



AO MAN LONG'S LUXURY GOODS AUCTIONED

A batch of luxury goods, confiscated from the former Secretary for Transport and Public Works was auctioned

P4



WOMAN JAILED OVER TAXI BRAWL

P5 CRIME



US BARS CHINESE PURCHASE OF MONEYGRAM

Jack Ma has dropped his bid to buy money transfer company MoneyGram after Washington rejected the USD1.2b deal

P8

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WORLD BRIEFS



US-IRAN The Trump administration has thrown the weight of the U.S. government behind the protesters taking to the streets of Iran, rooting them on despite the risk of helping Iranian authorities dismiss a week of major demonstrations as the product of American instigation. More on p14

SRI LANKA's president said yesterday that a commission he appointed to investigate alleged irregularities in the sale of treasury bonds has recommended the prosecution of the country's former finance minister on bribery charges.

US-PALESTINE U.S. President Donald Trump appeared to threaten to cut off aid money to the Palestinian Authority, asking why the U.S. should make "any of these massive future payments" when the Palestinians are "no longer willing to talk peace."

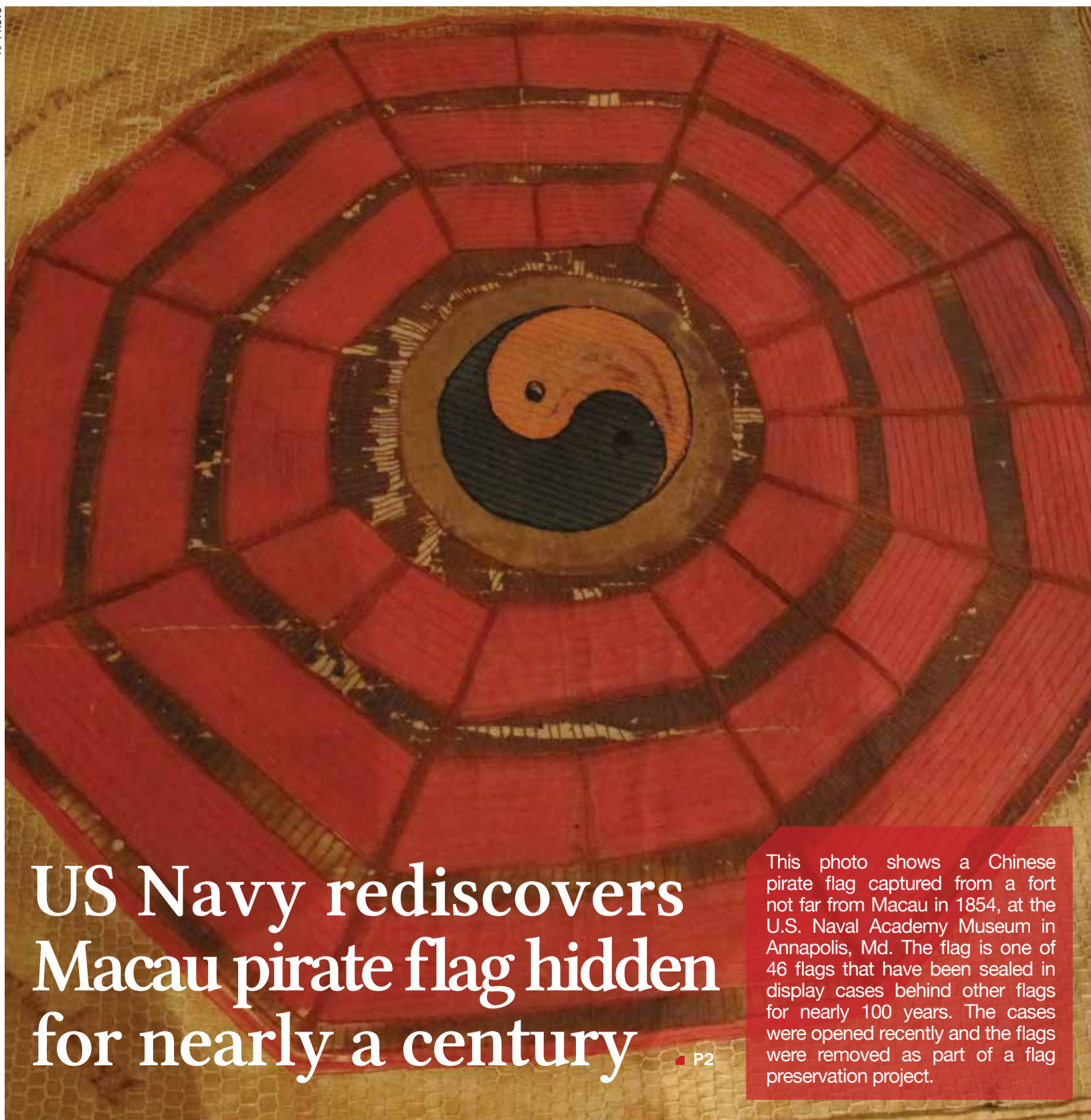


ETHIOPIA In a surprise move, Ethiopia's leader yesterday announced plans to drop charges against political prisoners and close a notorious prison camp in what he called an effort to "widen the democratic space for all." This is the first time the government has acknowledged holding political prisoners. More on p14

More on backpage

Korean cross-border hotline reopens

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US Navy rediscovers Macau pirate flag hidden for nearly a century

P2

This photo shows a Chinese pirate flag captured from a fort not far from Macau in 1854, at the U.S. Naval Academy Museum in Annapolis, Md. The flag is one of 46 flags that have been sealed in display cases behind other flags for nearly 100 years. The cases were opened recently and the flags were removed as part of a flag preservation project.

THE curator of the U.S. Naval Academy Museum wasn't exactly sure what would be found: records indicated five display boxes long used to exhibit captured British flags from the War of 1812 actually concealed more banners underneath.

But not until all 61 banners were painstakingly removed in December for a conservation effort did curator Charles Swift, who is also the museum's managing director, actually see what was hidden. And he was gratified to learn that conservationists had uncovered dozens of other flags — many captured by the Navy in other conflicts of the 19th century.

The 46 newly discovered flags, covered by the others in boxes with large plate-glass lids, speak to an earlier era of U.S. intervention overseas. They include one taken from a Chinese pirate fort off Macau dating to 1854.

A PIRATE ENCLAVE

Macau has a long history of pirate activity, dating back even before the arrival of the Portuguese.

By the early 16th century, the waters of Southern China had become infested with piracy, providing the opportunity for Portuguese naval officers to win favor from Ming China by agreeing to combat the Wokou pirates from Japan.

Some 300 years later, piracy in Chinese coastal waters remained a serious threat. Two of the most famous Chinese pirates, Ching Shih (Madame Ching) and Cheung Po Tsai, commanded the 300-junk Red Flag Fleet, terrorizing the region until their surrender to the Portuguese in 1810, following defeat at the Battle of the Tiger's Mouth. Ching Shih then notoriously retired from her life of piracy, but kept her loot and set up a gambling house in Macau.

João Guedes, a journalist and writer who is knowledgeable about Macau's history, said that many pirates settled in the city during the 19th century.

"By the mid-19th century, there were a few naval ships in Macau from Portugal that patrolled the Pearl River Delta, but also all the way up to Shanghai, to protect foreign commerce. There were frequent fights between the Portuguese navy and the pirates."

AP PHOTO



Charles Swift, managing director and curator of the U.S. Naval Academy Museum, stands in front of a case where the flags shown behind him had been tucked away from view behind another flag on display for nearly 100 years

US Navy rediscovers Macau pirate flag hidden for nearly a century

"Some of the pirates were transformed [from piracy] to naval officers [working] for the Chinese government," he said, commenting on the links between the Portuguese enclave and piracy. "Others turned from [state-sanctioned] protectors of the fishermen [in Macau] to a life of piracy."

Guedes could not identify the fort captured by the Americans without further information, but speculated that it might have been located on one of the islands that are today a part of Hong Kong, such as Lantau.

NEVER BEFORE SEEN

No one alive had seen the newly restored flags, long hidden from view.

"More importantly than just seeing them was seeing the colors," said Swift. "It is what struck me immediately. It was sort of dark, but you could see the colors — the

vibrant colors — of them having not been in light for 100 years, and so it was exciting."

Swift said no one had attempted to open the boxes for so long until it came time for needed conservation.

"We are ultimately stewards of these objects that tell important stories," he added.

Swift also said funding

By the mid-19th century, there were frequent fights between the Portuguese navy and the pirates.

JOÃO GUEDES
JOURNALIST, RESEARCHER

for the conservation, about USD40,000, came from the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command, which is tasked with preserving artifacts, documents and other items of that military branch.

THE FOWLER LEGACY

In 1849, then-President James K. Polk designated the academy in Annapolis, Maryland, as the repository of flags captured in battle by the Navy. The museum is now home to about 800 flags and trusted with their conservation, Swift said. About 250 of them are trophy flags seized in battle. The museum also houses seafaring instruments, naval uniforms, medals, photographs, art and items recalling past naval expeditions and explorations.

Amelia Fowler, a well-known flag preserver who restored the original Star-Spangled Banner in 1914, was contracted in 1912 to conser-

ve the academy's collection of trophy flags. She worked with dozens of other women in the museum's Mahan Hall, using a patented stitching method to help preserve the fabric. All told, they stitched up enough flags to cover two football fields, Swift said.

Camille Myers Breeze is working on a new conservation process for the flags as director of an independent conservation studio, Museum Textile Services, based in Massachusetts. She said Fowler's work has enabled her crew to handle the flags without risk of damage.

"For us to conserve a collection of flags like this that's historical — not only for its use, but for how it was preserved and how it has been installed here for 100 years for Naval Academy students and visitors to appreciate and learn from," she said. "It's really our favorite kind of project." **MDT/AP**

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“ THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’ ”

Batch of Ao's luxury goods auctioned

A batch of luxury goods, confiscated from the former Secretary for Transport and Public Works Ao Man Long, was auctioned last month by the Financial Services Bureau (DSF). Radio Macau reported yesterday that the administration has earned MOP640,000 from the auction to date.

Many of the auctioned items were not purchased, including the bulk of Ao's collection of rare wines and spirits, which had been previously estimated to be worth MOP3.8 million.

The asking price for the auctioned items was MOP2.8 million, well below the value of sold items. The item which gathered the most interest was a rare medicinal plant known as yartsa gunbu, 4.2 kilograms of which were put up for sale with an asking price of MOP138,000. The winning bid reached MOP400,000.

In December 2006, Ao was

arrested on suspicion of various crimes, including bribery and money laundering. In January 2008, he was sentenced to 27 years in prison for 57 counts of bribery, money laundering and abuse of power, among other charges.

■ **The asking price for the auctioned items was MOP2.8 million, well below the value of sold items**

In April 2009, he was charged with an additional 24 counts of taking bribes, money laundering activities and abuse of power, and was sentenced to one year and six months in



Ao Man Long

prison.

