



MORE CRIMINAL CASES

There was an 11.7 percent increase in the number of criminal cases in 2018, the Judiciary Police announced

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Pansy Ho eyeing more control of SJM

P3

WORLD BRIEFS

MALAYSIA Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah of central Pahang state was named Malaysia's new king yesterday, replacing Sultan Muhammad V who abdicated unexpectedly after just two years on the throne. [More on p13](#)



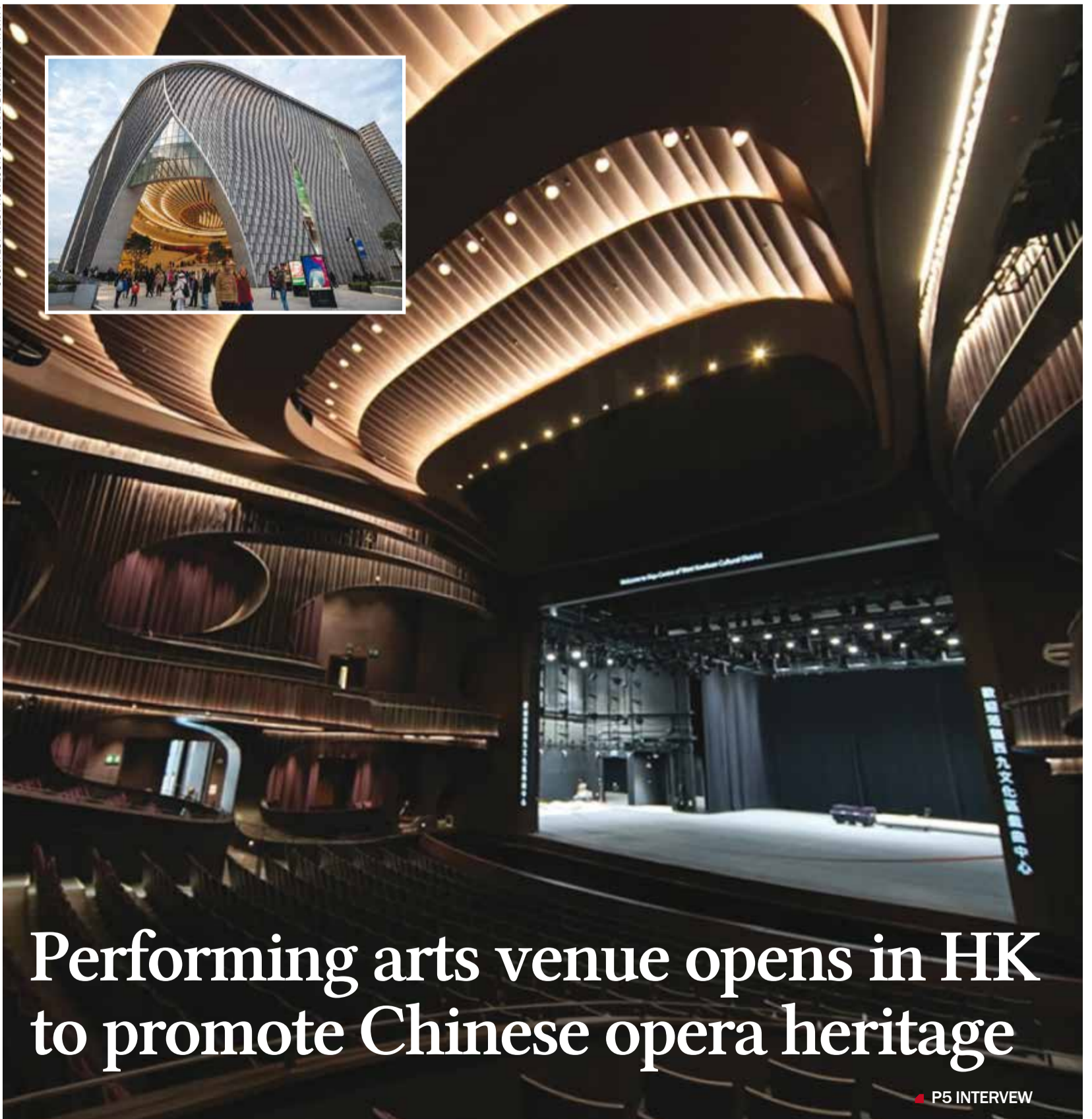
INDONESIA A polarizing Christian politician whose campaign comments ignited the largest protests in years in Muslim-majority Indonesia was freed yesterday after serving nearly two years in prison for blasphemy. [More on p12](#)

JAPAN Whalers discussed plans yesterday to resume their commercial hunting along the northeastern coast on July 1, for the first time in three decades.

