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NEW UM RECTOR ASSUMES OFFICE

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WORLD BRIEFS



KOREA The two Koreas have agreed in a joint statement to hold talks on reducing military tensions and "actively cooperate" in next month's Winter Olympics in South Korea. Senior officials of the rival Koreas gathered at the border village of Panmunjom yesterday for their first formal talks in about two years. [More on p11](#)

MYANMAR is set to put two reporters from the Reuters news agency on trial this week after they were charged under a colonial-era state secrets act, in a case that highlights growing concerns about press freedom in the country. [More on p12](#)



SINGAPORE police have arrested 17 men suspected of involvement in stealing oil from the largest Shell refinery in the world.



JAPAN's Olympics minister says he is visiting Rio de Janeiro to learn from the city's experience hosting the 2016 Summer Games. Shunichi Suzuki is on a three-day trip to Rio as part of preparations for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

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Tighter English rules for students abroad

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Huge Philippine procession secured tightly amid terror fears

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Renato Marques

SECRETARY for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo do Rosário and director of the Transport Bureau (DSAT), Lam Hin San were at the Legislative Assembly (AL) to discuss the Traffic Consultative Council's (CCT) proposal to raise the bus fares and establish a fare system that benefits residents preferentially to non-residents. This issue was raised by lawmaker Ella Lei.

During the debate, several lawmakers criticized the government regarding the new measure, expressing doubts over the need to adjust the fares, and questioning the fare change targets and whether they are justified.

The government officials refuted the criticism, noting that although the measure is unpopular, it is justified due to the low ratio of funding from users of the bus system, who, according to government figures, are currently paying only 30 percent of the true operating costs of the bus system, the rest being subsidized through public government funding.

Opening the debate, lawmaker Ma Chi Seng highlighted that the issue is "directly related to the purchasing power of the population," questioning if the subsidy currently granted by the government to the bus companies is being "appropriated" and if there was any study done by the government to support the measures.

On behalf of the government, Rosário replied that the measure is not a result of any studies conducted, as "it is not necessary to conduct a study to know this." According to Rosário, the idea of "balancing" the bus fares stems from the CCT and its members, and the aim of such an approach is to "balance the ratio

Bus fares update, gov't and lawmakers share mixed feelings



Lam Hin San (left) and Raimundo do Rosário

of the shares paid by the users and by the government for the public transportation service." Rosário noted that the "last update [to the fare system] was 10 years ago," and that, "we believe that the majority of the people will be able to bear this expense, as increasing from MOP2 to MOP3 is not that much." Rosário further noted that "in Hong Kong there is not any kind of subsidy."

Citing figures gathered by his office, Rosário said, "72 percent

[of the money granted to the bus companies] is from the subsidy from the government."

The director of DSAT added that in the last few years, the distance travelled by the users in bus rides (factor used to calculate the bus fare and subsidy) "has grown from around six kilometers to about 10 kilometers, creating added pressure over the companies too."

Lawmakers Angela Leong, Ella Lei, Ho Ion Sang and Mak Soi Kun called for the government

to pay attention to vulnerable groups in society, especially the elderly and people with disabilities.

Rosario replied that the government is not aiming to remove the benefits enjoyed by older residents, who currently pay only MOP0.30 per ride. Instead, the proposal aims to maintain the current fare during non-peak hours, while increasing the fare to MOP1.50 during peak hours, so as to discourage them from riding the buses during these hours.

One of the main reasons for the imbalance in the fare ratio, according to Rosário, is due to "the salaries of drivers that grew a lot due to the increase in passengers and the lack of bus drivers."

Lam compared the salaries of bus drivers, noting that "in 2011, the [average] salary was MOP11,000, while in the last month of last year, the average salary was MOP28,000." He added that the salaries "are accountable for 60 percent of the total of bus companies' operational expenses", an increase of 46 percent since 2011. Lam added that, "with this adjustment we are introducing, we want to improve the convenience of public transportation as

well as increase the size of some of these public transport [vehicle]."

Lei and Song Pek Kei asked the government about the reasons for the fare raise, and if they were related to the "lack of money from the government". In response, Rosário said that it was just an update to ensure a fair system, which had been previously supported substantially by the government. The purpose of the fare changes is to shift the proportion of funding between bus users and the government to 40 percent – and tentatively to 50 percent – when the LRT enters into operation.

Responding to doubts from lawmakers Agnes Lam and Au Kam San, Rosário mentioned that the fare update would be a "demand" from the companies that the government was assuming as their own initiative. Rosário explained that the bus companies (due to the contracts) will be getting the same amount, either from the government or from passengers. He concluded, "I'm only trying to do what you always ask me to do, that is not to waste public funds," and "by balancing the ratio we will save the money that is granted to the companies by public subsidies."

Raise to have little impact over locals

DURING yesterday's debate at the AL, Raimundo do Rosário said that the proposal to increase the bus fares would have little impact on locals.

The Secretary for Transport and Public Works was replying to lawmakers' questions on the topic, noting, "the majority of the people are using the 'Macau Pass' [cards] and not paying with currency". He added that the fare raise would see an increase of "MOP1 for trips in Macau [peninsula] and MOP0.50 for trips in Taipa", although the cost of trips to Coloane would remain the same. He explained that the idea of raising the fare to MOP6.60 would only apply to users without a Macau Pass, which generally would extend to tourists and infrequent visitors to the region.

Lawmaker Ng Kuok Cheong questioned the reason for the major raise to be registered in Taipa, questioning, "Does this have to do with the operation of the Light Rail Transit which will begin in Taipa?"

The Secretary responded, "We cannot update or we can update. We can do something or do nothing," noting that the opinions collected from the members of the Traffic Consultative Council had to do with complaints from the population since 2015 that "non-residents" were occupying all the buses and not leaving space for residents to travel around the city.

He added that this is the reason behind the proposal that would benefit residents over non-residents.

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EDUCATION

Students with poor English skills may face dilemma over tighter rules abroad

Lynzy Valles

MACAU plunged five spots in the EF English Proficiency Index (EPI) last year, ranking 42nd worldwide and 12th in Asia, a performance that puts Macau at a low level in terms of English-language proficiency.

Although a number of high-school graduates opt to continue their studies abroad, particularly students from international schools and from affluent families, the current performance of local students, whose first language is not English, showed poor results – a problem that may affect their choice of university in the future.

Late last year, Australia – one of the top choices for Chinese students – tightened its requirements for incoming foreign students.

This means that more than 150,000 international students will have to undergo tougher English language exams before they can start their preferred courses.

Prospective overseas students will have to take a new official test of their language skills before entering a university or vocational studies.

The Times contacted English-speaking institutions in Macau to enquire on their standards on accepting students who are not native English speakers.

Alan Baxter, dean of the University of Saint Joseph's (USJ) Faculty of Humanities noted that all students of USJ must attain a B2 Cambridge level early in their undergraduate program.

The Times is aware that students are required to attend English classes for four semesters during their four-year courses at USJ.

"This is through the international Cambridge certificate test. Students can only graduate if they have a certified B2 level," said Baxter in a written reply.

Questioned whether USJ recognizes a problem in Macau in terms of English language skills, Baxter preferred to express his "personal, non-institutional, unofficial opinion."

"There is a general problem in this regard, yes, but there are also some notable exceptions," he said. "Non-native students in any setting, in Macau or anywhere else in the world, are capable of following lessons taught through the medium of English, but they must seek to reinforce their English skills in simple, readily available means beyond the classroom."

Baxter suggested students to



Students interested in studying abroad gather information from the University of Manchester

take several measures to improve their English proficiency such as to read newspapers in English, watch television in English and seek English speakers to practice with.

There is a lack of interest and lack of initiative on the part of many students, with regard to second language learning.

ALAN BAXTER
USJ

"Locally, I often feel that there is a lack of interest and lack of initiative on the part of many students, with regard to second language learning," he added.

The Times also contacted School of the Nations and The International School but received no reply by press time.

The Education and Youth Affairs Bureau contested that for schools that use Chinese as the medium of instruction – and have English as the second language – the average number of such lessons must be five to seven times per week for primary students, while high school students must go through five to nine classes per week.

In addition to the provisions on the number of lessons, "The Requirements of Basic Academic Attainments for Formal Education of Local Education System" also sets the requirements for English ability at primary and high school education levels.

The requirements include the basic concepts, curriculum goals as well as the systematic and specific requirements for the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in a bid to expand students' grammatical knowledge.

"Based on the premise of following the 'Curriculum Framework' and the 'Basic Academic Attainments,' public and private schools [...] have autonomy to develop their own school-based curriculum in accordance with their school characteristics and teaching needs," DSEJ told the Times in a written reply.

Prospective overseas students who eye studying in Australia can take an intensive English course to prepare for further studies in Australia if they fail to have qualifications showing they can study in the language.

"The vast majority of language courses are providing high quality outcomes [...] but some slip through the cracks and it's unacceptable for that to occur," said Australia's Education Minister Simon Birmingham, as cited in several reports.

According to the minister, the standard would be enforced by the national education regulator.

During the first six months of last year, there were some 580,000 international students enrolled in Australia – a figure that Birmingham believed would not be affected by the new measures, as the new measure aims to strengthen the integrity of the country's education system.

Prospective students will have to undergo at least 20 hours of face-to-face teaching a week through the intensive courses designed for non-English speakers who intend to study in Australia.

"Some students simply don't have the English language skills they need to succeed. It means they draw away from getting in-

involved in lectures, tutorials and group study work while their classmates and teachers struggle to bridge the language divide," said Birmingham.

The Times is aware that there are a number of local students studying in English-language universities who could not keep up with the university's medium of teaching, thus hampering the progress of the module due to the need to cater to students with poor English proficiency.

The Times also contacted the Tertiary Education Services Office (GAES) to enquire on the standards of English language in universities, but it declined to comment.

"As higher education institutions in Macau enjoy academic and teaching autonomy, our office would not be able to provide any information regarding your questions as it is not within the terms of reference of our office," GAES noted.

DSEJ acknowledged that there is an increasing demand for English-speaking locals and pledged that it will further strengthen the development of foreign language education in non-tertiary education, and create a good language learning environment to improve local students' foreign language proficiency and ability.

"In line with the "Language Education Policy of Non-tertiary Education", the DSEJ strives to coordinate and implement local language education," the bureau said.

The education department also revealed that a language training center for "learning, practice and testing" is planned for the Seac Pai Wan area and language camps for students will be held there.

"Using the immersion teaching method and providing real-life learning situations, students can flexibly use the learned language so that they can become more confident and capable," it concluded.

Higher education institutions abroad require international students to take the English proficiency tests which includes International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and Test of English for International Communication.