In May 2012, the Court of Final Appeal held a third public hearing on Ao's corrup-

tion case, where it ruled that he had committed six crimes of bribery and three crimes of money laundering. Combining

the first two stages of his trial and respective sentences, Ao is serving a total of 28 and a half years in prison.

Erwiana's case inspires local migrant workers

IN celebration of International Migrants Day, which is usually celebrated in December, Indonesian migrant workers gathered on New Year's Day to welcome Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, who encouraged them to fight abuse and stand up for their rights.

The 26-year-old Sulistyaningsih, who first appeared in the global media spotlight in 2014, was back in Hong Kong after winning the last leg of her two-year legal battle last week. She received nearly HKD810,000 in damages for the abuse she experienced for over eight months at the hands of her employer.



Erwiana speaking to her compatriots

"For the domestic workers who have experienced cases like I did, don't be

afraid, be courageous and please speak out," she told state broadcaster TDM.

"Many migrants are afraid to speak out [...] We can't do anything if they don't

want to speak out [so they] should fight for [themselves] and not be afraid," said Sulistyaningsih, who was named one of the world's 100 most influential people by Time Magazine in 2014.

Indonesian migrant groups in Macau have recorded only a few cases of abuse as domestic helpers here are not required to live with their employers, unlike Hong Kong.

Yosa Wariyanti, president of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union, said that they have only recorded three cases of abuse, one of which is now being processed by local authorities.

However, she believed that physical abuse among domestic workers in the region should not go unreported, citing the absen-

ce of rights protection for them.

"For us, Erwiana's case is our case [...] so we must be braver if ever a similar situation happens to us," she told the Times.

"[She encouraged us] to not be afraid to report [abuse] to the police, or seek some help. She inspired us to never give up to fight for our rights, especially if we did nothing wrong."

Wariyanti also noted that domestic helpers do not know where to seek help when encountering physical abuse and are fearful of being blacklisted in Macau.

She added that the shortened visa period after a contract ends – be it by the termination or natural conclusion of a contract – also hinders these workers from seeking legal aid. LV



Migrant workers gather in celebration of International Migrants Day

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For us, Erwiana's case is our case [...] so we must be braver if ever a similar situation happens to us.

YOSA WARIYANTI
INDONESIAN MIGRANT
WORKERS UNION



RENATO MARQUES

CRIME

Woman jailed for assaulting and biting officers over cab fare

Renato Marques

A woman in her thirties from mainland China started off the New Year by getting arrested in Macau after a disagreement over a taxi ride fare in Cotai.

She had assaulted one police officer and bitten another in the Taipa police station, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) spokesperson said yesterday during a joint police press conference at PSP. The case started around 11.40p.m. on January 1 when the woman and her taxi driver arrived at the Taipa police station to settle a dispute over the taxi fare. The driver said he had picked the woman up at a hotel near the Avenida Marginal da Flor de Lotus, driving her to another hotel in Cotai. Upon arrival, the taxi driver requested payment of MOP35. The woman asked to pay in RMB as she had no Macau currency. The taxi driver agreed, but the woman added that she would pay only RMB29 and not RMB35 as the taxi driver wanted. The driver then took the woman to the police station to seek recompense.

The woman attempted to

flee the premises, shoving one police officer and biting another who grabbed her arm in the ensuing brawl.

She was arrested and accused of three crimes: grievous bodily harm to an officer, damages and resist to arrest. The taxi driver was unable to recover the fare.

In another case, a man, aged 35, was accused of swindling another man in an alleged currency exchange scheme, the Judiciary Police (PJ) said.

The case was reported by the security staff of a casino in NAPE after the men – both from mainland China – fought at the hotel lobby on the last day of 2017.

According to the PJ's investigation, the victim arranged to meet the suspect to exchange RMB for HKD. As part of the deal, the victim had agreed to pay the suspect RMB50,700 in exchange for HKD60,000.

On that day, the victim used two accounts – WeChat and Alipay – to transfer the total amount to the accused, who claimed that he had not received the funds and could not verify the success of the transfers. He then attempted to flee the scene.

As a fight broke out between the victim and the suspect, the casino security intervened and contacted the PJ.

The suspect informed the police that he could not verify the transfers as his phone was out of battery and said he would proceed with the payment to the victim.

The PJ believes that the man was attempting to carry out a scam, as he did not have the amount owed to the victim on hand at the time of arrest. The bureau also verified the app on the suspect's phone and acknowledged that one of the victim's transfers – amounting to RMB33,700 – had been received.

The PJ has detained the suspect and transferred him to the Public Prosecutions Office.

Woman admits exchanging fake USD

A 26 year-old woman from Taiwan has been accused of passing fake money to two men from mainland China, who were arrested for trying to exchange the currency with a casino cashier, the Judiciary Police (PJ) revealed yesterday.

The case occurred on December 29 at a Cotai casino, where the two men tried to exchange eight USD100 bank notes, tota-

ling USD800, into HKD. The cashier suspected that the notes were forged and called the PJ.

The men told the police that they had received the bank notes from a woman earlier that day in exchange for HKD5,000.

The PJ reviewed the security footage and were able to identify the woman, who was still inside the casino.

The woman admitted to

the police that she had passed money to the men but claimed to be unaware that the notes had been forged. She said that she had obtained the money during a recent trip to Singapore. However, she did not explain why she subsequently passed the notes to the men at an exchange rate much lower than their real value, which indicates that she was aware the money was fake.



Local student receives award for study on Buddhism

Dorji Wangchuk, a Doctor of Philosophy student of the University of Macau's (UM) Department of Communication, recently received the Top Student Paper Award at the 103rd Annual Convention of the National Communication Association (NCA) in Dallas, United States. The award was conferred by the Religious Communication Association (RCA), an organization affiliated with the NCA. The award-winning paper, titled 'Buddhism and its Influence on Communication in Bhutan: Search for the Middle Path in the Age of Social Media', explores the influence of Buddhism on communication behaviours in the Kingdom of Bhutan. The association commended the paper's 'contribution to the study of religious communication'. Founded in 1973, the RCA is a multidisciplinary academic society for scholars, teachers, students, clergy, journalists and others who share an interest in religious speech, rhetoric, media and performance.

10th Tap Seac Craft Market to be held in April

The Tap Seac Craft Market will return in April 2018. To celebrate, the tenth anniversary of the event, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is soliciting proposals for a series of programs such as 'interactive art installations', 'stage performance' and 'creative handicraft workshops'. The call for proposals is open to the general public and the deadline for submission is February 2. Inaugurated in 2008, the Tap Seac Craft Market is described by the IC as "a platform for local and foreign cultural and creative practitioners to showcase and sell their products, and has gradually become a local brand of [the] cultural and creative market."

Macao Post to issue greeting card for Year of the Dog

The Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau will issue a new greeting card for the Year of the Dog titled "The Year of the Dog brings blessing". This card will be available for sale at the General Post Office, all post offices and postal kiosks from January 8. This greeting card, priced at MOP15 each, can be sent worldwide without a stamp.

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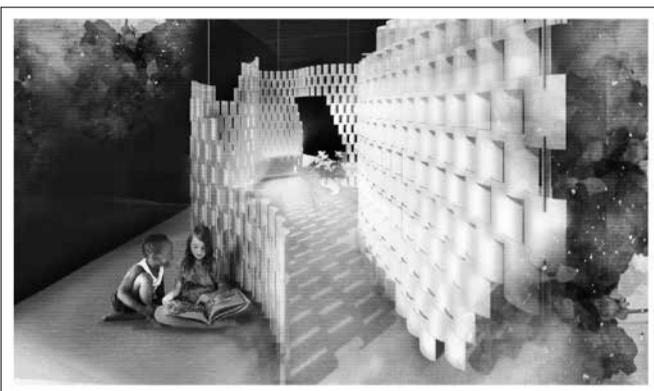
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Macau joins Venice Biennale of Architecture for third time

A joint project by three local architects – Ieong Chong Tat, Vong Ka Ian and Chu Hou San – will represent Macau at the 16th Venice Biennale of Architecture in May 2018, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced.

Their project was one of eight winning entries pre-selected by the Architects Association of Macau. The projects were assessed by a jury comprising the head of the Department of Cultural He-

ritage, Leong Wai Man, and the director of the Macau Museum of Art, Chan Kai Chon, who joined hands with three other Macau architects, Wong Yue Kai, Carlos Marreiros and Leong Chong.

The Venice Biennale of Architecture was first held in 1980 and is one of the most influential international events in architectural arts and academia, providing an important communication platform for architecture and cultural exchange. Since 2014, the IC has twice orga-

nized the participation of local architects in this event.

The theme of the 16th Venice Biennale of Architecture is "Freespace"; comprised of concepts, time and memories of freedom that connect the past, present and the future.

In order to align with the theme, the selected team chose "cards", a symbol of Macau's swift economic development, as the core element of their project. Through different combinations and formats of the "cards"

and abstract techniques, they revealed constructions rich in local characteristics that have a close connection to residents, such as markets, gardens and stairways.

According to the IC, the jury deemed the selected project to have drawn on the characteristics of Macau and incorporated elements of cultural value, revealing an image of Macau in a perceptual manner and displaying the traditional in a new way that attracted a great deal of interest and unity.

Macau construction union opposes easing worker import quota

The Talent Development Committee has suggested to the government that it raise the quota for the import of non-skilled construction labor to meet growing demand. The Committee cited some 2,000 low-level job openings that remain unfilled in the territory. However, the Macao Construction Industry General Union has publicly opposed the suggestions, claiming that many local residents in the industry are already out of work. The president of the Union, Cheong Man Fun, told TDM news that most of his fellow workers in the industry are unemployed at present. "It's evident that we have failed to protect local workers' employment rights," he said. Unemployment in Macau stood at 1.9 percent (2.6 percent for local residents) at end-November 2017.

MSAR passport holders exempted from visa to Cook Islands

The Identification Services Bureau (DSI) announced that holders of the Macau SAR Passport visiting the Cook Islands could be exempted from visa requirements for a maximum stay of 31 days. In addition, holders of SAR passports visiting the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia can apply for a visa upon arrival for a maximum stay of 30 days. Applicants must provide two photographs and pay a fee of USD50 when applying for the visa on arrival. According to the DSI, these passport holders can also choose to apply for an electronic visa before departure. At present, a total of 136 countries or territories have agreed to grant visa-free access or visa-on-arrival to Macau SAR Passport holders.



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19/03/2018

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MOP 400 *

turma . class 2

Quintas
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11 horas/hours

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11/01/2018
fim.finishes
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MoneyGram deal collapse may force a re-think at Jack Ma's Ant

Selina Wang, Lulu Yilun Chen

ANT Financial may have to re-tool its global ambitions after stiff U.S. opposition scuppered what would have been its largest overseas acquisition.