INDIA At least six people were killed when a building collapsed yesterday in northern India as workers were adding an additional floor to it, police said.

More on backpage

COURTESY WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT AUTHORITY



Performing arts venue opens in HK to promote Chinese opera heritage

P5 INTERVIEW

Crimes grow 12 percent in 2018, kidnapping, scams and sexual offenses raise concerns

RENATO MARQUES



Renato Marques

THERE was an 11.7 percent surge in the number of criminal cases in 2018 when compared with the previous year registering a total of 14,108 cases over last year, the Judiciary Police (PJ) said yesterday.

During a meeting with the media, PJ representatives said that the crimes that raise the most concern involve cases of kidnapping (not related to usury for gambling), scams, namely the ones over the phone or internet, and sexual offenses, which have been growing more and represent an alarming trend to both the police and society.

As compared with 2017, the number of kidnappings doubled in 2018 (from six to 12 cases), representing also four-fold growth when compared to the year of 2016. As the police explained on previous occasions, included in these figures are cases such as the unlawful detention of people against their will due to situations of

dispute or debts that are not related to gambling, such as acts executed by taxi drivers during disputes with clients.

Causing even more concern to society were the criminal cases of a sexual nature, with special emphasis on the sexual abuse of children that increased by 50 percent year-on-year, from 16 to 24 cases.

Crimes of sexual abuse grew at an even higher rate, such as prostitution or exploitation and sexual harassment, which registered last year respectively, seven and 10 cases against the one case each in 2017.

According to information provided by the PJ director on the sidelines of the event, "in fact, the total number of cases involving sexual abuse of minors [aged below 16 years old] was 33 [last year]."

"We must bear in mind that the majority of these cases [of sexual abuse] happen with people that the victims know well. In one-third [of cases] this happens in Study Centers of Education-related

institutions and others with family members or domestic helpers," the PJ director said, calling on all parents and family members to pay more attention to the behavior of children in order to prevent these

kinds of cases.

Sit also urged schools and other education institutions to seek more information on the staff they plan to recruit, performing a better evaluation at time of recruitment and asking

for more information, such as their criminal record, before recruitment.

Regarding the phone scams, although the PJ reported a 12 percent drop in this kind of cases last year, the director noted that there are several other crimes related, such as the ones happening over the internet that in total constitute a significant share of the crime.

In addition, the PJ director explained that these kinds of crimes usually result in the loss of large sums of money, and the criminal often swaps their "modus operandi" in order to target different kinds of people at different times, one of the reasons that these crimes are considered a priority for the authorities.

As Sit explained, "in the first part of the year [2018], we saw these crimes happening in the form of people pretending to be government or police authorities and targeting mostly university students in Macau, but, in the second semester we [saw] a return of the 'guess who I am' kind of phone scam which was [targeting] older people."

Still, the PJ director considered that the work being done to alert the population to the prevention of such crimes is getting positive results, saying that "the drop in the number of cases was from 139 in 2017 to 128 in 2018 but, more importantly is the fact that the amount lost was far lower; almost half."

As for the crimes related to gambling activities, as forecasted, they continued to grow in 2018 by about 6.5 percent, to a total of 5,014 cases.

DNA database to be ready this year, public consultation in mid-2019

QUESTIONED as to the status of the amendments to the law that aims to establish in Macau a DNA database that could be used to ease police investigation works, the director of the PJ Sit Chong Meng said he expected the law to be completed within the year. "This is a very important tool for police investigation and we want it [our law framework] to follow the international standards," Sit told the media.

According to the PJ director, "after the draft concludes, we will do a public consultation where we will clarify all the details and concerns expressed by society. We are not elaborating [upon] the public consultation document. We hope that at mid-year we can do the public consultation."