These students should have a minimum TOEFL score of 80 in internet-based TOEFL, and a minimum IELTS score of 6.5 on the academic test.

Currently, DSEJ provides subsidies for student and teaching staff who wish to undergo such proficiency tests.

New UM rector assumes office

YONGHUA Song, a scholar in electrical engineering, assumed office as the rector of the University of Macau (UM) yesterday – becoming the ninth rector of the university.

The new rector has expressed his hope to familiarize himself with the job as soon as possible with a view to increasing interactions with the local community and carrying out more innovative projects.

Song met with members of the management team of the university to learn more about the university's operation on his first day, according to a statement from UM.

In the same statement, Song expressed his hope to meet with more members of the university in the next few months and to hear their expectations about the university's future development.

"With the solid foundation laid for the university, we will continue to do our job well through collective efforts and we look forward to more innovation, new opportunities and greater accomplishments," Song said in an email to the faculty, staff members, students and alumni.

Song has been an appointed advisor to the Science and Technology Committee of the MSAR since 2002.

Meanwhile, the Secretary for



Yonghua Song



Wei Zhao

Social Affairs and Culture, Alexis Tam, has not announced any updates regarding the progress of the investigation of the university's former rector Wei Zhao – information that Tam said would be announced once the investigation has been concluded.

In November, Tam had asked the Tertiary Education Services Office (GAES) to investigate the terms of Zhao's contract.

On January 1, Zhao assumed as the role of a Chief Research Officer at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates – a day after his resignation had taken effect.

As previously reported, an anonymous complaint alerted the UM that Zhao would be

in breach of his contract with UM, as it has a clause that requires a cooling off period – an

allegation that the university denied.

In a statement, UM explained that Zhao submitted his resignation to the Chief Executive in accordance with established procedures and obtained his approval, and that there are no requirements for a 'cooling-off period'.

The Times contacted the office of the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture but was directed to contact the university instead. The GAES was also contacted, replying that it "is still handling this [Zhao's case] with established procedures, with no information to be provided at the moment."

HKU CHIEF ADMITS TO PRESSURE FROM BEIJING

THE OUTGOING vice chancellor of Hong Kong University, Peter Mathieson, has admitted that his executive post was filled with "pressure from everybody," adding that he was also receiving advice "all the time" by Beijing's liaison office. In an interview to South China Morning Post, the professor called on the region's leading university to continue its international approach rather than exclusively focusing on its ties

with mainland China. "They can tell me what they think I should do, but basically I do what I believe to be in the best interests of the university. [...] Yes, there has been pressure, but I don't regard that as unreasonable," he told the Post. "I wish higher education was not so politicized," he said. "I think it would be simpler for people like me if politics wasn't such a complicating factor." Mathieson, who will take up the post of Vice

Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, admitted that there was no initiative from Professor Arthur Li Kwok-Cheung, a pro-establishment politician who also chairs HKU's governing body, on discussing what would follow the end of his five-year contract in 2019. Professor Zhang Xiang, a mainland-born mechanical engineering expert at the University of California, Berkeley in the United States, will succeed Mathieson's post.

ARTS

Macau City Fringe Festival kicks off Saturday

THE 17th Macau City Fringe Festival, organized by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), will be held from January 12 to 21 with the theme of "Treasure Hunting."

According to a statement from the IC, the festival will "take the public on a stroll around town to uncover the treasures that have likely been forgotten."

An opening ceremony

for the festival will be held on January 12 (Friday) at the Old Court Building, with three performances to take to stage, namely "Niyaro: Yearning for Homeland", "Jin-Tang" and "Always in My Heart".

The production "Jin-Tang", by Taiwanese creator Ma Wei Yuan, makes use of body language and instant synthetic images to reveal a period of his family's

history and to let the audience take a peek into the most intimate anatomy of an individual's life experience.

Meanwhile, the play "Niyaro: Yearning for Homeland", which will be conveyed through chanting, dancing and ritual ceremonies at Hac Sa Beach, makes use of the environmental space and other interactive means to explore the identity

buried deep within each person.

In the play "Always in My Heart", the protagonist puts pieces of her life in her cakes and shares the different flavors of life with the public, according to the IC.

Extended activities this year include the sharing sessions of "Art Festivals in Cities 2.0" to be held on January 18 and "Arts Administrators in Main-



land China: Stay Deficient or Go Resourceful?" on January 21.

Tickets for the festival are available from the Macau Ticketing Network.

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Melco Chairman Lawrence Ho

Cyprus: casino resort to add USD838m to economy yearly

ONE of Europe's biggest casino resorts due to be built in Cyprus should pump USD838 million into the island nation's economy annually from 2022, the second year of its operation, the country's president said yesterday.

President Nicos Anastasiades said the figure represents around 4 percent of Cyprus' economy.

"Our government's aim is the creation of a complete casino resort that will be paramount in Europe and one of the best in the world," Anastasiades said at a presentation of the \$658 million resort.

The City of Dreams Mediterranean casino resort is forecast to create 4,000 construction jobs, employ another 2,500 permanent staff and bring in an additional 300,000 tourists annually from Europe and elsewhere. It will be built by a consortium made up of Melco Resorts and Entertainment and the Cyprus Phassouri Ltd.

Melco says the resort will be Eu-

rope's largest and will include 136 tables and 1,200 gaming machines, a five-star, 500-room hotel, 11 restaurants and cafes and a convention expo center.

Melco Chairman Lawrence Ho said the Cypriot resort will mirror the company's other resorts in Macau and the Philippines in architecture, design, and entertainment.

Anastasiades said the casino will enrich Cyprus' year-round tourism offering and help attract foreign investment to the country, which needed a multibillion-euro rescue from other eurozone countries to avoid bankruptcy back in 2013.

A temporary casino will open up by June in the southern coastal town of Limassol, where the resort will be built. Four other satellite casinos — one for each of Cyprus' districts — will also start operating by the middle of this year.

The age limit for entry into the casino has been set at 21. AP

Macau, Guangdong sign agreement on nuclear emergency response

MACAU and Guangdong have signed an agreement to enhance communication in the event of any incident relating to nuclear power generation.

A statement issued yesterday by the Government Information Bureau stresses that "the likelihood of any unscheduled events relating to nuclear power occurring adjacent to Macau is extremely low." However, Macau and Guangdong deem it necessary to establish an ongoing mechanism for emergency cooperation, in order to cope with either any unscheduled event occurring in the nuclear facility at Taishan Prefecture in Guangdong or in nuclear facilities of neighboring cities.

The "Guangdong-Macau Cooperation Consensus in Case of a Guangdong Nuclear Power Plant Emergency" was signed on Monday in Zhuhai. The signing was witnessed by the Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak, and the deputy director-general of the National Nuclear Emergency Res-

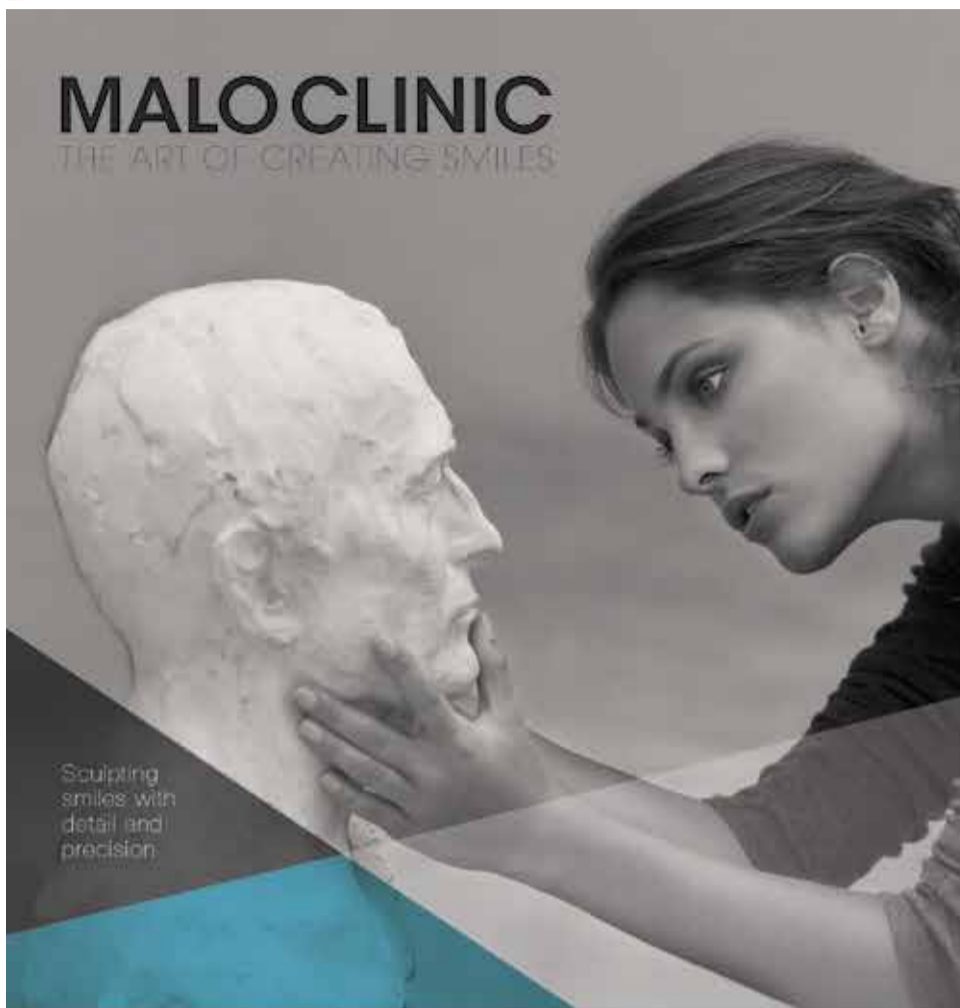
ponse Office, Yao Bin, who is also the head of the nuclear emergency and security division under the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense.

Under the agreement, Guangdong is to notify Macau of any unscheduled event — whether classified under an internationally-recognized, seven-level scale, or under the nation's four-level grading for nuclear emergency — occurring in any functioning nuclear plants located in Guangdong Province.

Guangdong and Macau are to organize, in turn, an annual meeting to review nuclear emergency measures and off-site emergency planning, as well as training sessions relating to technical issues, according to the agreement.

Prior to the signing ceremony, the two sides held a meeting to discuss response plans in the event of nuclear emergency, and a system for bilateral support when such contingency measures are required.

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B. For all patients who will be in Portugal during this period, Macau MALO CLINIC will manage the necessary bookings, follow-up and patients' medical records to our colleagues in any MALO CLINIC in Portugal.