The Chinese financial services giant controlled by Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma abandoned a plan to buy MoneyGram International Inc. after failing to win approval for the deal from a key government panel. China's largest online wealth management and payments service may now have to throttle back plans to expand in the world's largest financial market as it begins preparations to go public in the next year or so.

The end of the bid comes almost a year after Ma met with then President-elect Donald Trump and talked of creating a million U.S. jobs. Ant Financial's USD1.2 billion deal for Dallas-based MoneyGram would've added a network of 350,000 agent locations in more than 200 countries and territories that it says reaches billions of accounts. The U.S.



company's shares plunged as much as 17 percent in extended trading.

But the deal faced intense scrutiny from a government panel that's become more active in blocking Chinese investments. Ant submitted its proposal to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S. several times, to no avail. Last spring, two House of Representatives members said the acquisition could allow "malicious actors" to

obtain data on U.S. military personnel and their families who use the service. Ant and MoneyGram now plan to work together on initiatives in remittance and digital payments, they said in a joint statement.

"Technology companies understand the situation and are evolving in their approach. They are doing more things organically, they are doing more strategic alliances," Jeremy Choy, head of M&A for China Renaissance,

told Bloomberg Television. "We don't think this is the start of a trend where people just won't do things in the U.S. A lot of technology companies are becoming increasingly global, so they have to go to the U.S. But in terms of the approach, it will be less direct than finding a target and buying 100 percent."

Ant Financial - formerly part of Ma's Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. - is already a behemoth in China, providing services from wealth management and insurance to credit checks and consumer loans. Formally known as Zhejiang Ant Small & Micro Financial Services Group Co., the company was valued at \$75 billion by Hong Kong investment group CLSA in 2016 and is expected to go public eventually. Its Alipay platform has built itself into an online giant that controls roughly half of China's \$5.5 trillion mobile-payments market.

But the company is eager to expand internationally amid aggressive competition in its home market from Tencent Holdings Ltd. and the prospect of increa-

sed regulation on internet finance. It's struck partnerships around the globe, including in India, Thailand, South Korea and France. The company didn't respond to requests for additional comment.

Chinese takeovers of American companies have prompted warnings from lawmakers about risks to national security with CFIUS able to impose changes on deals to protect national security or recommend that the president block them. In September, Trump blocked the sale of Lattice Semiconductor Corp. to a buyer funded by a Chinese state-owned entity.

But Ant - which paid MoneyGram a \$30 million termination fee - has disputed assertions that U.S. security would be compromised by the deal, citing its plans to keep the U.S. company's headquarters, management team and employees in Dallas. The company said MoneyGram's servers - and the data stored on them - would also remain in the U.S.

"The geopolitical environment has changed considerably since we first announced the proposed transaction," MoneyGram Chief Executive Officer Alex Holmes said in Tuesday's statement. "Despite our best efforts to work cooperatively with the U.S. government, it has now become clear that CFIUS will not approve this merger." **Bloomberg**

AD



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GAMING | ANALYSIS

Things looking up for Atlantic City in 2018

Wayne Parry, Atlantic City

THE last traces of President Donald Trump's onetime casino empire could vanish. Someone may finally buy and reopen the former Revel casino. (Or maybe not.) The U.S. Supreme Court could legalize sports betting nationwide, drastically expanding the gambling industry.

A much-loathed state takeover of power is expected to end, internet gambling continues to grow at a healthy clip, and New Jersey now appears years away from trying again to open a casino in the northern Meadowlands — if it ever tries at all.

Things are definitely looking up for Atlantic City in 2018, a southern New Jersey city that is years overdue for a big win.

"I'm extremely optimistic about Atlantic City and the industry in 2018," said Mark Giannantonio, president of Resorts, which was the first U.S. casino to open outside Nevada and will celebrate its 40th anniversary in May. "We're very excited about the renaissance of Atlantic City; we think it's for real."

The single biggest story in Atlantic City in the new year will be the reopening of the former Trump Taj Mahal as a Hard Rock casino resort in the summer.

Hard Rock chairman Jim Allen promises the Atlantic City project will be all about music and seven-days-a-week entertainment. He has recruited guitar whiz and "Sopranos" actor Steven Van Zandt as an adviser on ventures that could include beach concerts and smaller indoor performances, as well as big-name concerts.



Mark Giannantonio, president of Resorts Casino Hotel in Atlantic City N.J., demonstrates a tabletop internet gambling console at his casino

Hard Rock bought the Taj from billionaire investor Carl Icahn in March, who had shut it down in October 2016 following a bitter strike with the city's main casino workers' union.

Icahn also figures prominently in the disposition of the last remnants of the Atlantic City legacy of Trump, his friend and fellow billionaire. Icahn plans to tear down the former Trump Plaza casino on the boardwalk at the foot of the Atlantic City Expressway to make way for an as-yet undefined economic development project.

The demolition could happen in 2018, but Icahn's request to use USD5.6 million in state investment credits toward the \$13.2 million demolition has met with opposition from state Senate President Steve Sweeney, who called on the state to reject the request, leaving the timetable uncertain.

At the northern end of the boardwalk, 2018 could finally be the year the star-crossed former Revel casino reopens. Colorado developer Bruce Deifik leads a group planning to buy it for \$200 million and reopen it. The group shared its plans with Moody's Investors Service, which reported the would-be owners will

■ **One thing to watch closely: Can Atlantic City's casino market handle the reopening of two casinos that shut down so recently?**

invest an additional \$175 million into the property, which closed in 2014 after little more than two years of operation.

Yet despite growing evidence that a sale is nearing, Glenn Straub, the Florida millionaire who owns Revel, insists he has no deal to sell it to anyone. He is still waiting for a state appeals court to rule on whether he needs a casino license in order to reopen the property.

One thing to watch closely: Can Atlantic City's casino market handle the reopening of two casinos that shut down so recently without harming some of the seven current operators in a slimmed-down market? Five of the city's 12 casinos closed from 2014 to 2016, and the surviving casinos have stabilized their revenue and earnings; analysts are mixed on the potential impact of reopening more casinos.

David Schwartz, director of the

Center for Gaming Research at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, said the new competition could hurt the seven casinos that currently operate but benefit customers with more choices.

Giannantonio acknowledged that two reopened casinos could cause "a short-term blip for everyone," but said they should bring in enough new customers to grow the market and not just steal customers from existing casinos.

One big opportunity: the U.S. Supreme Court will rule sometime between now and June on New Jersey's case seeking to legalize sports betting; it's legal only in four states that met a 1991 deadline to approve it: Delaware, Montana, Nevada and Oregon.

And one big potential threat faded last month when Sweeney, the state senate president, told The Associated Press that he doesn't plan to seek a second statewide referendum on whether to allow a casino in northern New Jersey "anytime soon, if ever." Sweeney, a southern New Jersey Democrat, said he doesn't see sufficient support for the measure, which was rejected by nearly 80 percent of voters in a 2016 ballot question.

November 2018 is the earliest proponents can try again to place the matter before voters. But even Jeff Gural, who operates the Meadowlands Racetrack, where the new casino would go, can't see a second attempt for at least another five years or so.

There will be some new nearby competition in February when Resorts World opens a casino in Sullivan County, New York, about an hour north of New Jersey. **AP**

ARTS

Box office records made as Broadway says goodbye to 2017

Mark Kennedy, New York

THE year on Broadway came to a very sparkly end for theater producers as many shows recorded their most profitable weeks ever despite theater-goers facing bitter cold and some eye-popping ticket prices.

Ten shows last week earned more than USD2 million, led by "Hamilton," "The Lion King" and "Wicked," which each pulled in more than \$3 million, according to the Broadway League, a national trade association for the indus-

try. The year ended with grosses soaring to \$1.6 billion, attracting 13.74 million patrons, both yearly records.

New weekly highs were reached by shows including "Come From Away," "SpongeBob SquarePants," "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," "The Play That Goes Wrong," "Waitress" and "The Band's Visit." Even the musical "Chicago" got into the act at the mature age of 21, earning a record \$1.3 million.

Those who boasted surpassing the \$2 million

mark included "The Phantom of the Opera," "Hello, Dolly!" "Dear Evan Hansen," "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," "Aladdin," "Springsteen on Broadway" and "The Book of Mormon."

The time around Christmas and New Year's is usually Broadway's boom time, but this holiday season was particularly flush, pushed by premium pricing and several shows going from eight performances a week to nine. The average price for a seat at "Hamilton" was \$358,

while it was \$508 to hear Bruce Springsteen. The official top premium price to see Bette Midler in "Hello, Dolly!" was \$996.

Not every show was popping Champagne. The holiday revue "Home for the Holidays," which featured the winners of various TV singing competitions, ended its run as one of the poorest performing shows ever on Broadway. It crept out of town with a weekly haul of under \$80,000 over eight performances, or 5 percent of its potential gross. The average ticket



was just \$26, but the theater was 70 percent empty.

The data this year is based on a 53-week calendar year, which is periodi-

cally necessary so 365-day years can be lined up with 52-week-long sales windows measured Monday through Sunday. **AP**



Operations at a copper refinery and smelter facility in Peru

China is boosting ties in Latin America. Trump should be worried

Carlos Torres & Randy Woods

CHINA'S emergence as a global economic rival to the U.S. is perhaps most obvious in Latin America.

The U.S. in recent years has lost its status to China as the top trading partner in parts of Latin America, such as copper-rich Chile and

agriculture and mining powerhouse Brazil. Now, all the uncertainty surrounding U.S. President Donald Trump's plans – from building a southern border wall, to re-freezing Cuba relations and exiting the Paris climate change accord supported by Latin America – could give an opening for China to seize more ground in the region.

Meanwhile the Chinese government is ready to expand its dominance in a region already supplying it expanding economy with everything from farm goods to raw materials.

China in 2009 surpassed the U.S. as Brazil's largest export market, as South America's biggest economy stepped up shipments of

everything from iron ore to soy beans. China a year later became Latin America's leading trade partner, when you omit Mexico and take into account only the South American nations. "China has successfully established a really remarkable economic presence in the region over a relatively short period of time," according to

Margaret Myers, director of the Inter-American Dialogue's Latin America and the World Program.

Mexico is an exception that still looks to the U.S. for most of its commerce, thanks in some measure to the North American Free Trade Agreement's zero-tariffs regime. The country's exports to the U.S. totaled USD303 billion in 2016 compared with just \$5.4 billion to China.

But China's encroachment in the region could accelerate if Trump makes good on threats to withdraw from Nafta, which would result in higher tariffs between Mexico and the U.S. Mexico already is making contingency plans to increase trade with non-U.S. nations in case the trade pact dissolves and the country's proximity to Latin America makes it a natural pivot point.

