivated (by); 10- Flatboat captain; 11- D-Day beach; 12- Fortitude; 13- Without; 18- Ginnie ___; 22- Weather map line; 24- Recreation; 25- Vietnamese New Year; 26- Preminger et al.; 27- Acute; 28- Ancient Greek colony; 30- History book chapter; 32- All together; 33- Troy beauty; 34- Japanese beer brand; 36- Most reasonable; 37- Bandleader Shaw; 39- Resembling a monster; 40- Bearded grazer; 42- Summer on the Seine; 45- Plant swellings; 46- Walked lamely; 48- ___ France; 50- Circle of flowers; 51- Petty quarrel; 52- Soccer legend; 53- Land in water; 55- Roman censor; 56- JFK postings; 57- Morays; 60- Gallery display; 61- Bridal bio word; 62- Alphabet trio;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



AD

FOR SALE
www.JMLProperty.com

FOR RENT
More info, please contact us
Info@JMLproperty.com
(853) 2835 2699 Office

<p>Manhattan E Unit Taipa 1,626 sq ft / HKD 11.382M HKD 7,000sq ft Luxury Residence Ref: 16105505</p>	<p>Taipa Warehouse, Pac On Taipa 1,652 sq ft / HKD 6.99M HKD 4,231 sq ft Storage Space & Cargo Lifts Ref: 16095501</p>	<p>Nova Taipa Tower 29 Car Park, Taipa 0 sq ft / HKD 1.3M HKD 0sq ft No M260. Close to Lift Ref: 16105502</p>	<p>Iau Lei Garden Taipa 1,015 sq ft / HKD 6.8M HKD 6,699sq ft Views Across Taipa Ref: 16105501</p>
<p>Office Space, Centro Commercial, Macau Great Location Available in January 2017 HKD 12,200 / 836 sq ft Ref: 16100626</p>	<p>Happy Valley Taipa Studio Apartment Cozy Furnished HKD 7,000 / 503 sq ft Ref: 16050580</p>	<p>Hellene Gardens, Lot 4, D Unit, Coloane 3 Bedroom Apartment Car Park Included HKD 13,500 / 1,663 sq ft Ref: 16100623</p>	<p>One Central, Unit B, T2 Macau 3 Bedrooms Apartment Views of Nam Van Lake HKD 29,800 / 2,288 sq ft Ref: 16090616</p>



Tariq Panja and Gaspard Sebag

FOOTBALL

Leak revealing offshore millions prompts French probe

FRANCE is the latest country to investigate possible tax avoidance by football stars, coaches and their managers following the leak of financial information published by media organizations across Europe.

France's financial prosecutor opened a preliminary probe into possible laundering of tax-fraud proceeds earlier this month. The probe is run by a law enforcement unit specializing in financial and tax offenses. Mediapart, a French group that's been publishing data distributed by the Football Leaks website, said Manchester United's Paul Pogba, the world's most expensive player, has offshore bank accounts. His agent, Mino Raiola, also named in the documents, described the information as "inaccurate."

Last week, Spain's tax agency requested information from the El Mundo newspaper after it ran a series of stories that alleged that some people in the football world, including Real Madrid star forward Cristiano Ronaldo, have improperly benefited from having image-rights income paid into offshore accounts established by Portuguese football entrepreneur Jorge Mendes's Gestifute



Paul Pogba, the world's most expensive player

agency.

Football Leaks had been posting documents on its website until April, when it started supplying them to Mediapart, a coalition of media organizations. Mediapart revealed earlier this month that Paris Saint-Germain players Angel Di Maria and Javier Pastore received some revenue in Panama or Uruguay in order to lower their taxes in

Europe.

The information sheds light on complex financial structures used in global football, where salaries and transfer fees are some of the highest in sport.

The leak has revealed a lack of regulation in the sport, something new FIFA President Gianni Infantino admitted in recent interviews.

"The problem is that there is

no transparency," Infantino said in an interview with Der Spiegel, one of the newspapers to have access to the Football Leaks data.

"It is naive to believe that the FIFA can know from Zurich exactly what is happening with all transfers around the world," he said. Critics have said the sport's

It is naive to believe that the FIFA can know exactly what is happening with all transfers around the world.