C. For those patients who are willing to wait for MALO CLINIC in Macau to proceed with the treatments, we are putting all our efforts in finding a partnering healthcare organization at the moment in order to continue our practice.

If any urgent situation arises or if you have any enquiries, please feel free to contact us.

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Once again, we would like to apologize for all the inconvenience this has put on you all.

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Consumer Confidence Index increased at year-end

Julie Zhu

THE Macau Consumer Confidence Index (MCCI) in the fourth quarter of 2017 has shown increases in five of the six sub-indexes compared to the third quarter of 2017. The five sub-indexes were the "local economy", "employment", "consumer price", "living standards", and "housing purchase".

The "stock investment" sub-index recorded 80.06, with a quarter-to-quarter decrease of 6.38 percent, reflecting a significant drop in the willingness of local consumers to invest in the volatile stock market.

All of the other five sub-indexes increased compared to the third quarter of 2017. While the "local economy" sub-index grew by 4.08 percent over the third quarter of 2017, it was 108.05 in the fourth quarter of 2017 and was still above the 100-point "having confidence" level, making it the second highest of the six sub-indexes.

The "employment" sub-index was 112.57, which continued the previous quarter's upward trend with an increase of 2.31 percent.



This reveals that Macau consumers continue to be optimistic about their employment in the labor market.

The "consumer prices" sub-index was 69.17 in the fourth quarter of 2017, an increase of 1.92 percent from the previous quarter.

The "living standards" sub-index was 103.73, a growth of 3.98 percent from the third quarter of 2017.

The "housing purchase" sub-index was still the lowest (53.46) among the six sub-indexes, dropping 4.15 percent as compared to the previous quarter. This reflects the negative sentiment among potential residential homebuyers.

Overall, the survey results from the fourth quarter of 2017 showed an increase in local consumers' confidence.

The "local economy" sub-index continued increasing from the previous quarter, exceeding the 100-point "having confidence" level.

Customers are still cautiously optimistic about "employment", demonstrating relatively stable confidence in "consumer prices" and "living standards". However, confidence has grown in "housing purchase," and confidence significantly declined in "stock investment."

The previous 34 consecutive

MCCI surveys have shown that consumer confidence has increased substantially with education levels.

In the latest survey, the average MCCI for consumers with tertiary education (91.2) was 3.2 points and 7.3 points higher than consumers with only secondary (88) and primary education (83.9) respectively. MCCI for consumers with only primary education differed from year to year.

Based on the survey design, index scores range from 0 to 200, where 0 means "no confidence", 100 is a neutral impression, and a score of 200 indicates "full confidence".

In short, index scores below 100 suggest a "lack of confidence" while index scores above 100 imply "having confidence".

The Institute for Sustainable Development of Macau University of Science and Technology used its computer-assisted telephone interview system to conduct the MCCI survey from December 6 to December 17, with 1,018 Macau residents aged 18 and above randomly selected and successfully interviewed to compile the index.

Person dies of hypothermia

A person has died of hypothermia as temperatures dropped to 8°C yesterday. Thirty five people used the government's winter shelter in the Ilha Verde district. The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau, predicts that the weather will remain very cold, although temperatures will rise slightly during the week. The shelter provides food, beverages and accommodation.

Association launches fundraising campaign

A crowdfunding campaign launched by the New Macau Association has gathered HKD17,900 so far, according to a TDM report. The pro-democratic association hopes to raise HKD300,000 during the campaign, which aims to help cover part of the costs of the association. In a statement, New Macau stresses that over the past 26 years it has insisted on financial independence, relying on contributions from elected lawmakers and donations.

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Jack Ma debt giant grinds to halt as China curbs micro-loans

AFTER selling billions of dollars of debt backed by consumer loans last year, Chinese billionaire Jack Ma's Ant Financial is pausing such fundraising as the government steps up curbs on micro lending.

The company hasn't sold any asset-backed securities since early December, according to data compiled by Bloomberg and China Securitization Analytics. That marks an abrupt shift after it issued a record 238 billion yuan (USD37 billion) in 2017 of such securities backed by consumer loans.

People familiar with the matter said this week that regulators have stopped approving sales of ABS backed by loans that aren't specifically for shopping. Authorities also announced on Dec. 1 they were requiring micro lenders to consolidate ABS into their balance sheets.

"Without the new rules, Ant Financial's consumer loans would balloon with no limit because it can move most loans off its balance sheet by packaging them into ABS," said Shanghai-based Yang Junmin, an analyst at Internet finance research firm Shanghai Yingxun Technology Co. "Now they would be very cautious about selling new ABS. Ant Financial's new consumer loans may have an obvious slowdown this year."

China's regulators are targeting the estimated 1 trillion yuan online cash micro-lending industry that has drawn criticism for sometimes high interest rates and underhand lending practices. An extended fundraising halt could limit the ability of Ant Financial - which is controlled by Alibaba Group Hol-



ding Ltd.'s founder Ma - to lend to consumers buying everything from iPhones to hairdryers on China's burgeoning online shopping platforms.

The securitized products have provided capital that can be lent out by Ant and the financing units of other Internet giants that can't take deposits, raising red flags for some analysts who said there needs to be more transparency about how the ABS are created.

Ant Financial said in an emailed statement that the company had stopped issuing ABS recently as interest rates in the interbank market had gone up significantly, and didn't respond to questions concerning any regulatory changes.

Some consumer loans allow borrowers to forgo specifying what the funds will be used for. The National Association of Financial Market Institutional Investors and the Shanghai and Shenzhen Stock Exchange have halted approval of ABS backed

by such loans, the people familiar said, asking not to be identified because the details are private. The people said they didn't know when the sales would be revived.

NAFMII declined to immediately comment. Shenzhen Exchange asked for emailed questions when reached by phone, and there was no immediate reply to the emailed queries. Calls to Shanghai Exchange went unanswered, and there was also no immediate reply to emailed and faxed questions.

"With the new restrictions published late last year, China's unsecured cash loan market will probably shrink quite a lot this year," said Jerome Cheng, a senior vice president in Hong Kong at Moody's Investors Service. "The ABS backed by this type of assets will shrink as well."

Ant Financial is formally known as Zhejiang Ant Small & Micro Financial Services Group. **Bloomberg**

Aston Martin is said to seek USD6.8b value in IPO talks

Tommaso Ebhardt, Kiel Porter

ASTON Martin is targeting a valuation of as much as 5 billion pounds (USD6.8 billion) in a potential initial public offering of the British sports car maker, according to people familiar with the matter.

The manufacturer has held preliminary talks with advisers about a valuation including debt that would put it on par with Ferrari NV, said the people, who asked not to be named discussing private deliberations. Investors' interest in an IPO this year could be bolstered by the planned expansion into the lucrative sport utility vehicle segment starting in 2019, the people said.

An Aston Martin share sale in London would cement the iconic brand's comeback and mark a significant test of investor appetite for British companies ahead of the U.K.'s March 2019 break with the European Union. The company, famous for its connection to movie spy James Bond, surpassed 5,000 deliveries last year for the first time since 2008, and expects to exceed its 2017 guidance of at least 180 million pounds in adjusted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization on more than 840 million pounds of revenue.

The valuation is a preliminary estimate and no decision has been made on the possible listing as advisers are also considering other options for the carmaker, the people said. "As a matter of policy, As-



ton Martin does not comment about speculation concerning future ownership or capital restructuring," said Simon Sproule, a spokesman for the Gaydon, England-based carmaker. The company is controlled by Investindustrial Advisors Ltd., which declined to comment, and Kuwaiti investors.

The carmaker has said it will start building the DBX SUV at its new factory in Wales by 2019. The new \$150,000 Vantage model had sold out almost all of its production capacity for 2018, Aston Martin said in November. Group sales may increase by about 60 percent to 8,250 vehicles in 2020, according to IHS Markit estimates.

Ferrari has a current stock-market value of about \$21.5 billion, and an enterprise value of about 18.5 times its expected 2018 earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization, based on data compiled by Bloomberg. The Italian carmaker exceeded 30 percent adjusted Ebitda margin in the third quarter, a rare feat that puts the company in the league of Apple Inc. or luxury goods makers LVMH and Gucci. **Bloomberg**

corporate bits

ADELSON FAMILY FOUNDATION DONATES NEARLY USD2 MILLION TO USJ



The Adelson Family Foundation presented a ceremonial cheque of more than USD1.9 million (approximately MOP15.4 million) yester-

day to the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) to assist its recovery efforts after Typhoon Hato and subsequent storms that caused major damage

to its new campus in August and September.

Executives from Las Vegas Sands Corp. and Sands China Ltd. presented the ceremonial cheque to Fr. Peter Stilwell, rector of USJ, at the university's new campus.

The basement level of the university's new Green Campus on Ilha Verde was flooded after the storm last year, submerging nearly all its equipment - both installed and in storage - under 3 metres of water. Five days of pumping was required to drain the basement.

Adelson Family Foundation donation will go towards addressing four critical areas of need at the university including the library, server room, audio-visual studio and its fitness room and recreational corner.

MGM SUPPORTS UM'S STUDY TOUR TO LAS VEGAS



A group of 48 students from the University of Macau (UM) recently toured MGM properties in Las Vegas and met with the senior management to gain an in-depth understanding of the operations of MGM Resorts International as well as the hospitality and gaming landscape in Las Vegas. According to a statement

issued by MGM, the gaming operator has supported the UM for its study tour since 2005.

The participants consisted of 41 students, who are in their third and fourth year of the Gaming Management Program and Convention and Hospitality Management Program, plus three accom-

panying faculty members. In addition, four representatives from the Sheng Kung Hui Macau Social Service Office joined the tour to enhance their skills and knowledge associated with the responsible gaming services to contribute to the Macau scene.

To offer the group the opportunity to explore non-gaming elements and responsible gaming measures in the world's leading hospitality and entertainment company MGM Resorts International, the Company arranged hotel site inspection tours at its properties including Bellagio, Aria, MGM Grand and T-Mobile Arena. An Executive Panel met and exchanged ideas with the MGM senior management team, which was followed by the appreciation of the featured show "O" at Bellagio.

MOZAMBIQUE

China's financing of public works exceeds USD2.28 billion

THE Maputo/Catembe bridge, due to be opened in the next few months in the Mozambican capital, is the biggest China-funded infrastructure project in the African country, the total amount of which exceeded USD2.28 billion from 2000 to 2014.



Maputo/Catembe bridge

The "Official Chinese Funding for Africa," document recently released by AidData, a research body linked to William & Mary University in the US, shows that the construction of the new bridge in the Mozambican capital costs an estimated \$725 million, of which 95 percent was covered by a loan granted by the Export Imports Bank of China (ExIm) and the remainder by the Mozambican State Budget.