To be sure, that doesn't mean that China would completely benefit from a souring of U.S.-Mexico relations. China largely seeks commodity imports from Latin America, whereas Mexico's biggest exports to its northern neighbor are cars and car parts as well as electronics – items that China already produces in abundance.

But the dissolution of Nafta could create a vacuum in Mexico that China would try to at least partially fill.

"Certainly Mexico will be interested in collaborating more with China" – as well as other countries – if Nafta ends, according to R. Evan Ellis, a professor of Latin American studies at the U.S. Army War College. "Mexico's partnership with the United States has really been a bulwark against the advances of China in the region." **Bloomberg**

SINO-MALAY PROSTITUTION RING

Three people accused of operating US brothel sent to prison

TWO Chinese women and a Malaysian man whom prosecutors say operated a brothel near Atlanta that lured women from around the U.S. to work as prostitutes have been sentenced to federal prison.

Court records show that 45-year-old Xiaohong Huang, 59-year-old Chan Kong Chow and 54-year-old Biyun Gong were sentenced Friday. Huang and Gong are from China, while Chow is from Malaysia.

"Brothels remain a blight in segments of our communities," U.S. Attorney Byung J. "BJay" Pak said in a news release yesterday [Macau time]. "The prosecution of these defendants, the seizure of significant assets, and the dedication of law enforcement resources in targeting this long-running criminal

scheme are a warning for others engaged in this conduct."

Huang, also known as Michelle and Jenny, operated a brothel at an apartment complex in Doraville from December 2005 through May 2017, while Chow and Gong managed the day-to-day operations, prosecutors said. The three lured women of Asian descent from across the U.S. to work as prostitutes, arranging for them to travel to Atlanta on commercial flights on a rotating basis roughly every 10 days, prosecutors said.

Huang advertised the brothel online and by word-of-mouth and used checking accounts to launder more than USD150,000 in illegal proceeds from the brothel, prosecutors said.

The three pleaded guilty in

July to conspiring to operate an interstate prostitution scheme involving money laundering.

Huang was sentenced Friday to serve two years and nine months and was ordered to forfeit a large home in Johns Creek, cash, high-end watches and designer purses. Chow, also known as Blake Wong, got one year and nine months, and Gong got one year and three months.

All three will be turned over to immigration authorities for deportation after completing their prison sentences, prosecutors said.

In court filings before the three were sentenced, their lawyers said their clients' actions were not as serious as prosecutors asserted.

A lawyer for Gong noted she had only arrived in the U.S. in 2015, long after the

brothel began operating, and that she could most accurately be described as a cook, not someone with any management responsibility.

Chow's attorney said he had no decision making authority and took orders from Huang – doing tasks like driving the sex workers to and from the airport – during the two years he worked for her.

Huang's lawyer stressed that she didn't coerce any of the sex workers, saying the women would contact her when they were coming to Atlanta and she would arrange transportation to and from the airport and provide lodging and a place to perform sex acts. In exchange, she would get \$40 of the \$120 the women charged, her lawyer wrote, saying the sex workers were effectively independent contractors. **AP**

Climber who died in South Africa said to be from Hong Kong

AUTHORITIES in Hong Kong say a climber who died after falling on South Africa's Table Mountain is from the southern Chinese city.

The statement yesterday by Hong Kong's immigration department contradicts an earlier assertion by South Africa's national parks service that the male climber was Japanese. There was no immediate explanation for the discrepancy.

Hong Kong says it has "taken the initiative" to contact the victim's family to provide advice and other help.

The climber and a surviving female companion were clients of a male South African guide who also died in the accident earlier this week. The injured survivor was taken to a hospital after a dramatic rescue operation in which emergency responders descended on ropes from a cable car on the mountain, a major tourist destination overlooking Cape Town. **AP**



Performers dance in front of a depiction of the North Korean flag in Rungrado May Day Stadium during a ceremony commemorating the 65th anniversary of the Korea Worker's Party in Pyongyang

OFF-SHORE DEALS

Trafigura denies involvement in North Korea oil transfer

Kanga Kong & Dan Murtaugh

TRAFIGURA Group denied it was involved in the illicit transfer of fuel to North Korea after the South Korean government said the world's third-biggest independent oil trader originally owned a cargo that was shipped in breach of United Nations sanctions in October.

The controversy nonetheless could spook international traders working in the region worried their oil and refined products could find their way to North Korea. In turn, that could increase the pressure on Pyongyang, making it more difficult and expensive for the rogue regime to buy fuel in the face of international sanctions.

President Donald Trump last week accused China of allowing ship-to-ship fuel sales to the isolated nation, which have been limited by UN Security Council resolutions in an effort to pressure

Kim Jong Un to abandon nuclear weapons.

Trafigura said this week that it didn't order the shipment of oil to North Korea and it neither owns nor chartered the vessel Lighthouse Winmore that was seized by South Korea last year. Hours earlier, the South Korean foreign ministry said the trading house owned the cargo and authorities were investigating whether it ordered the transaction.

The trading house, which has big operations in Singapore, Geneva and Houston, originally sold the shipment to a little-known Hong Kong-based company called Global Commodities Consultants Ltd. The deal was done on a free-on-board basis from South Korea for delivery to Taiwan, it said. The contract prohibited the on-sale of the cargo in breach of sanctions and Trafigura had no involvement in its final destination, according to the company.

Global Commodities Con-

sultants as well sold the cargo onward, it said in its own emailed statement, to a firm called Oceanic Enterprise Ltd. The cargo was sold free-on-board in South Korea and was still intended to go to Taiwan, and also contained the contractual provisions on sanctions, the company said. No contact information was immediately available for Oceanic Enterprise Ltd.

Oil shipments often change hands repeatedly in the trading industry, often while vessels are at sea, leaving the initial seller unaware of the final destination of the commodity. Still, large trading houses such as Trafigura often monitor through vessel tracking systems the end point of cargoes they sell.

The latest controversy relates to a small cargo of fuel oil that changed hands in October last year in the Yellow Sea between China and the Korean peninsula.

The Lighthouse Winmore

tanker transferred the fuel in October in international waters, South Korean officials said last week, without naming Trafigura at the time. So-called ship-to-ship transfers are used in the petroleum industry to move liquids from one tanker to another without the use of on-shore infrastructure, a technique explicitly barred for supplies to North Korea by the UN Security Council because such sales are difficult to track.

■ Trafigura originally sold the shipment to Global Commodities Consultants, a Hong Kong-based company

South Korea, which said it seized and inspected the Lighthouse Winmore in November, identified the charterer as Taiwan-based Billions Bunker Group. The company is incorporated in the Marshall Islands, according to Taiwan's Maritime and Port Bureau.

The vessel loaded oil products from Japan on Oct. 11 in Yeosu, Yonhap News reported last week, citing South Korean government officials. It then transferred 600 tons - about 4,000 barrels or enough to power a shipping vessel - to a North Korean vessel, the Sam Jong 2, on Oct. 19. At current prices, the cargo would be worth less than \$1.5 million. Considering that traders often make as little as one percent of the value of the deal, whoever sold it likely earned as little as \$15,000 from the operation.

Vessel tracking data compiled by Bloomberg showed the ship making trips between Kaohsiung in Taiwan and Yeosu in South Korea during September and October. The vessel data, which are broadcast by ships voluntarily and cannot be independently verified, showed it south of Yeosu, with its destination listed as Tai Chung, Taiwan, on Oct. 15. The next transmission was Oct. 25, further to the south near Jeju island. **Bloomberg**

Beijing welcomes Koreas 'positive' moves to talk

CHINA has welcomed moves by North and South Korea to use next month's Winter Olympics in the South as an opportunity for talks, saying it hopes the rivals will try to "meet

each other halfway." Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told reporters yesterday that China hopes "all sides concerned will seize this positive turn of events."

South Korea on Tuesday offered high-level talks with North Korea to find ways to cooperate on the Pyeongchang Olympics. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said Monday that

he was willing to send a delegation to the Olympics.

Kim also said he has a "nuclear button" on his office desk, a fiery threat that President Donald Trump responded to by

boasting he has a bigger and more powerful button than Kim.

Commenting on Trump's tweet, Geng urged countries to "maintain restraint" and say things that are "condu-

cive to alleviating the situation."

South Korea says it has begun preliminary contacts with North Korea on a reopened cross-border communication system. (More on p12-13) **AP**

FAQ

Is there a chance for a breakthrough with the Koreans?

AFTER one of the most fraught years on the Korean Peninsula in recent memory — threats of war amid North Korea's strongest-ever nuclear bomb test and repeated missile launches — an unexpected, very tentative interest in peace seems to have broken out.

In rapid succession: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un floats the idea in a New Year's speech of better ties with his southern rival. Maybe, he says, he'll even send a delegation to next month's Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea. Seoul quickly offers to meet and talk. And yesterday, the North announces that Kim views the South's offer positively and the two sides begin preliminary contact on a newly reopened cross-border communication channel.

Is it an elaborate ruse by the North? Wishful thinking in the South?

Some answers to questions about what it may all mean:

Q: How likely is it that the two sides will actually meet?

A: There's a pretty good chance, though meeting is the easy part.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in has favored better ties with North Korea for years, and he campaigned on pledges to take a softer line than his conservative predecessors.

Moon was a top aide for a previous liberal president who maintained a so-called "Sunshine Policy" toward Pyongyang, with large amounts of aid shipped to the North and the two sides pursuing



Visitors use binoculars to see the North side from the Imjingak Pavilion in Paju, South Korea

cooperative tourism and business programs.

Although Moon, who took office in May, has been pushed into a hard-line stance by the North's repeated missile and nuclear tests, he would clearly like dialogue.

The North's Kim, on the other hand, has shown little interest in pursuing peace since taking power in late 2011. That said, he has made repeated suggestions about improving ties in past New Year's speeches. Skeptics will point out that he mixed his peace overtures with threats of war and has conducted weapons tests within weeks of past speeches.

There's also suspicion that Kim will use any talks as cover to continue perfecting an arsenal of nukes that can reliably hit the U.S. mainland, and that his overture is mainly meant to disrupt ties between Seoul and Washington so he can weaken international pressure and sanctions.

Q: Why is it so difficult for the Koreans to make peace once they sit down and talk to each other?

A: Seven decades of simmering animosity and bloodshed is the short answer.

The Koreans were divided in 1945

at the end of World War II into a U.S.-controlled southern side and a Soviet-controlled north. Three years later, the division became formal with the founding of the opposing republics. Two years after that, the North launched a surprise invasion and the Koreans fought, with the help of the United States, the United Nations and China, one of the bloodiest wars of the 20th century.

Since then, there has been steady bloodshed, though mostly from the North, including assassinations, kidnappings and, in 2010, attacks blamed on North Korea that killed 50 South Koreans.

When the history is this bloody, and the two sides are squared off across the most heavily armed border in the world, every detail is usually contested.