GIANNI INFANTINO
FIFA PRESIDENT

world governing body, which has more than USD1 billion in reserves, should devote more resources to oversight of football.

Last week, Ronaldo's management team released his 2015 tax declaration. It revealed he held assets outside of Spain worth more than 203 million euros (\$216 million). "This communication, which was not required by law, constitutes irrefutable proof that Cristiano Ronaldo and his representatives are in good faith, and cooperate with the authorities in a spirit of transparency and compliance with legality," Gestifute said.

Spain's Budget Minister Cristobal Montoro recently told the nation's parliament in Madrid last that no team, athlete or sport is exempt from paying taxes. He added sportsmen, given their public profile, had an added responsibility to be good role models.

Ronaldo isn't the first football star playing in Spain to have his financial affairs come under scrutiny.

His case comes four months after Ronaldo's rival for the title of the world's top player, Lionel Messi, was sentenced to 21 months in prison for tax fraud in Spain. The Barcelona player is appealing the sentence. AP

AD

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Steve Douglas, Manchester

OVERVIEW

Chelsea, Conte standing out as normality returns to EPL

IN one sense, normality has returned to the English Premier League after the craziness of Leicester's improbable surge to the title last season.

The top six on Christmas Day are the teams most pundits predicted would be challenging for the title: Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Arsenal, Tottenham and Manchester United.

There's nothing normal about Chelsea's current form, however.

After 11 straight wins, Chelsea leads the league by six points from Liverpool, heading into the hectic period of festive fixtures that is unique to British soccer. Only once — Arsenal in 2001-02, with 13 straight wins — has a top-tier club had a longer winning streak in one season since World War II.

In the first year of the "super-coach" era in the Premier League, Chelsea manager Antonio Conte is standing head and shoulders above the rest, although it needed a September switch to his favored 3-4-3 formation to get the team to click.

With a stingy defense (two goals conceded in the last 11 games), a dynamic midfield marshalled by N'Golo Kante and a forward line led by the league's top scorer, Diego Costa, there are no apparent weaknesses in Conte's lineup. On current evidence, it's hard to see how the team from southwest London can be stopped.

One thing is for sure, there'll be no miracle sequel for Leicester in the Premier League. Languishing in 15th place in the 20-team standings, the reigning champions are closer to the relegation zone than the Champions League qualification spots.

It's back to the heavyweights challenging for the title. And Chelsea is the big favorite.

TITLE RACE

One factor is particularly helping Chelsea and Liverpool in their quests for the title: No European competition.

Such was the extraordinary nature of last season that neither team qualified for the Champions League or even the Europa League. That failure is now allowing them to focus purely on the domestic games, give their players more rest, and have a full week of preparation for Premier League games.

Chelsea hasn't dropped a point since a 3-0 loss at Arsenal on Sept. 24, during which Antonio Conte changed formation to a 3-4-3 and hasn't looked back. Like Chelsea, Liverpool has two losses so far.

Man City is in third place, a point behind Liverpool, as



Antonio Conte (right) celebrates with Chelsea's Nemanja Matic at the end of the English Premier League soccer match between Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur

coach Pep Guardiola gets to grips with the physical and non-stop demands of English soccer, including no rest at Christmas. Arsenal is a further two points back on 34 points in fourth, Tottenham has 33 and Jose Mourinho's Man United has 30. For United, some 13 points behind Chelsea, the target has already switched from winning the league to securing Champions League qualification with a top-four finish.

Chelsea has three tough away games left — at Spurs, Liverpool and United — and is proving adept at eking out 1-0 wins. Four of its last six games have finished with that scoreline, including the last three.

PICK OF THE PLAYERS

While Liverpool playmaker Philippe Coutinho, Man City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne, Chelsea midfielder N'Golo Kante and Arsenal forward Alexis Sanchez have starred in patches, Diego Costa has been the only player to have had a consistent impact this season.

Last season, the Spain striker appeared to be more interes-

ted in picking fights than scoring goals. Costa is a changed man, though, and has scored a league-high 13 goals while providing five assists.

Five of the goals were winners (against West Ham, Watford, Middlesbrough, West Bromwich Albion and Crystal Palace), an overhead kick earned a draw at Swansea, and another goal sparked a come-from-behind win at Man City in December.