Last October the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CBRC) installed the first module of the 57 that will make up the main deck of the bridge connecting Maputo to the town of Catembe on the other side of Maputo bay, which was originally scheduled for completion at the end of 2017,

but which is now expected to be opened in the first few months of 2018.

Construction of the bridge is part of the Maputo-Ponta de Ouro road construction project, over a distance of 209 kilometers. The project is divided into three parts – the first section from Maputo to Katembe, over 35 kilometers; the second section comprising Katembe-Ponta de Ouro (109 kilometers) and includes the repair/construction of roads between Katembe/Bela Vista and Bela Vista/South Africa and the third section of 63 kilometers covering the repair of the Bela Vista/Boane road.

The AidData document showed that the second largest slice of Chinese funding to Mozambique was granted by the same bank in 2013, in the amount of \$416.5 million, to repair the Beira-Machipanda road.

The project is part of a package agreed in May 2013 during a visit to China by former President Armando Guebuza to build a set of roads that also includes the already inaugurated Maputo circular (\$300 million) and the Beira-Zumbo (\$278 million), among others.

The total of \$2.28 billion of Chinese funding between 2000 and 2014 also includes almost

\$155 million of interest-free loans granted in 2007 for agriculture, health and education projects announced during a visit to Maputo by the former Chinese President Hu Jintao.

The list also includes funding of \$133 million granted by the ExIm Bank for migration from analogue to digital broadcasting in Mozambique, by Chinese company StarTimes, involving Mozambican public television and radio.

The same bank also appears in the AidData survey by granting a loan of \$120 million in 2014 for the reconstruction of the fishing port of the city of Beira, in Sofala province.

In the same period, AidData identified schedule agreements and debt pardons valued at \$95.4 million.

The Economist Intelligence Unit recently reported that the Mozambican government plans to strengthen its relationship with Asian countries in the coming years "in particular with China [a large creditor of Mozambique]."

MDT/Macauhub

ANGOLA

President orders evaluation of public banks

The shareholdings held by the Angolan state or public companies in national and foreign banking institutions will be evaluated by a working group led by Finance



João Lourenço

Minister Archer Mangureira under an order signed by President João Lourenço. The order also stipulates that the working group will have 45 days to carry out an "appraisal diagnosis" of Angolan public financial banking institutions and to "define a methodology for restructuring" them. The Angolan State, through oil company Sonangol, has holdings in several national and foreign banks, including Portugal's largest private bank Banco Comercial Português (BCP), in which it holds a stake of 14.87 percent with a potential loss of 365.7 million euros, according to Portuguese state news agency Lusa. The working group includes the Secretary for Economic Affairs of the President of the Republic, the Secretary of State for Finance and the Treasury and a deputy governor of the National Bank of Angola.

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A former chief of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's joint staff department was referred to military prosecutors on suspicion of bribery yesterday, state media reported, making him the latest high-ranking target of President Xi Jinping's campaign against corruption in the armed forces.

Fang Fenghui's case was transferred to the PLA's criminal prosecution body, the official Xinhua News Agency said. The move virtually ensures his conviction at court martial, followed by a sentence of life or many years in prison. Xinhua said he was suspected of both giving and taking bribes, traditionally a common route to gaining promotion and potentially amassing enormous riches.

Fang dropped out of public view last fall, shortly after an August meeting with the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine Corps Gen. Joseph Dunford, leading to speculation he'd been placed under investigation.

Since coming to power in late 2012, Xi, who also leads the party and the armed forces, has launched a wide-ranging crackdown on corruption that has felled scores of mid-to-high-ranking officials.

Three former top generals

Former leading general Fang suspected of bribery

have already been ensnared in corruption probes, including one who died of cancer before trial and another who committed suicide in November while under investigation. Like Fang, all had been members of the government and ruling Communist Party's Central Military Commissions that oversee the armed forces.

The campaign has strengthened Xi's iron grip on the party and military, while eliminating political threats and helping make him the most powerful Chinese leader in a generation, a status cemented at last year's party congress where he was given a second five-year term as general secretary.

While widely popular, the drive has been criticized outside China as trampling on the legal system since it is spearheaded by the ruling party's internal disciplinary body rather than state prosecutors.

At the same time, Xi has undertaken a thoroughgoing reform of the PLA, reorganizing its



Fang Fenghui, the then-chief of the general staff of the PLA (right)

structure and shrinking the size of the Central Military Commissions from nine to seven members.

Zhang had been elevated to commander of Beijing's defen-

ses by Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, and in 2009 commanded a massive military parade through the heart of the city to mark the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic.

Last year, he traveled with Xi on a visit to President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate, where he was photographed seated smiling beside Ivanka Trump at a formal banquet. AP

Hong Kong businessman pleads not guilty in bribery case

Larry Neumeister, New York

A Hong Kong businessman charged in a United Nations-linked bribery conspiracy pleaded not guilty yesterday [Macau time] to an indictment charging him with helping to arrange millions of dollars in bribes to the president of Chad and the Ugandan foreign minister.

Dr. Chi Ping Patrick Ho, polite and soft spoken, said "not guilty, judge" to each of eight counts he faces in the case in Manhattan federal court. Judge Katherine Forrest said it was unlikely that a trial would occur before next year.

Ho, 68, was arrested in November on charges that he paid bribes on behalf of a Chinese energy conglomerate to secure business advantages in violation of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Ho, once Hong Kong's home affairs secretary, remains jailed without bail pending a scheduled court appearance on Feb. 2.

His lawyers indicated in a court filing Friday they would ask the judge to release him on USD10 million bail. But there was no mention of



In this courtroom sketch Judge Katherine Forrest presides over the corruption trial of former Hong Kong home affairs secretary Dr. Chi Ping Patrick Ho

his bail request at the hearing.

After the hearing, defense attorney Edward Kim declined to comment on why the bail request was not pursued.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Douglas Zolkind said evidence against Ho includes several hundred thousand documents, along with bank records, wire records and telecommunications equipment. Authorities said they recovered from defendants and the U.S.

offices of the energy conglomerate more than a dozen phones and numerous computers that must be analyzed.

Authorities have said that Ho and a co-defendant conspired in October 2014 to bribe the African government officials after wiring almost \$1 million through New York's banking system. They say the Ugandan scheme was created at the United Nations in New York when Uganda's current foreign minister ser-

ved as president of the U.N. General Assembly.

The case marks the second in recent years to involve allegations of bribe paying at the United Nations.

Dr. Chi Ping Patrick Ho, polite and soft spoken, said 'not guilty, judge'

A Chinese billionaire, Ng Lap Seng, was convicted in July of paying more than \$1.7 million in bribes to U.N. ambassadors to secure rights to build a U.N. conference center in Macau to serve struggling Southern Hemisphere nations. Defense lawyers contended that Ng only paid money when he was asked to spend it to speed the project along. The center was never built.

Former U.N. General Assembly President John Ashe was charged in that case, but he died in an accident at his home as he awaited trial. AP

Body found, tanker still on fire after sea collision

RESCUERS have found a body believed to be of a sailor from the Iranian oil tanker set ablaze after a collision in the East China Sea, China's Ministry of Transportation said yesterday, as the search continued for another 31 missing from the same ship.

The ministry said the body recovered Monday had yet to be identified but was wearing a protective suit designed to withstand cold seawater. There was no further word about the others missing since the Panamanian-registered Sanchi collided with a freighter late Saturday.

Chinese media said the tanker was still on fire yesterday and at risk of exploding.

The tanker was carrying 136,000 metric tons (nearly 1 million barrels) of condensate, a type of gassy, ultra-light oil, when it collided with the Hong Kong-registered freighter CF Crystal. All 21 crew members of the Crystal, which was carrying grain from the United States to China, were rescued, the Chinese ministry said. The Crystal's crew members were all Chinese nationals.

An official in Iran's Oil Ministry, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters, said the tanker was owned by the National Iranian Tanker Co. and confirmed that 30 of the tanker's 32 crew members were Iranians. The others are Bangladeshi. AP

SPORTS DIPLOMACY

North Korea to send delegation to Olympics in South

Hyung-Jin Kim, Seoul

NORTH Korea agreed yesterday to send a delegation to next month's Winter Olympics in South Korea, Seoul officials said, as the bitter rivals sat for rare talks at the border to discuss how to cooperate in the Olympics and improve their long-strained ties.

The Koreans' first talks in two years were arranged after North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un recently made an abrupt push for improved ties with South Korea after a year of elevated tensions with the outside world over his expanding nuclear and missile programs. Critics say Kim may be trying to divide Seoul and Washington in a bid to weaken international pressure and sanctions on the North.

During the talks, the North Korean delegation said it would send an Olympic delegation, which includes officials, athletes, cheerleaders, journalists and others, South Korea's Vice Unification Minister Chun Haesung told reporters, according to media footage from the border village of Panmunjom, the venue for the talks.

The South Korean delegation, for its part, proposed North Korea send a big delegation and conduct a joint march during the Feb. 9-25 Games opening and closing ceremonies, Chun, one of the five South Korean negotiators, said.

He said South Korea also suggested resuming temporary reunions of families separated by war and offering military talks designed to reduce animosities in frontline areas. South Korea also stressed the need to achieve denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, Chun said.

North Korea responded by saying the two Koreas must try to promote peace and reconciliation through dialogue, he said.

The two sides were to continue their negotiations later yesterday at Panmunjom, the only place on the tense border where North and South Korean soldiers are just feet away from each other. A North Korean soldier late last year defected to the South across Panmunjom amid a hail of bullets fired by his comrades. He was hit five times but survived.

The meeting began with an amicable atmosphere in the morning, with chief North Korean delegate Ri Son Gwon saying he hopes the talks would give "a New Year's first gift — precious results [of the talks] to



South Korean Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon (right) and head of North Korean delegation Ri Son Gwon (left) arrive to hold their meeting at the Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone in Paju, South Korea

the Korean nation." Ri's South Korean counterpart, Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon, said he also hopes they would come up with a "good gift" for people in both Koreas.

The overall prospect for the negotiations was still unclear. The two Koreas have a long history of ending key talks without any agreement and failing to follow through with rapprochement accords.

An agreement on the North's Olympic participation had been widely expected before the talks began, but the Koreans remain sharply at odds over how to improve their overall ties.

North Korea is expected to

demand rewards in return for South Korea's offer for family reunions and military talks, like Seoul halting propaganda broadcasts and scaling back or halting military drills with the U.S., observers say.

Suspension of the military drills would be unacceptable for Seoul because that would seriously undermine the alliance with its chief ally the United States, which wants to put more pressures on Pyongyang. The North views the drills as a rehearsal for a northward invasion.