Q: Even if they meet, is there any chance for a breakthrough?

A: Any time the Koreans talk it's a victory of sorts, especially after the misery of last year.

Still, the rivals have done this dance many times before, and their talks don't have the best track record when it comes to results, often blowing up before anything really gets done.

If there are talks, the first round will likely be lower-level discussions meant to set up a higher-level meeting. Previous such talks have bogged down on matters of protocol, for instance, with one side objecting to the "rank" of a proposed participant.

If a next round is decided upon, the actual negotiations of what to do about Olympic cooperation would begin. But with decades of accrued animosity between them, nothing is guaranteed.

Q: What about President Donald Trump's tweet in which he taunted Kim Jong Un, who'd earlier said he has a nuclear button on his desk, by boasting of a bigger and more powerful "nuclear button" than Kim's.

A: For the time being, both Koreas are ignoring it.

Trump's tweets worried South Koreans at first, but they are becoming used to them. President Moon will likely prefer to focus on the rare signs of rapprochement with the North.

The North, however, rarely lets an insult pass, though there's a chance it could keep its outrage against Trump separate from whatever its intentions are with the South.

US-NORTH KOREA

Trump boasts of 'nuclear button' but doesn't really have one

Matthew Pennington,
Washington

PRESIDENT Donald Trump boasted that he has a bigger and more powerful "nuclear button" than North Korean leader Kim Jong Un does — but the president doesn't actually have a physical button.

The president's yesterday's tweet came in response to Kim's New Year's address, in which he repeated fiery nuclear threats against the United States. Kim said he has a "nuclear button" on his office desk and war-

ned that "the whole territory of the U.S. is within the range of our nuclear strike."

Trump mocked that assertion, writing, "Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!"

But despite ratcheting up the tension, Trump doesn't really have a nuclear button.

The process for launching a nuclear strike is secret and complex and

involves the use of a nuclear "football," which is carried by a rotating group of military officers everywhere the president goes and is equipped with communication tools and a book with prepared war plans.

If the president were to order a strike, he would identify himself to military officials at the Pentagon with codes unique to him. Those codes are recorded on a card known as the "biscuit" that is carried by the president at all times. He would then transmit the launch order to the Pentagon and Stra-

tegic Command.

Tuesday, Trump sounded open to the possibility of an inter-Korean dialogue after Kim made a rare overture toward South Korea in a New Year's address. But Trump's ambassador to the United Nations insisted talks would not be meaningful unless the North was getting rid of its nuclear weapons.

In a morning tweet, Trump said the U.S.-led campaign of sanctions and other pressure were beginning to have a "big impact" on North Korea. He referred to the



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un speaks in his annual address at an undisclosed location

recent, dramatic escape of at least two North Korean soldiers across the heavily militarized border into South Korea. He also alluded to Kim's comments Monday that he was willing to send a delegation to the Winter Olympics, which will be hosted by South Korea

next month.

"Soldiers are dangerously fleeing to South Korea. Rocket man now wants to talk to South Korea for first time. Perhaps that is good news, perhaps not — we will see!" Trump said, using his derisive moniker for the young North Korean leader. **AP**

Hyung-Jin Kim, Seoul

KOREAN PENINSULA

North reopens cross-border communications with South

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un reopened a key cross-border communication channel with South Korea for the first time in nearly two years yesterday as the rivals explored the possibility of sitting down and talking after months of acrimony and fears of war.

The sudden signs of easing animosity, however, came as President Donald Trump threatened Kim with nuclear war in response to his threat earlier this week.

In his New Year's address Monday, Kim said he was willing to send a delegation to next month's Winter Olympics in South Korea. But he also said he has a "nuclear button" on his desk and that all U.S. territory is within iastriking distance of his nuclear weapons, comments Trump latched onto Tuesday when he boasted of a bigger and more powerful "nuclear button" than Kim's.

The two leaders exchanged crude insults last year, as the North received new U.N. sanctions over its sixth and most powerful nuclear test explosion and a series of intercontinental ballistic missile launches.

The recent softening of contact between the rival Koreas may

show a shared interest in improved ties, but there's no guarantee tensions will ease. There have been repeated attempts in recent years by the rivals to talk, but even when they do meet, the efforts often end in recriminations and stalemate.

Outside critics say Kim may be trying to use better ties with South Korea as a way to weaken the alliance between Washington and Seoul as the North grapples with toughened international sanctions over its nuclear and missile programs.

Kim's latest announcement, which was read by a senior Pyongyang official on state TV, followed a South Korean offer on Tuesday of high-level talks with North Korea to find ways to cooperate on next month's Winter Olympics in the South and discuss other inter-Korean issues.

Ri Son Gwon, chairman of the state-run Committee for the Pea-



A South Korean government official checks the direct communications hotline to talk with the North Korean side at the border village of Panmunjom in Paju, South Korea, yesterday

ceful Reunification, cited Kim as welcoming South Korea's overture and ordering officials to reopen a communication channel at the border village of Panmunjom. Ri also quoted Kim as ordering officials to promptly take substantial

measures with South Korea out of a "sincere stand and honest attitude," according to the North's state TV and news agency.

South Korea quickly welcomed Kim's decision and later confirmed that the two Koreas began

preliminary contacts on the channel. During their 20-minute communication, liaison officials of the two Koreas exchanged their names and examined their communication lines to make sure they were working, according to Seoul's Unification Ministry.

Since taking office last May, South Korea's liberal President Moon Jae-in has pushed hard to improve ties and resume stalled cooperation projects with North Korea. Pyongyang had not responded to his outreach until Kim's New Year's address.

Relations between the Koreas soured under Moon's conservative predecessors, who responded to the North's expanding nuclear program with hard-line measures. All major rapprochement projects were put on hold one by one, and the Panmunjom communication channel had been suspended since February 2016. AP

AD



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IRAN

Trump roots on Iranian protesters, declares 'time for change'

Josh Lederman, Washington

The Trump administration yesterday threw the weight of the U.S. government behind the protesters taking to the streets of Iran, rooting them on despite the risk of helping Iranian authorities dismiss a week of major demonstrations as the product of American instigation.

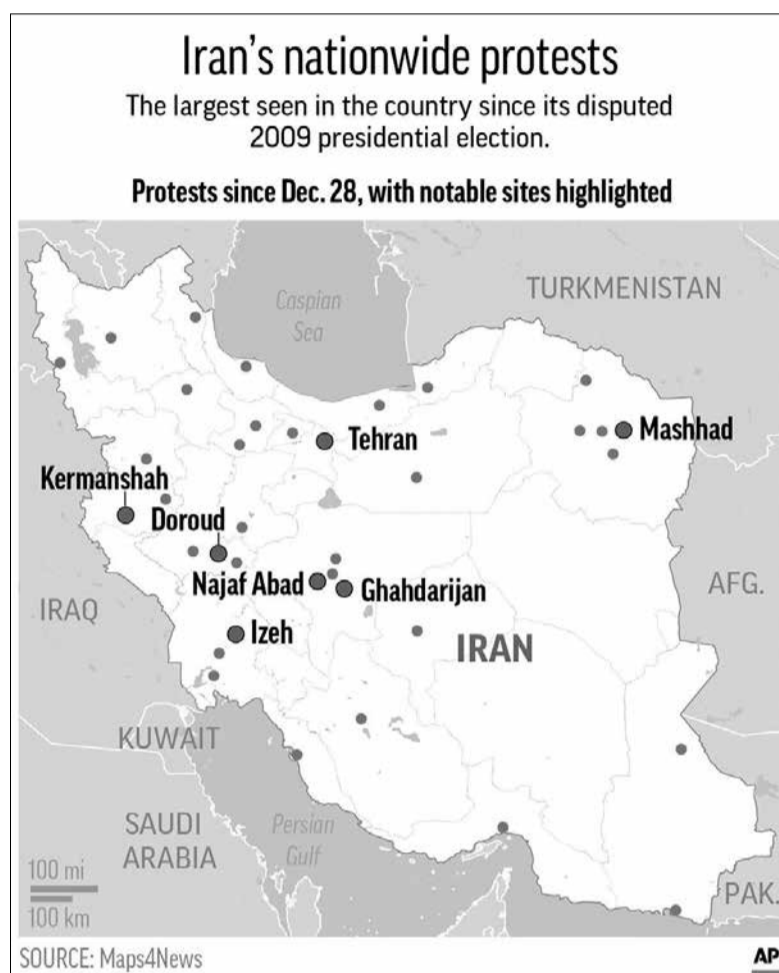
As Iran's supreme leader accused "enemies of Iran" of trying to destabilize his country, the State Department pressed Tehran to unblock social media sites used by the protesters. It even offered advice to tech-savvy Iranians on circumventing state internet controls.

President Donald Trump declared it was "time for change" in Iran, and other officials floated the possibility of additional sanctions. At the United Nations, Ambassador Nikki Haley sought a Security Council meeting to show support for those protesting in the Islamic Republic.

"We want to help amplify the voices of the Iranian people," said Haley, who appeared before cameras to recite the chants of protesters across Iran. She said Iran's claim that other countries were fomenting the unrest was "complete nonsense," describing the dissent as homegrown.

Borrowing from a response playbook it has used before, Iran's government blamed the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Britain for the protests. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the 78-year-old supreme leader, said Iran's enemies were using money, weapons, politics and spies "to create problems for the Islamic system, the Islamic Republic and the Islamic Revolution."

Trump was undeterred, praising Iranians for "finally acting against the brutal and corrupt



Map locates the sites of protests which began on Dec. 28 over the economic hardships in Iran

Iranian regime." In an allusion to possible sanctions in response to human rights violations, Trump said the United States would closely monitor the situation.

"The U.S. is watching!" the president tweeted.

Beyond rhetoric, though, it wasn't clear what the Trump administration could do substantively to empower the protesters, who are railing against corruption, mismanagement and economic woes including higher food prices. His support also sets up a potential test of his presidential leadership if the protests — already deadly —

grow more violent.

At least 21 people have died and hundreds have been arrested over six days of demonstrations, the largest in Iran since the "Green Movement" that erupted in 2009 following a disputed presidential election. The new outbreak started in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city, and has expanded to many others.

Iranian authorities have sought to suppress the protests in part by shutting down key social media sites protesters use to communicate, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and the messaging app Telegram. On

Tuesday, Undersecretary of State Steve Goldstein urged Iran's government to unblock the sites.

"They are legitimate avenues for communication," Goldstein said. He said the U.S. has an "obligation not to stand by."

Iranians seeking to evade the blocks can use virtual private networks, Goldstein said. Known as VPNs, the services create encrypted data "tunnels" between computers and can be used to access overseas websites blocked by the local government.

The primary U.S. goal is to ensure enough global attention to deter Iranian authorities from violently cracking down on protesters with impunity, said a senior State Department official involved in Iran policy. The official wasn't authorized to comment by name and demanded anonymity.