EMERGING TALENT

There's another "Harry" making a splash at White Hart Lane. The 20-year-old Harry Winks is a central midfielder who is getting a run in Tottenham's first team, starting four of the past eight games at the expense of internationals like Moussa Sissoko and Eric Dier. He scored against West Ham on his full league debut in November and is an intelligent passer with a good technique.

Mauricio Pochettino is renowned for giving youth players a chance to shine during his time at Southampton and now Tottenham. Harry Kane has matu-

red into one of the best strikers in the Premier League under Pochettino, and Winks could be next in line.

SURPRISE TEAM

When it was announced in August that West Bromwich Albion had been bought out by Chinese investors, the future of manager Tony Pulis looked precarious despite his record of never having been relegated from the Premier League.

The new owners were wise to keep hold of the 58-year-old Pulis.

Away from the likely title contenders, West Brom is proving to be the best of the rest in the Premier League and at one point early in December was in the top six.

Known for setting his teams out with a solid defensive structure, Pulis has added some flair up front in forwards Nacer Chadli — a club-record signing in the offseason — and Matt Phillips, who operate behind Salomon Rondon. The Baggies have scored three or more times in four games this season, testament to their new-found attacking approach.

POINTS TO PROVE

The season started with rival coaches Pep Guardiola and Jose Mourinho expected to be battling it out for the title. The way things are going, they'll be fighting just to secure Champions League qualification.

Both coaches have had tough spells in the first season with their respective clubs, with Mourinho in particular criticized for public outbursts against his players and a run of poor results over September and October. United has won its last three league games to get back on track, but a current position of sixth is not good enough.

Guardiola started his City tenure with 10 straight victories but has only won six of his next 17, raising questions about his tactics, the team's defensive stability and whether Guardiola can get to grips with English soccer.

It will help Guardiola to have Sergio Aguero on the field. The Argentina striker has missed seven of City's 17 league matches through suspension, and needs to make amends in the second half of the season. **AP**

opinion

Our Desk

Lynzy Valles



SHAME ON THE ABSENCE OF RIGHTS PROTECTION

It is still quite absurd that the region does not have laws that protect the rights of its domestic workers.

Last week, approximately 25 Filipino and Indonesian domestic helpers working in Macau celebrated International Migrants Day by holding a silent protest nearby Nam Van Lake.

The group continued their call for the protection of domestic workers' rights in the MSAR.

Domestic workers remain one of the most undervalued communities in many regions, and their occupation is one of the least regulated forms of employment.

Although millions of domestic workers are still excluded from protection in their country's labor laws, two wrongs do not make a right. It is shameful for this region to not update their labor decrees.

And if they ever do, it does not help to increase the quality of life of these vulnerable groups.

Figures from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) showed that in the third quarter of 2016, the region accommodated 25,300 domestic employees. In the third quarter of 2015, there were 23,600 domestic workers, a 7.2 percent and a 17 percent growth compared to figures in 2014.

This shows an increasing demand for the region to uphold a protection law for these workers.

The region's lack of progress for the betterment of this sector shows incompetence, but a constant surge in the sector's numbers is expected to continue.

The International Domestic Workers Federation this year revealed that Asia scores low on labor law protection for domestic workers – pertinent information, as over 35 percent of domestic workers worldwide are accounted for in Asia.

These migrant workers continue to face discrimination and marginalization despite the critical services they provide to families.

In the silent protest last week, the workers expressed their need for the local government to protect them.

The Times reported that many members of vulnerable groups refuse to voice their concerns, as there is no protection for them.

This kind of protection should be prioritized. It should not even be discussed whether the MSAR will grant them the protection they seek.

These are the kinds of rights that Macau should have facilitated years ago, and sadly, despite the outcries of these workers, it seems that lawmakers are turning a blind eye to them.

How can the region afford to accommodate some 25,000 domestic employees when they can't provide protection for them?

Needless to say, the mere detail that the region has no written minimum wage for domestic workers is already bizarre. Yes, these are the workers that are working to fill the demand to sustain families. Employers should bring this modern-day slavery to an end.

A group of workers is putting pressure on employers to grant them an increase in their salaries, citing that the pay hike should be in line with the 2.46 percent salary increase announced for civil servants. The group stressed that salaries should be adjusted along with the inflation in the cost of living in the city.