President Donald Trump on Saturday expressed hope for some progress from the talks

and said he was open to talking with Kim himself. But U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley later said the U.S. administration isn't changing its conditions regarding talks with North Korea, saying Kim would first need to stop weapons testing for a "significant amount of time."

■ N. Korea is expected to demand rewards in return for S. Korea's offer for family reunions and military talks

In his New Year's Day address, Kim said there is an urgent need to improve inter-Korean ties and that he is willing to send a delegation to the Pyeongchang Games. He urged Seoul to halt the military drills with the U.S. and said he has a "nuclear button" to launch missiles at any target in the United States. **AP**

China says it welcomes Korea talks in historic 'no-one' land

CHINA said it welcomes moves by North and South Korea to improve relations after the sides held rare high-profile talks and called on the international community to lend its backing to such efforts. Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang told reporters that Beijing was "pleased to see this high-level talk between the two sides."

Lu said that "China welcomes and supports the positive moves taken by the two sides to improve relations, and we hope the talk will make a good start for the two sides to further improve ties, promote reconciliation and cooperation and alleviate tensions on the peninsula."

China is North Korea's only major ally and has come under heavy pressure to use its leverage to steer Pyongyang back to negotiations on ending its nuclear programs.

While Beijing argues its influence is limited, it has signed on to increasingly harsh United Nations sanctions against Kim Jong Un's regime, including bans on key exports of textiles, seafood and other products and sharp limits on supplies of oil and petroleum products.

The two Koreas' rare high-profile talks took place at the jointly controlled area inside the world's most heavily fortified border — the same place where North Korean soldiers recently sprayed bullets at a comrade who was making a daring dash for freedom.

The defecting soldier was hit five times, but he survived and is now recovering in South Korea. The dramatic video of his defection, released by the American-led U.N. command, showed again why the area, called Panmunjom, is known as



one of the scariest places on Earth.

Yesterday, Panmunjom captured international headlines again when a group of high-level North Korean officials walked across concrete slabs that make up a military demarcation line for their first formal talks with South Korea in more than two years.

U.S. presidents and other top officials have often traveled to Panmunjom and other areas of the DMZ at times of heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula. They have peered through binoculars across the border and vowed to boost the U.S. military alliance with South Korea.

In 1993, then-President Bill Clinton visited Panmunjom when the North Korean nuclear crisis first flared. In 2002, President George W. Bush visited the DMZ a few weeks after he labeled North Korea part of an "axis of evil."

In 2012, ahead of a planned North Korean long-range rocket launch, President Barack Obama visited a frontline U.S. military camp just south of the DMZ and told American troops they are protectors of "freedom's frontier." Obama's trip came days after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visited Panmunjom. **MDT/AP**

THE BUILDUP AND EASING OF TENSIONS

Jan. 1, 2017: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un says in a New Year's address that preparations for launching an intercontinental ballistic missile have "reached the final stage."

Jan. 2, 2017: Donald Trump, then the U.S. president-elect, tweets, "North Korea just stated that it is in the final stages of developing a nuclear weapon capable of reaching parts of the U.S. It won't happen!"

March 6, 2017: North Korea fires four ballistic missiles, and later says it was simulating nuclear strikes on U.S. military bases in Japan.

April 12, 2017: Trump says in a televised interview that the U.S. is sending "an armada" of vessels to the Korean Peninsula, after the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier strike group is ordered to head there from Singapore. The move fans fears that Trump is weighing military action.

April 15, 2017: North Korea marks the birth anniversary of founder Kim Il Sung with a massive military parade. Analysts say previously unseen rocket canisters and launcher trucks point to the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles and launch systems.

June 23, 2017: North Korea's taekwondo demonstration team arrives in South Korea for its first performance in the rival country in 10 years.

July 4, 2017: North Korea conducts its first flight test of an ICBM, the Hwasong-14. Kim says the United States would be displeased by the North's "package of gifts" delivered on America's Independence Day.

July 28, 2017: North Korea fires another Hwasong-14. Experts say its range could reach into the U.S. mainland, including cities such as Chicago.

Aug. 9, 2017: North Korea announces a plan to launch a salvo of missiles toward the U.S. territory of Guam, a major military hub in the Pacific. It never does.

Aug. 29, 2017: North Korea fires an intermediate-range Hwasong-12 that flies over Japan before plunging into the northern Pacific Ocean.

Sept. 3, 2017: North Korea carries out its sixth and most powerful nuclear test to date, saying it was a hydrogen bomb designed for use on ICBMs.

Nov. 29, 2017: North Korea's third test of an ICBM demonstrates a potential range that could reach Washington, D.C.

Jan. 1, 2018: Kim says in his New Year's address that he has a nuclear button on his desk, but also calls for improved relations with the South and says his country is willing to discuss sending a delegation to February's Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

Jan. 5, 2018: South Korea says North Korea has agreed to hold talks.

Jan. 6, 2018: Trump, expressing hope for some progress from the talks, says he is also open to talking with Kim. But his U.N. ambassador, Nikki Haley, says the next day that the U.S. administration isn't changing its conditions regarding talks, saying Kim would first need to stop weapons testing for a significant amount of time.

Jan. 9, 2018: At a meeting in the border village of Panmunjom, North Korea agrees to send a delegation including athletes to the Olympics.

MYANMAR

Trial set to begin for two Reuters journalists

MYANMAR is set to put two reporters from the Reuters news agency on trial this week after they were charged under a colonial-era state secrets act, in a case that highlights growing concerns about press freedom in the country.

Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were arrested Dec. 12 for allegedly acquiring “important secret papers” from two police officers. The officers had worked in Rakhine state, where abuses widely blamed on Myanmar’s military have driven hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims to flee into neighboring Bangladesh.

The charges against the two are punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

Rights and media groups have criticized Myanmar’s new civilian government led by Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi for continuing to use colonial-era laws to threaten and imprison journalists. Such laws were widely used by the military junta that previously ruled the country to muzzle critics and the media.

Under the current government, at least 32 journalists have been charged, mostly under colonial-era laws, according to the local group We Support Journalists.

“Such arrests and laws were widely used by the military junta to shut us down,” the group’s founder, Maung Saungkha, said by phone. “But it’s sad to see media freedom is even worse under the so-called democratically elected



Reuters journalist Kyaw Soe Oo, also known as Moe Aung, looks out from a police van after a court appearance outside Yangon

government.”

The arrest of the two Myanmar journalists, whose trial begins today, caused an international outcry. After they were detained, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the arrests showed how press freedom was deteriorating in Myanmar, while U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called for their immediate release.

“A free press is critical to a free society—the detention of journalists anywhere is unacceptable,” former President Bill Clinton tweeted yesterday [Macau time]. “The Reuters journalists being held in Myanmar should be released immediately.”

Reuters President and Editor-in-Chief Stephen J. Adler also

has called on Myanmar to free the journalists.

“Their arrest and continued incarceration represent an egregious attack on press freedom — preventing them, and deterring other journalists, from reporting independently in Myanmar,” Adler said in a statement.

Critics and rights groups say that in some respects, press freedom in Myanmar is more restrictive now than it was during the previous quasi-civilian administration, which bridged the former military government to the current civilian one. Suu Kyi’s government, which has been in power for two years, has done nothing to change laws that create barriers to a free press.

“Nearly two years later, we have

been gravely disappointed by the lack of progress on legal reform and the new clampdown on journalists under Suu Kyi’s rule,” said Shawn Crispin, senior Southeast Asia representative for the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

In November, Myanmar authorities sentenced two foreign journalists working for Turkish state broadcaster TRT, along with their local interpreter and driver, to two months in prison for flying a drone over the parliament building. All four were released in late December.

A few days after the Reuters journalists were arrested, Myanmar President Htin Kyaw, a close ally and confidant of Suu Kyi, the country’s de facto lea-

der, authorized police to proceed with the charges against them.

Despite facing heavy criticism for the move, the government said it was simply implementing the rule of law.

“It’s up to the court to decide whether the journalists are guilty or not because as a government, we don’t interfere in the country’s judicial system,” said government spokesman Zaw Htay.

Wa Lone, who joined Reuters in June 2016, has covered a range of stories related to the Rohingya crisis, while Kyaw Soe Oo began working for the news agency in September. Since their arrest, they’ve been held in the country’s notorious Insein prison.

More than 650,000 Rohingya have fled from Myanmar into Bangladesh since Aug. 25, when Myanmar’s army began what it called “clearance operations” following an attack on police posts by Rohingya insurgents. The aid group Doctors Without Borders estimates at least 6,700 Rohingya civilians were killed in the first month of the crackdown.

Since the crisis in northern Rakhine state began, new restrictions on press access have made it nearly impossible for journalists to cover independently in the region.

“Suu Kyi’s government clearly feels foreign media coverage of the Rohingya crisis has damaged its international image and now it’s fighting back through bogus legal threats and jailing of journalists,” Crispin said. **AP**

AUSTRALIA

Gays marry in midnight wedding ceremonies across country

SAME-SEX couples married in midnight ceremonies across Australia yesterday after the country’s last legal impediment to gay marriage expired.

Marriage equality became law on Dec. 9 with overwhelming support in Parliament, but Australia’s requirement that all couples give a month’s notice for weddings made Tuesday the first possible date for gay marriages.

Athletes Craig Burns and Luke Sullivan married at a midnight ceremony near the east coast city of Tweed Heads.

“It’s another way to show your love and appreciation of your partner in front of the people in your life,” said Burns, a 29-year-old

sprinter who will compete in the Commonwealth Games in Australia’s Gold Coast in April.

In Newcastle, north of Sydney, Rebecca Hickson, 32, married her partner of nine years, Sarah Turnbull, 34.

Hickson described the divisive build-up to a gay marriage ballot preceding

Today we are a more equal and inclusive country.

WEDDING GUEST

Parliament’s vote as “a horrible time.” She said the couple wanted to be part of history by becoming one of the first lesbian couples to marry in Australia.

Lainey Carmichael, 51, and Roz Kitschke, 46, married shortly after dawn before 65 guests at their home in the town of Franklin in the island state of Tasmania.

The early ceremony was mainly to avoid the summer heat, Kitschke said. “New day; new era — and we don’t like the heat that much,” she said.

Wedding guest Rodney Croome, a long-time marriage equality advocate and spokesperson for Tasmanians United for Marriage Equality, said:

“This morning’s wedding marked the start of a new chapter in the lives of the two brides but also a new chapter in the life of the nation.”

“Today we are a more equal and inclusive country that treats all loving, committed couples the same,” Croome said in a statement.

The Australian Parliament overwhelmingly voted for same-sex marriage after a nationwide postal survey found that 62 percent of respondents wanted marriage equality.