For Trump, the protests have served as an unexpected but welcome opportunity to rally the world against Iran, and U.S. officials said the administration was actively encouraging other countries to back the protests. Early U.S. attempts to get European allies to coordinate their messaging with the U.S. ran into obstacles, but several countries including France and Italy have joined in expressing concerns.

In the U.S., Trump's full-throated support for the protesters has renewed the debate about how best to encourage change in Iran, whose government Trump deems a top national security threat.

Under President Barack Obama, the U.S. took a more cautious approach during the last major wave of anti-government protests. It was concerned about enabling Iranian authorities to exploit longstanding suspicions of the U.S., dating back to Ame-

rican and British support for a 1953 coup toppling Iran's elected prime minister.

Ben Rhodes, Obama's former deputy national security adviser, said "too much ownership" of the protests by Trump would likely be counterproductive.

"I can't imagine that the people marching in the streets of Iran are looking to Donald Trump for inspiration or support," Rhodes said. "I just don't think it helps things for the White House to make this into a U.S.-versus-the-Iranian-government circumstance."

We want to help amplify the voices of the Iranian people.

NIKKI HALEY
US AMBASSADOR, UN

But former Sen. Joe Lieberman, a staunch Iran critic, said it's a given Tehran will portray dissent as externally provoked.

"That's a very weak excuse for American inaction and inconsistency with our own interests and values. I'm glad President Trump is not following that advice," Lieberman said in an interview.

It wasn't immediately clear what effect Trump's support was having on the protests, although Iran's state TV reported his tweets and some Iranians shared them online.

When it comes to supporting the Iranian aspirations, Trump's credibility may be dented by his hostility to the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement and his inclusion of Iranians in his travel bans.

Trump's insistence in an October speech on using the term "Arabian Gulf" in place of the Persian Gulf also riled the Iranian public. There also was criticism of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson for saying America was working with people in Iran for a "peaceful transition of that government." AP

ETHIOPIA

Government to release all political prisoners, close camp

In a surprise move, Ethiopia's leader yesterday announced plans to drop charges against political prisoners and close a notorious prison camp in what he called an effort to "widen the democratic space for all."

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn's comments came after anti-government protests engulfed much of the restive Oromia and Amhara regions

in recent months, bringing many businesses, universities and transport networks to a standstill. The sometimes deadly protests, the most serious since the current government came to power in 1991, spread into other parts of the East African country, leading to a months-long state of emergency that has since been lifted.

"Political prisoners that are facing prosecutions and

are already under arrest will be released," Hailemariam said. "And the notorious prison cell that was traditionally called Maekelawi will be closed down and turned into a museum."

It was not immediately clear how many political prisoners were being held across the country, a close U.S. security ally.

Ethiopians were quick to respond, even with social media sites cur-

rently blocked.

"I'm writing you this struggling with my tears," wrote renowned blogger and former detainee Befeqadu Hailu. "All these pledges need to be implemented immediately."

Rights groups and opposition groups in Ethiopia had been calling for the release of political prisoners, saying they were arrested on trumped-up charges and were being punished

for their points of view. Ethiopia's government has long been accused of arresting critical journalists and opposition leaders.

Some of the prominent politicians currently in custody include opposition leaders Bekele Gerba and Merara Gudina. A number of journalists also remain in detention.

The months of protests demanding wider freedoms began in late 2015

and led to hundreds of reported deaths and tens of thousands of arrests while disrupting one of Africa's fastest growing economies.

"The crackdown on the political opposition saw mass arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, unfair trials and violations of the rights to freedom of expression and association," rights group Amnesty International has said. AP

WEATHER

Storm leads to flights cancelled in Switzerland; shortages over Europe

THE storm battering many parts of western Europe has led to power outages in Switzerland, canceled flights at Zurich and Basel, and toppled a truck on a Swiss highway.

Local media reported that at least 11 flights were canceled while several others were rerouted to other airports.

Thousands of households at Lake Zurich were left without power because of the storm and firefighters received repeated calls to help with toppled trees blocking streets and flooding due to heavy rains.

Online news site 20Minuten reported that a truck was toppled over on a highway near Emmen.

France's interior ministry says nine people have been injured in a violent wind storm pummeling the country.

Four people are said to be in serious condition following acci-

dents caused by the winds that reached speeds above 100 mph (160 kph) yesterday.

In the Paris region a falling tree hit a car and seriously injured one person, while another resident was seriously hurt falling from a building.

In the Eure-et-Loir, a motorcyclist hit a tree that had been uprooted and fell into the road. In the east, a woman was seriously injured after an object hit her in the head.

First responders have made 3,250 interventions related to some of the worst winds to hit France in years.

The national electricity provider says a violent windstorm has left some 200,000 households without electricity across the country, including 30,000 in the Paris region.

Further north, zoos have been closed, roads flooded and a train has derailed as a winter storm

batters large parts of Germany.

The German news agency dpa reported yesterday that a train derailed near Luenen in western Germany when it crashed against a tree that had fallen on the tracks. No injuries were reported.

Highways near Duisburg and Juelich in the west were also partially blocked because of toppled trees and flooding.

The zoos in Munich and Augsburg in Bavaria closed for the day and the railway leading up on Germany's tallest mountain, the Zugspitze, was also shut down because of the bad weather.

In the UK, a severe storm packing winds of up to 100 miles per hour has battered Britain and Ireland overnight.

The storm, which included heavy rain, hail and lightning left tens of thousands of households in Ireland and Britain without



Waves crash over the stone jetty wall in Aberystwyth in west Wales as Storm Eleanor lashed Britain with violent storm-force winds of up to 100mph yesterday

power, and also led to some bridge and road closures.

Extremely high tides also caused the partial collapse of a harbor wall in Cornwall in southwestern Britain.

Overtaken vehicles forced officials to close portions of three major highways in England.

The country's main weather forecaster, the Met Office, says gusts reached 100 mph in Cumbria 450 kilometers northwest of London yesterday when the storm reached its peak.

Forecasters said gusts of up to 80 mph are possible today. **MDT/AP**

AD

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what's ON



CRAYON SHIN-CHAN KASUKABE ADVENTURE 2017 (MACAU)

TIME: 2pm-9pm (last admission 8:30pm)

UNTIL: February 14, 2018

VENUE: 2/F, Broadway Macau

ADMISSION: From MOP128, available at Kong Seng Ticketing Service

ENQUIRIES: (853) 6288 9485 / 2855 5555

IMAGINARY BEINGS – ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANA ARAGÃO

TIME: 12pm-8pm (closed on Mondays)

UNTIL: February 21, 2018

VENUE: Taipa Village Art Space

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2857 6118

THE MEMORABLE TIME – THE TRADITIONAL HANDICRAFT INDUSTRIES OF MACAU

TIME: 10am-6pm (closed on Mondays; open on public holidays)

UNTIL: February 25, 2108

VENUE: Macau Museum

ADMISSION: MOP15

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2835 7911

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF MACAU – EXHIBITION

TIME: 10:30am-5:30pm (closed on Mondays)

UNTIL: March 31, 2018

VENUE: Gallery of Carmo Post Office in Taipa

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2837 8138

11TH MACAU DESIGN BIENNIAL (HGM)

TIME: 10am-7pm, last admission at 6:30pm (closed on Mondays, open on public holidays)

UNTIL: March 31, 2018

VENUE: Macau Museum of Art, Av. Xian Xing Hai, NAPE

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8791 9814

DISCOVER MACAU: MUSEUM OF TAIPA AND COLOANE HISTORY

TIME: 10am-6pm daily (last admission at 5:30pm; closed on Mondays)

ADDRESS: Rua Correia da Silva, Taipa

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8988 4000

Offbeat

FED-UP PASSENGER SOUGHT FAST TRACK ON RYANAIR WING

A Ryanair passenger who apparently got fed up waiting to get off a plane surprised fellow passengers by using the emergency exit to jump onto a wing.

The incident on New Year's Day took place 30 minutes after the flight landed from London's Stansted Airport, where it had also been delayed.

The man was coaxed back into the plane while police were called.

Fellow passenger Fernando del Valle Villalobos, who videoed the incident, said he heard the man say he got fed up waiting.

Police said Wednesday that they have opened a complaint against the man for breaching security. They confirmed he is a non-Spanish citizen.

Ryanair said the incident was now in the hands of Spanish authorities.

TV canal macau



13:00	TDM News (Repeated)
13:30	News (RTPi) Delayed Broadcast
15:00	Miscellaneous
15:35	Miscellaneous
17:25	Zig Zag
18:25	Brazilian Soap Opera (Repeated)
19:15	Miscellaneous
19:50	Portuguese Serie
20:30	Main News, Financial & Weather Report
21:00	TDM Talk Show
21:35	Non-daily Portuguese News
21:45	Yes Chef! - Sr 2
22:10	Brazilian Soap Opera
23:00	TDM News
23:30	Miscellaneous
00:30	Main News, Financial & Weather Report (Repeated)
01:05	RTPi Live

cinema



CINETEATRO

04 JAN - 08 JAN



COCO

ROOM 1

2:30, 4:45, 7:15pm

Director: Lee Unkrick

Starring: Anthony Gonzalez, Gael García Bernal,

Benjamin Bratt

Language: Cantonese (English)

Duration: 105 min



JUMANJI: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

ROOM 2

09:30pm

Director: Jake Kasdan

Starring: Dwayne Johnson, Jack Black, Karen Gillan,

Kevin Hart

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 119 min



INSIDIOUS: CHAPTER 4

ROOM 2

02:30, 04:30, 07:30, 9:30pm

Director: Adam Robitel

Starring: Lin Shaye, Angus Sampson, Leigh Whannell, Josh

Stewart

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 103 min

AJIN

ROOM 3

02:30, 04:30, 07:30, 9:30pm

Director: Katsuyuki Motohi

Starring: Takeru Satoh, Go Ayano, Testuji Tamayama,

Yu Shirota

Language: Japanese (Chinese & English)

Duration: 105 min

this day in history



1951 COMMUNIST FORCES TO RE-TAKE SEOUL

Chinese and North Korean troops are reported to be close to capturing the South Korean capital of Seoul for the second time since the war began last year.

The authorities have ordered the evacuation of Seoul and thousands of people have started streaming south out of the city and across the Han river.

Over the past few weeks, many families have taken refuge in Seoul from the advancing enemy. Now they are being forced to move on again, mostly by foot, although some have been lucky enough to get a lift on a military vehicle.

The BBC's cameraman Cyril Page was in Seoul as the communist forces were reported to be less than 50 miles from the city.

His pictures show the only sign of normal life in the city was the trams, which were still running.

To the south, the steady stream of refugees made its way through freezing temperatures to the River Han flats. It was so cold the river had frozen over and people were able to walk across to the relative safety of the other side.