These workers remained silent on their steady housing allowance of MOP500 despite the surge of house rents several years ago. These are the workers that were discreet despite long working hours, and they are also justified in taking part in demonstrations.

THE NORTH KOREAN DEFECTOR IMPRESSED BY SEOUL POLITICAL PROTESTS

A high-profile North Korean defector told South Korean lawmakers that the massive protests that led to the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye still feel strange to him but he sees the demonstrations as the country's strength.

Thae Yong Ho, the former North Korean deputy ambassador to London, said in a closed-door briefing to lawmakers that he was impressed with the South's democracy because its government continued to function despite the protests, according to the office of Lee Cheol Woo, one of the legislators who attended the event.

Thae also saw as remarkable that powerful individuals linked to the scandal that brought down Park were grilled by lawmakers on live TV, Lee's office said.

South Korea's opposition-controlled parliament on December 9 voted to impeach Park over the corruption scandal that saw millions of people protest in past weeks. The impeachment suspended Park's powers and pushed the prime minister into the role as government caretaker until the country's Constitutional Court decides whether she should permanently step down or be reinstated.

FASHION ASIA AWARDS

Event recognizes Macanese designer



Nuno Lopes de Oliveira

SEVERAL Macau fashion finalists and the integrated resort, Galaxy Macau, will be awarded today at the Fashion Asia Awards 2016 presentation ceremony held in Chongqing, China.

Among the finalists to be awarded is Macanese designer Nuno Lopes de Oliveira who will be bestowed with an accolade in the category for Asia Top Young Designer 2016. He told the Times that it

was an important award that would motivate him to "do better as a fashion designer."

"China is one of the [biggest] consumer markets, so being able to have a chance to introduce my brand via this platform will push this Macanese brand to other territories – not just in China, but in Asia as a whole," said Oliveira. This recognition "has been a great motivation [to] thrive me to do better as a fashion designer," he added.

Asked about the proportion of the finalists that are based in or from Macau, Oliveira said that it gives the impression that the local fashion industry is beginning to develop. "[It] gives out a sense that the Macau creative and fashion industries are slowly catching up to the standards of the global market," said Oliveira. "To show that Macau is not only a city of gaming but there is also creative talent within this small region."

Galaxy Macau will be awarded the title of Asia's Top Fashionable Tourist Attraction of the Year, in recognition of the offerings at The Promenade Shops element of the integrated resort.

"We are extremely proud to receive this award in recognition of the fashionable shopping, dining and leisure opportunities on offer at The Promenade Shops at Galaxy Macau," Amy Lee, assistant senior vice president of retail marketing services at Galaxy Macau, wrote in an emailed message.

The Fashion Asia Awards is an organization that claims to advance the development of creative industries across Asia by recognizing the achievements of individuals and institutions in the industry. **DB**

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

SOURCE: DSMG

WORLD BRIEFS



AP PHOTO

GERMANY Several hundred peace activists have started what they say will be a month-long protest march from Berlin to war-ravaged Syria to urge an end to the fighting there. The Civil March for Aleppo set off carrying white flags from Berlin's former Tempelhof Airport yesterday in cloudy, cold and blustery weather.

US Donald Trump said he intends to dissolve his charitable foundation to resolve concerns about possible ethics conflicts. "To avoid even the appearance of any conflict with my role as President I have decided to continue to pursue my strong interest in philanthropy in other ways," the president-elect said.



AP PHOTO

CHILE A powerful earthquake shook southern Chile on Sunday, but there were no immediate reports of deaths and only minor known damage. Some 4,000 people had been evacuated for fear of a possible tsunami following the quake, but the alert was eased about 90 minutes after the temblor.



AP PHOTO

COLOMBIAN aviation authorities say a preliminary investigation has found that the plane that crashed with a Brazilian football team aboard had run out of fuel. Yesterday's statement by the Civil Aeronautics agency says the conclusion is based on the plane's black boxes and other evidence. The charter plane crashed as it was trying to approach the airport in Medellin.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

Xinhua/Cheong Kam Ka



Tourists take a selfie in front of Christmas decorations at Senado Square to celebrate Christmas Eve.