The one-month waiting period was waived for some couples who wed in recent weeks. Those exceptional circumstances included a partner’s terminal



Lainey Carmichael (left), Roz Kitschke (right) and celebrant Jason Betts pose as they show Lainey and Roz’s marriage certificate at their home in Franklin, south of Hobart, yesterday

illness and overseas-based relatives booking flights to Australia before the official start date for the new law was known.

Civil celebrant Charles Foley has been campaigning for years to get Australia to drop the one-month waiting period, which he said is among the longest in the world.

The federal government

imposed it at the request of churches decades ago so parishioners would have time to say why they may object to some religious unions, Foley said.

Ireland has a waiting period of three months.

Australia and Ireland are the only countries that have put the question of legalizing gay marriage to a popular vote. **AP**

Jim Gomez, Manila

PHILIPPINES

Huge procession secured tightly amid terror fears

A massive crowd of mostly barefoot Filipino Catholics joined a raucous procession of a centuries-old black statue of Jesus Christ under extra-tight security yesterday after the Philippines came under a disastrous militant attack last year.

Although the Philippine police and military said they have not monitored any specific threat, they deployed more than 6,000 personnel, including snipers and bomb squads backed by a surveillance helicopter and drones, to secure the annual procession of the wooden Black Nazarene along Manila's streets. More than 700 devotees were treated by Red Cross volunteers, mostly for minor injuries and ailments and exhaustion, by midafternoon.

Authorities imposed a gun ban, cellphone signals were jammed sporadically in the vicinity of the procession and a team of bomb experts walked sniffer dogs along the route ahead of the mammoth crowd. Concrete barriers blocked the route, partly to prevent the kind of attacks that have been witnessed in Europe, where Islamic radicals have rammed vehicles into crowds, a military official said.

Hundreds of local and foreign militants laid siege for five months last year to southern Marawi city, leaving more than 1,100 combatants and civilians dead in the

worst IS group-linked attack so far in Asia. Troops crushed the uprising in October, but an unspecified number of extremists managed to escape and other small but brutal groups in the country's south still pose threats.

Security officials said they were also concerned with possible stampedes in a dawn-to-midnight event that some say could draw millions, although it's difficult even to approximate the crowd size.

Mobs of devotees in maroon

■ Mobs of devotees squeezed their way into the tight pack of humanity around a carriage carrying the life-size statue



shirts dangerously squeezed their way into the tight pack of humanity around a carriage carrying the life-size statue. They threw small towels at volunteers on the carriage, which was being pulled by ropes, to wipe parts of the cross and the statue in the belief that the Nazarene's powers would cure ail-

ments and foster good health and fortune.

Ronald Malaguinio, a 38-year-old worker, carried a small replica of the Nazarene on a steel platform bedecked with yellow and white flowers for several kilometers from his home in Manila's Tondo slum district to join the procession and

pray for a son recovering from a heart ailment.

"If the doctor says your son has a 50-50 chance of surviving, where will you go?" Malaguinio asked. "If money can't cure diseases, the only other option is prayers. Ours have been heard and we're here to thank the Nazarene." AP

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Eric Tucker, Washington

USA

Mueller conveys interest in questioning Trump

SPECIAL counsel Robert Mueller's team of investigators has expressed interest in speaking with President Donald Trump as part of a probe into potential coordination between Russia and the Trump campaign, a person familiar with the matter said yesterday [Macau time].

The prospect of an interview with the president has come up in recent discussions between Mueller's team and Trump lawyers, but no details have been worked out, including the scope of questions that the president would agree to answer if an interview were to actually take place, according to the person. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the ongoing investigation.

When or even if an interview would occur was not immediately clear, nor were the terms for the interview or whether Trump's lawyers would seek to narrow the range of questions or topics that prosecutors would cover. Trump's lawyers have previously stated their determination to cooperate with Mueller's requests.

It's not surprising that investigators would ultimately seek to interview the president given his role in several episodes under scrutiny by Mueller. Any interview of Trump would be a likely indication that the investigation was in its final stages — in-

AP PHOTO



Donald Trump takes the stage to speak at the American Farm Bureau Federation's Annual Convention

investigators typically look to interview main subjects in their inquiries near the end of a probe.

Mueller for months has led a team of prosecutors and agents investigating whether

Russia and Trump's Republican campaign coordinated to sway the 2016 election, and whether Trump has worked to obstruct an FBI investigation into his aides, including by firing the FBI director, Ja-

mes Comey.

Comey has said that several months before he was dismissed, Trump told him he hoped he would end an investigation into his former national security adviser, Mi-

chael Flynn.

Mueller's team recently concluded a series of interviews with many current and former White House aides, including former chief of staff Reince Priebus and the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

Four people have been charged so far, including Flynn, who pleaded guilty in December to lying to the FBI about his conversations with the Russian ambassador. Former campaign chairman Paul Manafort was indicted on charges tied to foreign lobbying work.

Peter Carr, a spokesman for Mueller, declined to comment, as did Trump lawyers John Dowd and Jay Sekulow.

Trump did not rule out the possibility of being questioned by Mueller when asked about it at a news conference Saturday. He said there had been "no collusion" and "no crime."

"But we have been very open," Trump said. "We could have done it two ways. We could have been very closed and it would have taken years. But you know, it's sort of like, when you've done nothing wrong, let's be open and get it over with."

A White House spokesman pointed to a statement from White House lawyer Ty Cobb saying the White House doesn't publicly discuss its conversations with Mueller but was continuing to cooperate "in order to facilitate the earliest possible resolution." **AP**

IRAN

Lawmaker says 3,700 arrested in days of protest, unrest

Amir Vahdat & Jon Gambrell, Tehran

AN Iranian reformist lawmaker said yesterday that some 3,700 people were arrested in the days of protests and unrest that roiled Iran over the past two weeks, offering a far higher number than authorities previously released.

The protests, which vented anger at high unemployment and official corruption, were the largest seen in Iran since the disputed 2009 presidential election, and some demonstrators called for the overthrow of the government. At least 21 people have been killed in the unrest surrounding the protests.

The official news website of the Iranian par-

liament, icana.ir, quoted Mahmoud Sadeghi of Tehran as saying that different security and intelligence forces detained the protesters, making it difficult to know the exact number of detainees. He did not elaborate, nor did he say where he got the figure.

Previously, authorities have said "hundreds" were arrested in Tehran alone, not offering a total figure for arrests as the demonstrations spread into the Iranian countryside, including small towns.

Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli has said about 42,000 people at most took part in the anti-government protests. Sadeghi's figure of arrested offered would mean nearly 10

percent of those who demonstrated were arrested.

On Sunday, Tehran prosecutor, Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi, said that 70 of the detained protesters have been released on bail during the last 48 hours. He added that there would be more releases from detention, except for the main instigators of the riots who will be "dealt with seriously."

Also Sunday, Iranian lawmakers held a closed session in which senior security officials briefed them on the protests and the conditions of the detainees, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

Iranian authorities have said that the protests are waning. That's

in part due to the government blocking access to the popular messaging app Telegram, which demonstrators used to share images of the rallies and organize. Authorities also have deployed additional police and members of the Basij, a volunteer organization affiliated with Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

It remains difficult for journalists and outsiders to piece together what's happening beyond Tehran, as Iran is a vast country of 80 million and travel there is restricted.

In recent days, government supporters have held several mass rallies across the country to protest the unrest.

The United States and

AP PHOTO



Israel have expressed support for the protests, which began on Dec. 28 in Iran's second largest city, Mashhad, but deny Iranian government allegations that they fomented them.

U.S. officials and analysts studying Iran say believe conservative opponents of President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate within Iran's clerically overseen government, started the demonstrations in Mashhad, but quickly lost control of them.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

also blamed "Americans and Zionists" for the protests, saying money supporting them came from "one of the filthy-rich governments of the Persian Gulf."

Khamenei, however, also stressed that those with legitimate complaints about Iran's economy should be heard.

"We should differentiate between people's righteous and honest demands on one side and barbaric and disruptive moves by another group," he said. "These should be distinguished from each other." **AP**

David Biller

BRAZIL

Fake news risks plaguing elections, top fact checkers say

BRAZIL'S combination of political polarization and passion for social media offers fertile ground for fake news in the run-up to this year's elections, leading fact checkers have warned.

Claire Wardle, a Harvard fellow and the director of an organization that coordinated fact-checking efforts during the French and UK elections, said political division combined with widespread use of WhatsApp, a closed-network messaging app, leaves Brazilians particularly vulnerable to misinformation ahead of this year's elections. She is convinced the country will be a "fascinating" case study because, in some ways, it is more susceptible to propaganda than the U.S.

"Brazil has real challenges; it's a very polarized landscape and closed messaging apps will be the biggest concern," Wardle, the director of the Harvard-based First Draft, said in an interview. "The conditions that exist in Brazil are just ripe for people's selective exposure, their confirmation bias, their tribalism."

The fake-news debate that escalated in the world over the past year has left social media companies trying to fend off accusa-



tions that their platforms have been used to unfairly influence elections. A similar discussion is growing in Latin America's largest economy as Brazilians,

among the world's heaviest internet users, are set to elect a new president in October amid the dramatic fallout from the 2016 impeachment of Dilma Rousseff.

Two populist-leaning candidates on the left and right of the political spectrum are leading opinion polls: former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party and ex-army captain Jair Bolsonaro, respectively. More moderate candidates trail well behind.

"When you have a polarized electorate, people want to connect with others who share the same worldview," she said. "The emotional response to these issues is so strong, they're a lot less likely to be critical."

Brazil's electoral authorities are moving to tackle the problem. Luiz Fux, incoming president of the country's electoral tribunal, will create a task force comprised of various authorities to combat the proliferation of fake news and draft a bill to curb the practice, local media reported. A law Congress approved last year also aims to fine internet users

who publish content aimed at influencing the election under a false identity.

Ahead of France's presidential race last year, online, real-time fact checkers such as First Draft worked with newsroom partners to clarify false, misleading and confusing claims made online. That included stories, comments, images and videos. Bloomberg News was one of the organizations that partnered with First Draft.

In Brazil, Facebook announced Jan. 4 that it had selected Aos Fatos, part of the International Fact-Checking Network, to partner on the creation of a chatbot for the company's messenger service. Wardle said that, while such a fact-checking bot can be created for Facebook Messenger, it can't be done for WhatsApp because of the app's closed nature. Facebook also owns WhatsApp. **Bloomberg**

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Offbeat

TV SHOW 'AMERICAN IDOL' LOOKING FOR STARS



Carrie Underwood was one of the memorable talents boosted by the show in early 2000s

"American Idol" wants to get back in the business of making stars.

The longtime talent show, which is being revived by ABC starting on March 11, had faded in ratings and cultural significance over its last seasons on Fox.