They have left behind them a city devastated and burning.

The United States Eighth Army is also pulling out, but reports of its movements have been banned by army censors.

Speaking at a Pentagon briefing, the US Secretary of Defense, General Marshall, said the advance of the enemy troops had been anticipated.

The odds against the United Nations forces were heavy - "almost incredible in some respects," he said. The Communists forces outnumber UN troops by three or four to one and they are capable of covering difficult terrain on foot carrying heavy loads.

Lieutenant-General Matthew Ridgway, commander of the Eighth Army, has been reported in press dispatches as saying the flight of the Korean refugees is "perhaps the greatest tragedy to which Asia has been subjected in the course of its long history."

Seoul first fell to the powerful North Korean and Chinese communist forces last June - days after the invasion began.

In September, a United Nations force led by US marines re-captured the city.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

After a series of offensives, UN forces succeeded in winning back control of Seoul in March 1951.

It was followed by a UN call for a ceasefire, the first since the war began.

Talks finally began in July 1951 but the negotiations at Kaesong broke down.

The war reached stalemate.

In July 1953 talks reopened. The Korean War ended with the signing of the armistice on 27 July 1953. Two million people had died during the war.

In August, prisoners of war were exchanged in Operation Big Switch - 77,000 communists for 12,700 UN men, of whom 3,597 were Americans.

North and South Korea were separated by a demarcation line which was extended by a 2km (1.5 miles) demilitarised zone on either side.

A peace deal has never been signed.

YOUR STARS

Aries Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Reliability is a virtue, especially when it comes to finances. In fact, it's quite virtuous of you to take a look at any consistently unhealthy ways you deal with money.

Taurus April 20-May 20 You and someone close may get so giddy in each other's company that your heads seem to have settled in the clouds for now, but your feet should be firmly planted on the ground.

Gemini May 21-Jun. 21 Truth is certainly stranger than fiction, though it's usually not as stylish! It's your job now to sift out the facts from the tall tales. It's important to consider your sources.

Cancer Jun. 22-Jul. 22 It's a good moment to keep your social life low-key - instead of fighting your way through crowds, just gather a few close friends who really understand you (and spend your time near water, if possible).

Leo Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Someone could be taken aback by your brutal honesty when you change your mind about plans they thought were set in stone. You're done with following other people's agendas just because it's polite.

Virgo Aug. 23-Sept. 22 Once you give yourself the space to examine recent events in your life, you might find yourself dictating the outcome of the next few events, instead of feeling that you're at the mercy of fate.

Libra Sep.23-Oct. 22 Fortunately, you're smart enough to know when you need to replenish body and soul. Now is the time to take a break and do something indulgent that pampers you inside and out.

Scorpio Oct. 23 - Nov. 21 Even if their demands are unreasonable or they're being weirdly fussy, face up to your people bravely. Use your natural speed and clever brain to engage them instead of simply dismissing their concerns.

Sagittarius Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Your mental energy gets a giant helping of earthy influences, which help bring you a deep sense of calm. It's fortunate, too, because you're just about to tackle some big tasks that require the best of your intellect.

Capricorn Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Supremely capable and hard-working people like you aren't always the best at expressing feelings, but that all changes for you today. You've got a lot of emotions that you need to get off your chest.

Aquarius Jan. 20-Feb. 18 You are the best at coming up with far-reaching ideas or being a visionary in your chosen field, but you might not be quite as flexible when it's time to implement those ideas - or listen to other people's opinions.

Pisces Feb.19-Mar. 20 Your energy emphasizes art and creation right now. That could mean exploring a museum you've never been to, or maybe looking through your old sketchbooks from that long-ago life-drawing class.

THE BORN LOSER by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

Easy

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

Easy+

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

Medium

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

Hard

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

WEATHER

MIN MAX CONDITION

CHINA

Table with 4 columns: City, Min, Max, Condition. Includes Beijing, Harbin, Tianjin, Urumqi, Xi'an, Lhasa, Chengdu, Chongqing, Kunming, Nanjing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Hangzhou, Taipei, Guangzhou, Hong Kong.

WORLD

Table with 4 columns: City, Min, Max, Condition. Includes Moscow, Frankfurt, Paris, London, New York.

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- French cleric; 5- ___ Gras; 10- Invitation request; 14- Critters in litters; 15- Dined at home; 16- Mayberry lad; 17- Camaro model; 18- Titles; 19- ___ Blanc; 20- First-stringers; 22- Repeats; 24- Actress Sofer; 27- Flabbergast; 28- Baldness; 32- Intolerant person; 36- TV room; 37- Sample; 39- Fenced areas; 40- Coup d' ___; 42- "The dog ate my homework," e.g.; 44- Nothing, in Nogales; 45- Dens; 47- Reflection on death; 49- Latin word which means "for every"; 50- Up ___ (trapped); 51- Pants; 53- Riding; 56- Pitfall; 57- Cutting instrument for paper; 61- Dressed to the ___; 65- Bean curd; 66- Congo, formerly; 69- Thin change; 70- Controversial orchard spray; 71- Kett and James; 72- Lamb's pseudonym; 73- Fence opening; 74- Acts; 75- Queue after Q;

DOWN: 1- Capital city of Western Samoa; 2- Songwriter Bacharach; 3- Fraternal org.; 4- Steep bank under a rampart; 5- Adult male; 6- One ___ time; 7- Do followers; 8- Eats to a plan; 9- Atlas feature; 10- Inhabitant of Bucharest; 11- Dick and Jane's dog; 12- Grape plant; 13- Teachers' favorites; 21- Run into; 23- Red gem; 25- Final Four org.; 26- Lovers' lane?; 28- Journalist ___ Rogers St. Johns; 29- Free to attack; 30- TV studio sign; 31- Leaning; 33- Wine fruit; 34- More peculiar; 35- Romanov rulers; 38- Movie critic Roger; 41- Cherish; 43- Aviation pioneer Sikorsky; 46- Complete collections; 48- Monetary unit of China; 52- Arachnid; 54- Seeped; 55- Babble; 57- Deer sir; 58- Soft drink choice; 59- ___ first you don't...; 60- Word that can succeed building, web or burial; 62- Guitarist Lofgren; 63- Expel gas or odor; 64- Linebacker Junior; 67- Far out!; 68- Double curve;

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

Large crossword puzzle grid with some numbers.

Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222
Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993
Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333
Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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



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TENNIS

Raonic upset by De Minaur in second round at Brisbane

FORMER champion Milos Raonic lost in straight sets to 18-year-old Alex De Minaur in a second-round upset yesterday at the Brisbane International.

Raonic, who won the Brisbane title in 2016 and reached the Wimbledon final that year, struggled to find rhythm with his usually booming serve in a 6-4, 6-4 loss to the Australian wildcard entry.

De Minaur pressured Raonic with his relentless service returns, made just one unforced error and only dropped serve once — when serving for the match at 5-2 — en route to the biggest win of his career.

The victory put De Minaur into a quarterfinal match against American qualifier Michael Mmoh, who upset No. 8-seeded Mischa Zverev 6-2, 5-7, 6-4.

“It’s going to take a while for me

to believe what’s happened just now,” De Minaur said.

Raonic was playing his first match since October after taking time out to deal with injuries that also ruled him out of the U.S. Open last year, when his ranking slipped to No. 24 — 21 spots lower than his career-high finish in 2016.

“Heavily disappointed,” he said. “I could have served better. I could have moved a little better. I could have found my way to the net a little bit better.

“I sort of played into his comfort zone. I didn’t do enough to pull him out of it or, when I did, it would be only for a few points at a time. I wasn’t consistent enough and that’s sort of what cost me.”

Raonic saved double break points in his first two service games in the second set, but was finally broken in the fifth game

when De Minaur challenged a call on a second serve, got it overturned to win the point on a double-fault, and won the next two points on the back of some impressive returns.

De Minaur broke again in the seventh game and, after missing the chance to close out in the eighth, the former Wimbledon junior finalist held his composure to close out.

Asked how he unsettled one of the better servers in tennis, De Minaur said he threw out the playbook.

“I was just guessing really, I’m not going to lie,” he said. “I tried to change my returning position a bit to try to throw him off a bit. He probably didn’t have his best serving day, which helped me a lot. I took advantage of it — really proud.”

Nick Kyrgios was the first into the men’s quarterfinals, overco-



Alex De Minaur of Australia reacts after he won his match against Milos Raonic of Canada

ming a knee problem to outlast fellow Australian Matthew Ebden 6-7 (3), 7-6 (5), 6-2.

Third-seeded Kyrgios called for a medical timeout after nine games and had further treatment two games later to have his left knee taped.

His movement appeared to be hampered but he still had too much for Ebden and set up a

quarterfinal match against former Brisbane International runner-up Alexandr Dolgoplov, who beat Horacio Zeballos 6-1, 6-2.

Defending women’s champion Karolina Pliskova beat Catherine Bellis 6-1, 6-1 in the night match to set up a quarterfinal against Kaia Kanepi, who beat Lesia Tsurenko 6-4, 6-3. **AP**

AD

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Tim Reynolds

HOCKEY | NHL

Penguins looking for a big second-half breakout

THERE'S no need to push the panic button in Pittsburgh yet. Soon, maybe.

There are plenty of examples of a reigning Stanley Cup champion not making the following season's playoffs, most recently the Los Angeles Kings in 2015. But one would need to go all the way back to 1970 to find when a back-to-back champion didn't even qualify for the postseason — when Montreal achieved that dubious feat.

That's what Pittsburgh is trying to avoid.

The Penguins aren't in trouble yet, though aren't exactly on the thickest of ice either. They haven't as much as won back-to-back games in a month, and are basically in the middle of the pack in goal-scoring — after leading the league last season.

If the season was over now, they wouldn't be in the playoffs. But there's a ton of hockey left, and the Penguins know there's lots of time to make a run.

"We need to find that second gear," Penguins left wing Connor Sheary said recently. "It's coming into the second half of the season here. We have to make sure we're stringing some wins together and maybe get on a win streak here."

Sheary did his part yesterday [Macau time], scoring in Pittsburgh's 5-1 win over Philadelphia.

Pittsburgh has the longest active streak of playoff appearances, having been to the postseason 11 consecutive times.

KID GOALS

Winnipeg's Patrick Laine is still only 19, and has a chance to join a seriously elite club.

He has 54 career goals, which means he's on the cusp of

AP PHOTO



Tampa Bay Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy (88) makes a save on Toronto Maple Leafs left wing Matt Martin (15) during the second period of an NHL hockey game

joining the 10 highest-scoring teens in NHL history. Steven Stamkos had 55 goals before he turned 20.

The other teens with that many goals: Jimmy Carson, Dale Hawerchuk, Wayne Gretzky, Brian Bellows, Sidney Crosby, Steve Yzerman, Ilya Kovalchuk, Bob Carpenter and Rick Nash.