The memorable talents boosted by the show – Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood, Adam Lambert and the like – were all a part of the show's early years in the 2000s.

Ryan Seacrest is back as host of "American Idol," but it will have three new judges in Luke Bryan, Katy Perry and Lionel Richie. They said they see themselves as mentors and instructors.

"We are wasting our time if we don't find another star," Perry said yesterday.

TV canal macau



13:00	TDM News (Repeated)
13:30	News (RTPi) Delayed Broadcast
15:00	Miscellaneous
16:30	Miscellaneous
17:20	Zig Zag
18:25	Brazilian Soap Opera (Repeated)
19:15	TDM Interview (Repeated)
19:50	Portuguese Serie
20:30	Main News, Financial & Weather Report
21:00	Miscellaneous
21:30	You, Me and the Apocalypse Sr 1
22:10	Brazilian Soap Opera
23:00	TDM News
23:30	Miscellaneous
00:15	Main News, Financial & Weather Report (Repeated)
00:50	RTPi Live

cinema



CINETEATRO

04 JAN - 08 JAN



COCO

ROOM 1

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

Director: Lee Unkrich

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



INSIDIUS: 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 Shiota

Language: Japanese (Chinese & English)

Duration: 105 min

this day in history



1996 KING OF JORDAN IN HISTORIC TEL AVIV VISIT

King Hussein of Jordan has made his first public visit to Israel's largest city, Tel Aviv, in the latest indication of the new warmth between the two countries.

The King, an experienced pilot, flew a Jordanian army helicopter to the Sde Dov air base near Tel Aviv, where he was met by Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

At a ceremony to honour the chief negotiators who brokered the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace talks, Mr Peres said: "We still face all kinds of challenges: the greatest of them is not to let the galloping prospect of peace pass us by."

"I would like to say how happy we are to have the opportunity to be with our friends, our partners in building and laying the foundations for a comprehensive peace in this region," replied the King.

Peace treaty
Israel and Jordan ended 46 years of war with a peace treaty in 1994 backed by US President Bill Clinton. The deal drew condemnation from Jordanian Palestinians, who make up 60% of the population.

PLO officials were critical of today's visit by the King, saying he should first have visited lands under Palestinian rule.

There was extremely tight security as King Hussein's motorcade made its way through Tel Aviv.

A quarter of Israeli police - 6,000 officers - were deployed to protect him, and central Tel Aviv was paralysed as police closed off roads and diverted traffic.

Thousands of Israelis turned out to watch him go by, giving him an enthusiastic welcome with Jordanian flags and banners greeting the King in Arabic.

King Hussein did hold talks with Mr Peres, but diplomats stressed the main purpose of the visit was symbolic rather than political.

Later, he flew to Beit Gavriel on the shore of the Sea of Galilee for talks with Mr Peres and US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, whose shuttle diplomacy in the region continues tomorrow with a visit to the Syrian capital, Damascus.

Jordan has been largely diplomatically isolated since taking a neutral stand in the Gulf War of 1991.

However, the peace agreement with Israel and King Hussein's increasing opposition to the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, have brought the country back into the international fold.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Shimon Peres lost the 1996 Israeli elections to Binyamin Netanyahu, who campaigned against the Rabin-Peres peace programme.

The Israel-Jordan peace treaty of 1994 continues to hold fast, however,

despite its continuing unpopularity with many in the region.

In September 2002, Jordan and Israel agreed on a plan to pipe water from

the Red Sea to the shrinking Dead Sea that straddles the two countries.

The project, costing \$800m, was the two nations' biggest joint venture to

date.

And 18 months later, in March 2004, the two nations agreed a joint project

to build a desert science centre on their shared border.

King Hussein of Jordan died of cancer in 1999.

YOUR STARS

Aries Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Your instincts steer you in the right direction today because you don't hesitate or question your judgment. In fact, your trust in your intuition can lead you to some big wins right now.

Taurus April 20-May 20 It's too easy (and tempting) to get involved in battles of wits today, but be careful not to let it descend to the level of playground fighting. Consider whether there's really any point to debating.

Gemini May 21-Jun. 21 When you're hanging around with the right people, things start moving faster than you'd have thought possible. The old saying about great minds thinking alike is true, of course.

Cancer Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Did you really just spout off that shocking one-liner in the middle of the workday? What made you decide to wear that bright red outfit outdoors? Surely you're joking.

Leo Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Your energy puts you front and center, just where you want to be. Soak up the warmth of the spotlight and get ready to rock your audience with your best moves. Don't worry if you're unprepared.

Virgo Aug. 23-Sept. 22 Give in to that whim. Your organized self loves your schedule, but it's essential for you to leave room for serendipity - or that well-planned timetable could start to feel like a prison cell.

Libra Sep.23-Oct. 22 It'd be nice if your bank account were as full as your calendar because invitations are coming at an alarming rate! The pleasure of your company is required by seemingly everyone you know.

Scorpio Oct. 23 - Nov. 21 A work situation could get pretty serious if you keep bringing up your authority issues. While your concerns are valid and definitely need to be addressed, it's best to save them for a while.

Sagittarius Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Adventure is calling, and you always answer in the affirmative. You've got the itch to get out of the house, so if you can, take a little road trip today - even just to a new neighborhood.

Capricorn Dec. 22-Jan. 19 If someone is intent on getting all they can - and then some - out of you, remind them politely but firmly that you can only give so much - and that you are tapped out for now.

Aquarius Jan. 20-Feb. 18 While you usually are pretty easygoing and a proponent of radical change, today's odd personal energy may have you wagging your finger, holding your ground and refusing to budge.

Pisces Feb.19-Mar. 20 Are your colleagues snooping around your cubicle looking for clues or distraction? Politely tell them to buzz off so you can concentrate on your workload. You have a say in how you're treated, of course.

THE BORN LOSER by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

Easy

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

Easy+

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

Medium

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

Hard

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

WEATHER

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

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Beethoven's "___ Solemnis"; 6- First man; 10- PDQ; 14- Rose essence; 15- Bog down; 16- Summoned; 17- Stable compartment; 18- Traditional prayer ending; 19- "East of Eden" director Kazan; 20- Commune; 22- Journey; 24- Picnic pests; 25- Very funny; 26- Perfectly; 29- Drive off; 30- Indonesian holiday resort; 31- Previously owned; 37- Rose; 39- Flushed; 40- Hawkins of Dogpatch; 41- Exceptional; 44- Adorable; 45- Starchy food grain; 46- Maintenance; 48- Down-to-earth type; 52- ___ breve; 53- Introduce; 54- Light; 58- Arabian Sea gulf; 59- "Dancing Queen" quartet; 61- Helicopter part; 62- In ___ land; 63- Actor Kristofferson; 64- Flaming felony; 65- Asterisk; 66- 3:00; 67- Inclines; DOWN: 1- Not fem.; 2- Sock ___ mel; 3- Ollie's partner; 4- Redemption; 5- She's a Dahl; 6- Collect; 7- Thin change; 8- Live and breathe; 9- Refer briefly to; 10- Skip ___; 11- Artillery burst; 12- French farewell; 13- Rings; 21- Hwys.; 23- Crucifixes; 25- Role for Valerie; 26- Recipe amt.; 27- Vow; 28- Tropical plant; 29- Part of an act; 32- Set up; 33- Looped bridle; 34- Together, in music; 35- Evening, informally; 36- Like an abyss; 38- Column type; 42- Error; 43- Break in the action; 47- Involving more than one; 48- Iranian money; 49- Conclude by; 50- Journalist ___ Rogers St. Johns; 51- Pertaining to the moon; 52- As ___ resort; 54- Wading bird; 55- ___ girl; 56- High time?; 57- Sea eagles; 60- Maidenform product;



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Ralph D. Russo, Atlanta

TO add another championship to the greatest dynasty college football has ever seen, Alabama turned to its quarterback of the future, and Tua Tagovailoa proved that his time is now.

The freshman quarterback, who had played mostly mop-up duty this season, came off the bench to spark a comeback and threw a 41-yard touchdown to DeVonta Smith that gave No. 4 Alabama a 26-23 overtime victory against No. 3 Georgia yesterday [Macau time] for the College Football Playoff national championship.

Tagovailoa entered the game at halftime, replacing a struggling Jalen Hurts, and threw three touchdown passes to give the Crimson Tide its fifth national championship since 2009 under coach Nick Saban.

"He just stepped in and did his thing," Hurts said. "He's built for stuff like this. I'm so happy for him." The Tide might have a quarterback controversy ahead, but first Alabama will celebrate another title.

For the third straight season, Alabama played a classic CFP final. The Tide split two with Clemson, losing last season on a touchdown with a second left.

What was Saban thinking as the winning pass soared this time?

"I could not believe it," he said. "There's lots of highs and lows. Last year we lost on the last play of the game and this year we won on the last play of the game. These kids really responded the right way. We said last year, 'Don't waste the feeling.' They sure didn't, the way they played tonight."

Smith streaked into the end zone and moments later confetti rained and even Saban seemed almost giddy after watching maybe the most improbable victory of his unmatched career. A few hours later, Alabama was voted No. 1 in the final AP college football poll for the 11th time, three more than any other program.

After Alabama kicker Andy Papanastos missed a 36-yard field goal that would have won it for the Tide (13-1) in the final seconds of regulation, Georgia (13-2) took the lead with a 51-yard field goal from Rodrigo Blankenship in overtime.

Tagovailoa took a terrible sack on Alabama's first play, losing 16 yards. On the next he found Smith, another freshman, and hit him in stride for the national championship.

Tagovailoa was brilliant at times, though he had a few



Alabama wide receiver DeVonta Smith catches a touchdown pass past Georgia defensive back Malkom Parrish during overtime of the NCAA college football playoff championship game in Atlanta on Monday, Jan. 8, 2018

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Alabama beats Georgia in OT for national title

freshman moments. He threw an interception when he tried to pass on a running play and all his receivers were blocking. He also darted away from pass rushers and made some impeccable throws, showing poise of a veteran. Facing fourth-and-goal from the 7, down seven, the left-hander moved to his left and zipped a pass through traffic that hit Calvin Ridley in the numbers for the tying score with 3:49 left in the fourth quarter.

He finished 14 for 24 for 166 yards. The winning play was, basically, four receivers going deep.

"After the sack, we just got up and took it to the next play," Tagovailoa said.

"I looked back out, and he was wide open. Smitty was wide open." Freshmen were everywhere for the Alabama offense in the second half: Najee Harris at running back; Henry Ruggs III at receiver; Alex Leatherwood at left tackle after All-American Jonah Williams was hurt. It's a testament to the relentless machine Saban has built.