For comparison's sake, Jaromir Jagr had 50 NHL goals on his resume when he turned 20.

Speaking of the Jets, they

piled up 102 standings points in the 2017 calendar year — by far their best "year" since relocating to Winnipeg in 2011. Only seven NHL teams had more points from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31.

HAT WATCH

Washington's Alex Ovechkin has a league-best three hat tricks already this season — and there's still a full half of the schedule yet to be played.

It doesn't sound like much, but Ovechkin is on

quite a pace.

No NHL player has had four in a season since 2010-11 — done then by Alexander Semin and Drew Stafford.

The record for hat tricks in a season is 10, by Wayne Gretzky (who did it twice).

STRUGGLING PANTHERS

Florida saved its playoff hopes with a five-game winning streak to end December.

January is rarely kind to the Panthers, however.

Since 2011, the Panthers have won only 35 of their last 81 January games — including a 5-1 loss at Minnesota to start a five-game trip. Florida didn't exactly look desperate in that game either, with forward Vincent Trocheck saying afterward the Panthers got outworked by the Wild.

MODEL OF CONSISTENCY

Los Angeles' Drew Doughty averaged 32 shifts per game last season, and 27 minutes on the ice.

This season: 32 shifts per game, 27 minutes on the ice.

While those numbers have stayed the same, his scoring numbers are way better. He's averaging about three-quarters of a point per game, as opposed to a half-point per game last season. He's had four gamewinning goals already, compared to just one last season. And he is a plus-20 this season, after posting a plus-8 for the entirety of last season.

GAME OF THE WEEK

Vegas at Chicago, Saturday [Macau time]: The second night of a back-to-back on the road for the Golden Knights, and the second game in a stretch where Vegas plays 12 of 16 on the road. If Gerard Gallant's club — the NHL's best story this season — survives the next month relatively unscathed, there should be playoff games around J-Lo shows in Vegas this April.

LEADERS

Goals: Alex Ovechkin (Washington), 26. Assists: Jakub Voracek (Philadelphia), 38; Josh Bailey (N.Y. Islanders), 38. Points: Nikita Kucherov (Tampa Bay), 56. Wins: Andrei Vasilevskiy (Tampa Bay), 26. Goals-against average: Vasilevskiy, 1.95. Save percentage: Vasilevskiy, .937. AP

FOOTBALL

Hectic EPL schedule will 'kill' the players, warns Guardiola

MANCHESTER City manager Pep Guardiola has hit out at the amount of games played in the Premier League over the festive period, saying the schedule is going to "kill" the players.

City was one of the teams to play four games in 11 days across Christmas and the new year, with the last two matches — away to Crystal Palace and at home to Watford — coming just two days apart.

"What I saw, what everybody sees, in the last weeks is how many injuries

the players have," Guardiola said. "We are going to kill them [the players]. The federation — whoever the bosses are — have to reflect. It's not normal."

Guardiola's ire might have been caused by the sight of right back Kyle Walker holding his groin in the final minutes of the 3-1 win over Watford on Tuesday. The City coach said Walker "might have a little bit of a problem."

City lost striker Gabriel Jesus to a ligament injury early in the 0-0 draw at Palace on Sunday that will keep

him out for up to six weeks.

"I know the show must go on and it doesn't matter with which guys the show must go on," Guardiola said.

"Here in England, you don't protect the players — that is a big mistake. You have to do it for the quality, not quantity. Play every three, four, five days, but not every two days ... Look at how many players have muscular injuries in this period. But it doesn't matter; the show must go on. And that's why there will be players not fit."

Guardiola's comments came as Palace's Scott Dann and Jason Puncheon were ruled out for the remainder of the season. Manager Roy Hodgson said both players had suffered cruciate ligament injuries in Sunday's 0-0 draw with City.

"We won't see anything of those players for the rest of our season and it is going to be hard for them to get ready even for the start of next season, because these are serious injuries," Hodgson said after Palace's 2-1 win at Southampton this week. AP

AP PHOTO



Manchester City's manager Pep Guardiola

opinion

Girl About Globe

Linda Kennedy



TIME TO RECLAIM PAGE 3. THANKS, BREXIT.

One day, I'd like to be a Page 3 girl. Or a centrefold.

Not in a tabloid newspaper, in a travel document. There's a lot of conversation about British passport design at the moment. Some people are looking forward to getting the old navy blue passport back, post-Brexit.

I'd like to talk about the current design.

I just renewed my British passport, for the first time in ten years. And boy, things have changed. The new design differs substantially from the old. For a start, in keeping with the times, it's more narcissistic. There are two images of the person being allowed to pass through ports, and they are positioned at the front of the document. (Some things never change, though. Will they ever expand the range of permissible poses? The 'straight-ahead-crime-suspect' look is so over.)

The pages are now not blank, as they once were. They have representations of Britishness on them. British icons. British achievements and achievers. On all 32 pages. Overall, the passport is part travel brochure, part history lesson and the theme of the current design is 'Creative United Kingdom.'

I start flicking. There is a man on the opening spread, posing beside an array of timepieces. He is John Harrison, clockmaker. Watches? Isn't that a Swiss gig? I idly wonder: is Britain trying to pretend it is Switzerland, a successful country outside the EU?

I flick on. On the next page, there is another creative Brit, who is again a bloke – it's John Constable, artist. Duly, I admire the exhibited section of The Haywain, his most famous painting.

Two Johns. Any Janes coming up? I find myself hoping a woman is on page 3, which is a most unexpected opinion. British tabloid newspapers used to feature topless women on Page 3 so this location is definitely not a feminist folio. But if the passport people have gone for the most publicised creative British woman in history, Jane Austen, at least her version of topless will be without a bonnet.

Flick. No Jane. Not bonnetless hussy. But there is the female head of Queen Victoria, on a stamp. The Penny Black was one of the earliest stamps in the UK. I am learning.

Page 4 is trains and ships. Page 5 brings red telephone boxes, and an image of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, its designer and therefore a man who created what was a really big handset.

Page 6. Finally, an actual woman who isn't a queen. Here I find Elisabeth Scott, an architect who was responsible for British landmarks including Shakespeare Memorial theatre and Bournemouth Pier.

After that, it's back to the boys with artists Anthony Gormley and Anish Kapoor. At the end, computer scientists Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace star jointly in a double page spread.

So, including me, and excluding Queen Victoria's head, there are three women in my passport. There are six men. Were there really so few creative British women in history? This is not an EU passport, it's a GQ passport - a small version of a men's magazine with inspiring images of chaps of achievement.

I research the design of British passports. There is a new look every five years. This one came out in 2015 so, under current rules, there's not an official revamp due until 2020. But when Brexit goes ahead, we have just learnt there will be a navy blue passport issued soon thereafter. Could the contents as well as the cover change? Aha. Finally, something about Brexit of which I approve – potentially altering for the better who goes in the British passport, not who gets one.

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS WITH FLAG CEREMONY

The United Nations Security Council has six new members: Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Peru and Poland.

Their flags were installed outside the council chambers in a ceremony arranged by Kazakhstan's ambassador, Kairat Umarov. His country currently holds the council presidency.

The 15-member council is the U.N.'s most powerful body. China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States are permanent mem-

bers, with veto power.

Other members are elected by the 193-member General Assembly for two-year terms. But this year, the Netherlands is filling out the second half of a term it shared with Italy.

Egypt, Japan, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay also finished their terms last year.

Winning a Security Council seat gives countries a strong voice in matters dealing with international peace and security.

Price tag on gene therapy for rare form of blindness: USD850K

Matthew Perrone, Washington

A first-of-its kind genetic treatment for blindness will cost USD850,000, less than the \$1 million price tag that had been expected, but it's still among the most expensive genetic therapies in the world.

Spark Therapeutics says it decided on the lower price tag for Luxturna after hearing concerns from health insurers about their ability to cover the injectable treatment.

Consternation over skyrocketing drug prices, especially in the U.S., has led to intense scrutiny from patients, Congress, insurers and hospitals.

"We wanted to balance the value and the affordability concerns with a responsible price that would ensure access to patients," said CEO Jeffrey Marrazzo, in an interview with The Associated Press.

Luxturna is still significantly more expensive than nearly every other drug on the global market, including two other gene therapies approved earlier last year in the U.S. Approved last month, Luxturna, is the nation's first gene therapy for an inherited disease. It can improve the vision of those with a rare form of blindness that



is estimated to affect just a few thousand people in the U.S.

The treatment is part of an emerging field of medicine that could create dozens of new gene-targeting medications in the next few years.

There are questions about the wisdom of devoting so much energy to specialty drugs, which are used to treat so few people, but still account for a growing slice of overall health care costs.

Drugmakers have historically offered little explanation for the prices they charge. However, some companies have begun to offer more detailed reasoning as the backlash against drug prices has grown more heated.

Spark Therapeutics, based in Philadelphia, has said that the cost for a lifetime of blindness – including lost earnings and caregiver wages – can easily exceed \$1 million.

Not everyone agrees with that argument. A preliminary analysis by one group found the drug would have to be priced significantly lower "to be a cost-effective intervention."

The estimate by the non-profit Institute for Clinical and Economic Review assumes the drug would maintain patients' vision for 10 years. However, Spark expects the drug's effect to be long-lasting, if not lifelong, though it has only tracked patients for about four years.

At least one gene therapy sold overseas has already crossed the \$1-million price threshold.

The treatment for a rare protein disorder launched in 2012 with a price of \$1.2 million. Manufacturer uniQure stopped selling the drug earlier last year after seeing a lack of demand. The drug was never approved in the U.S. AP

Station	Air quality
Roadside	35-55 Good
High Density Residential Area	40-60 Good
Ambient	35-55 Good

WORLD BRIEFS



MOLDOVA's Constitutional Court has temporarily stripped the country's pro-Moscow president of his duties for his refusal to endorse new ministers in a political standoff.



GERMANY The recent influx of mostly young, male migrants into Germany has led to an increase in violent crime in the country, according to a government-funded study published yesterday.

DENMARK Copenhagen police are investigating the theft of a bottle of vodka that is claimed to be the world's most expensive at USD1.3 million.

NORWAY said yesterday it has suspended exports of munitions and arms to the United Arab Emirates as a "precautionary line," based on its assessment of the situation in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition including the UAE has been fighting Shiite rebels for nearly three years.



PERU At least 48 people died when a bus tumbled down a cliff onto a rocky beach along a narrow stretch of highway known as the "Devil's Curve," Peruvian police and fire officials said.

BRAZIL's state-run oil giant Petrobras has agreed to pay USD2.95 billion to settle lawsuits in the United States over the sprawling corruption scandal that has ensnared dozens of officials and business executives across Latin America.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT



Thin ice. The city of Harbin in China's northeast is in its final stages of preparation for one of the world's largest ice and snow festivals, which officially opens to the public tomorrow.