But this game will be remembered most for his decision to change quarterbacks trailing 13-0.

"I just thought we had to throw the ball, and I felt he could do it better, and he did," Saban said Tagovailoa. "He did a good job, made some plays in the passing game. Just a great win. I'm

so happy for Alabama fans. Great for our players. Unbelievable."

Saban now has six major poll national championships, including one at LSU, matching the record set by the man who led Alabama's last dynasty, coach Paul Bear Bryant.

This was nothing like the others.

With President Trump in attendance, the all-Southeastern Conference matchup was all Georgia in the first half before Saban pulled Hurts and the five-star recruit from Hawaii entered. The president watched the second half from Air Force One.

"I don't know how Coach Saban found me all the way

in Hawaii from Alabama," Tagovailoa said. "Thank God he found me and we're here right now."

The Tide trailed 20-7 in the third quarter after Georgia's freshman quarterback, Jake Fromm, hit Mecole Hardman for an 80-yard touchdown pass that had the Georgia fans feeling good about ending a national title drought that dates back to 1980.

Fromm threw for 232 yards and for a while it looked as if he was going to be the freshman star of the game, the first to true freshman to lead his team to a national title season since Jamelle Holieway for Oklahoma in 1985.

"I mean, if you want to find out about Jake Fromm, go ask those guys on the other side of the ball, and they'll tell you because that's a really good defense he just went against," Georgia coach Smart said.

A little less than a year after the Atlanta Falcons blew a 25-point lead and lost in overtime to the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl, there was more pain for many of the local fans. Two years ago, Georgia brought in Smart, Saban's top lieutenant, to bring to his alma mater a dose of Alabama's Process.

Smart, who spent 11 seasons with Saban — eight as defensive coordinator in Tuscaloosa — quickly built 'Bama East. It was Georgia that won the SEC this season. Alabama had to slip into the playoff without even winning its division.

With the title game being played 70 miles from Georgia's campus in Athens, Dawgs fans packed Mercedes-Benz Stadium, but it turned out to be sweet home for Alabama. Now Saban is 12-0 against his former assistants.

But not without angst.

Alabama drove into the red zone in the final minute and Saban started playing for a winning field goal to end the game. A nervous quiet gripped the crowd of 77,430 as 'Bama burned the clock. With the ball spotted in the middle of the field, Papanastos lined up for a kick to win the national championship. The snap and hold looked fine, but the kicked missed badly to the left.

For the second straight week, Georgia was going to overtime. The Bulldogs beat Oklahoma in a wild Rose Bowl in double overtime to get here, and after Jonathan Ledbetter and Davin Bellamy sacked Tagovailoa for a big loss on the first play, Alabama was in trouble — second-and-26.

Not for long. Tagovailoa looked off the safety and threw the biggest touchdown pass in the history of Alabama football. **AP**

opinion

World Views

Virginia Postrel, Bloomberg

OPRAH IS THE SYMBOL AMERICA NEEDS RIGHT NOW

Forget Oprah Winfrey for president. We don't need another political newbie in the Oval Office. But the response to her eloquent Golden Globes speech demonstrates a craving, and not just on the left, for skills she's already mastered.

She knows how to represent the country in a unifying and inspirational way. Note the numerous shoutouts to men, from Sidney Poitier to TV executive Dennis Swanson to "some pretty phenomenal men," in a speech that could easily have become male-bashing.

She'd make a terrific head of state. And we need one.

Donald Trump's presidency has highlighted the value of constitutional checks and balances, but it has also revealed a great flaw in the U.S. system. By uniting the executive and ceremonial roles in a single office, the presidency requires someone who can both win a partisan campaign and represent all Americans. It is the ceremonial role that is invoked in the phrase "respect for the office," as distinct from its occupant.

The traditional distinction is between "head of government," the prime minister in a parliamentary system, and "head of state," the ceremonial role filled by a constitutional monarch or an office like the Israeli president.

That model doesn't apply to the U.S. With its independent legislative and executive branches, however, the U.S. system doesn't really have a head of government. And treating the head of one branch of government as the embodiment of the American nation and its constitutional system - the head of state - has always been problematic. Why not the speaker of the House or the chief justice of the Supreme Court? The branches are supposed to be coequal.

Now we have a chief executive whose primary interest in the office seems to be enjoying the public trappings that declare him top dog. Yet he is remarkably clumsy at playing head of state. He even turned a ceremony honoring the Navajo code talkers of World War II into an utterly inappropriate, racist and partisan word-association rambles calling Senator Elizabeth Warren "Pocahontas."

A president who avoids the Kennedy Center Honors, lest he attract protesters, and repels basketball champions invited to the White House is failing as head of state. Having established his base by challenging his predecessor's native birth, Trump made it unusually difficult for opponents to separate respect for the office with respect for the man who holds it. The result is that the U.S. effectively no longer has a head of state.

We can thank Trump for reminding us both that the president - any president - isn't the best representative of the nation as a whole. We don't need another politically inexperienced celebrity as chief executive. But we could use a living symbol.

And if Oprah seriously wants to be president, she should first take a crack at governor of California.



THE BUZZ FRANCE INVESTIGATES APPLE FOR SLOWING DOWN OLD IPHONES

French prosecutors have opened an investigation into Apple over revelations it secretly slowed down older versions of its handsets.

The Paris prosecutor's office said a probe was opened last week and is led by the French body in charge of fraud control, which is part of the finance ministry.

It follows a legal complaint filed in December by a French consumer rights group that aims to stop intentional obsolescence of goods by

companies.

In France it is illegal to intentionally shorten the lifespan of a product in order to encourage customers replace it.

Apple apologized in December for secretly slowing down older iPhones, a move it said was necessary to avoid unexpected shutdowns related to battery fatigue.

Lawsuits against the company have been filed in the U.S. and Israel.

FILM SHOWN AT IFFAM 2017

'The Shape of Water' leads race for British Academy Awards



Actresses Natalie Dormer (from left) Joanna Lumley and Letitia Wright pose for photographers during a photo call for the BAFTA Academy Film Awards Nominations in London yesterday

Jill Lawless, London

COLD War monster movie "The Shape of Water" led nominations yesterday for the British Academy Film Awards, as organizers announced a new female host and promised to fight sexism and sexual misconduct in showbiz.

Guillermo del Toro's fantastical thriller scored nominations in 12 categories, including best picture and best director, for the U.K. equivalent of the Oscars.

Scorching tragicomedy "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" and Winston Churchill biopic "Darkest Hour" gained nine nominations apiece for the prizes, considered an indicator of likely success at Hollywood's Academy Awards.

"Three Billboards" writer-director Martin McDonagh said he was thrilled by the positive response to the film and its "strong and outrageous and nuanced" central character, played by Frances McDormand. The story of a mother avenging the rape and murder of her daughter won four trophies at the Golden Globes in Los Angeles on Sunday.

"You never know if a film that is as dark as this, and has as many strange shifts in tone as this, is going to connect," McDonagh said.

Other multiple nominees include sci-fi sequel "Blade Runner 2049" and World

War II drama "Dunkirk," with eight each. Figure-skating showdown "I, Tonya" is nominated in five categories.

The BAFTA nominations brought good news for two movies snubbed by the Golden Globes: "Dunkirk" and Jordan Peele's comedy-horror story "Get Out." The British academy embraced Christopher Nolan's visually dazzling war picture with nominations for best film and best director, among other categories. "Get Out" gained nominations for its British star, Daniel Kaluuya, and for original screenplay.

Best-picture nominees are "The Shape of Water," "Three Billboards," "Darkest Hour," "Dunkirk" and lush romance "Call Me By Your Name."

Best-actress nominees are McDormand for "Three Billboards," Annette Bening for "Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool," Margot Robbie for "I, Tonya," Sally Hawkins for "The Shape of Water" and Saoirse Ronan for "Lady Bird."

Best-actor contenders are Daniel Day-Lewis for "Phantom Thread," Gary Oldman for "Darkest Hour," Kaluuya for "Get Out," Jamie Bell for "Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool" and Timothee Chalamet for "Call Me By Your Name."

Supporting-actor nominees include Christopher Plummer for "All the Money in the World." Plummer was a

last-minute replacement for Kevin Spacey, who was cut from the already-completed film following allegations of sexual misconduct.

Nominees for best director are del Toro, McDonagh, Nolan, Denis Villeneuve for "Blade Runner 2049" and Luca Guadagnino for "Call Me By Your Name."

The BAFTAs differ from their U.S. counterpart in having a separate category for best British film. Nominees are "Three Billboards," "Darkest Hour," chilling comedy "The Death of Stalin," gay rural romance "God's Own Country," period drama "Lady Macbeth" and ursine adventure "Paddington 2."

Winners will be announced at London's Royal Albert Hall on Feb. 18, two weeks before the Oscars.

The ceremony will be hosted by "Absolutely Fabulous" star Joanna Lumley, who is taking over from longtime master of ceremonies Stephen Fry.

The evening is likely to echo the political tone of the Golden Globes, where many attendees wore black as a statement against sexual misconduct and Oprah Winfrey made a rousing speech calling for change.

BAFTA chair Jane Lush said the British film academy was determined the disturbing recent revelations should be "a watershed moment to be a catalyst for real, lasting change." AP

Station	Air quality	
Roadside	60-80 Moderate	☹️
High Density Residential Area	50-70 Moderate	☹️
Ambient	60-80 Moderate	☹️

SOURCE: DSMG

WORLD BRIEFS

AUSTRALIA Same-sex couples married in midnight ceremonies across Australia yesterday after the country's last legal impediment to gay marriage expired. More on p12

SYRIA-ISRAEL Syria's military accused Israel of launching missiles targeting its outposts near Damascus in a wave of three pre-dawn attacks yesterday and claimed that the Syrian air force hit one of the Israeli jets and shot down several of the missiles.

TURKEY In a calculated bid to irritate the United Arab Emirates, Turkey yesterday renamed the street on which the country's embassy stands after an Ottoman military commander accused by an Emirati minister of pillaging the holy city of Medina.

GREECE Lawmakers in Greece are set to limit the powers of Islamic courts operating in a border region that is home to a 100,000-strong Muslim minority.



POLAND's new prime minister reshuffled his Cabinet yesterday, ousting the controversial ministers of foreign affairs, defense and the environment before heading off to Brussels for talks with top European Union officials.

ITALY-GERMANY Police in Italy and Germany seized 50 million euros in mafia assets and arrested more than 160 people, accusing them of running a huge mob-controlled commercial and political empire involving everything from bread and wine sales to funeral services, migrant housing and garbage recycling.

BRAZIL's combination of political polarization and passion for social media offers fertile ground for fake news in the run-up to this year's elections, leading fact checkers have warned. More on p15