The establishment of a local DNA database

system was already completed in 2012, but its use was postponed due to the lack of a legal framework to support its entry into force, causing concerns in areas such as personal data protection and privacy.

Another topic addressed by Sit in media questions related to the amendments of the Cybersecurity Law, whose works were also expected to be concluded this year.

On the topic, the PJ director said that "the crimes of this kind have been growing. The last year we have reports of two cases related to 'hackers' and although the number of cases is small, it is considerable in the way that [these crimes] can cause a strong impact on people as well as on companies," he said, adding, "we need to legislate."

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GAMING

Henry Fok Foundation sides with Pansy Ho in SJM takeover

Daniel Beittler

A cooperation agreement signed this week between Pansy Ho and the Henry Fok Foundation is indicative of a takeover at Macau's oldest gaming concession, Sociedade de Jogos de Macau (SJM), with the two shareholders appearing to edge out familial rivals with smaller stakes.

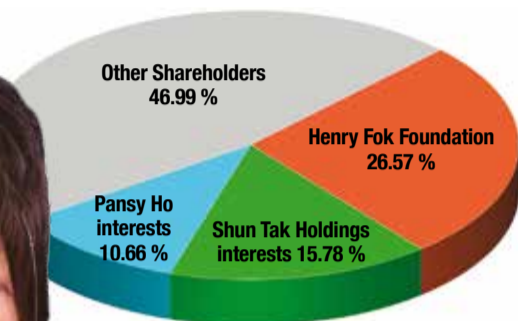
Pansy Ho and the Henry Fok Foundation together control a 53 percent stake in Sociedade de Turismo e Diversões de Macau (STDM), which in turn owns slightly over 54 percent of SJM Holdings.

Signed on Wednesday, the agreement spells out a joint commitment to advancing three principle objectives, as well as the means of achieving them – namely by using their majority voting power to determine the company's board of directors.



Pansy Ho

STDM OWNERSHIP



First among the objectives is an extension of SJM's Macau gaming concession, via its wholly-owned subsidiary SJMSA, so as to allow the casino business to continue to be a "fundamental asset and source of revenue" for the company. SJM has already signaled its intent to solicit a two-year extension of its concession, which will otherwise expire in March 2020.

The partners also stress their commitment to implementing "best practices"

on corporate governance and legal and regulatory compliance across the STDM Group, as well as the maintenance of STDM's position as the owner of more than 50 percent of the total issued shares of SJM.

According to a filing to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange made by Shun Tak Holdings, the agreement "reflects the practice of discussion and consensus over many years between the Parties and their predecessors regarding STDM and the STDM Group."

This consensus will be carried forward to the STDM board election, which will be held on or before March 31, 2019. At said time, the two parties will submit a common proposal and jointly agree upon the appointment of the company's chairman and managing director, "consistent with the pursuance of the [abovementioned] objectives," notes the Wednesday filing.

Wednesday filing.

Family patriarch Stanley Ho last year completed the carve-up of his business empire and stepped down from his role in the company, leaving Pansy's sister Daisy Ho as SJM Holdings chairman. Meanwhile, Stanley Ho's fourth consort and current lawmaker Angela Leong was nominated as a co-chairman along with Timothy Fok, while chief executive Ambrose So was made vice chairman.

Controlling about 8.62 percent of the company, Angela Leong is notably absent from the agreement and may see her influence wane if her interests are not aligned with that of the Pansy-Fok alliance. Citing industry analysts, GGR Asia reported that Leong is seen by some to lead a rival faction to Pansy Ho inside the casino operator's board.

Since its founding in 1962, STDM has been directly or indirectly majority-controlled by the partnership of the Ho and Fok families. At present, the executive directors are Pansy Ho, Daisy Ho, Maisy Ho, David Shum and Rogier Verhoeven, while the independent non-executive directors are Norman Ho, Charles Ho, Michael Wu and Kevin Yip.

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GAMING

Ho says Macau sold out for CNY, China anxiety overplayed

MELCO Resorts & Entertainment Ltd., one of Macau's biggest casino resort operators, is already sold out for the upcoming lunar new year holidays, as its top executive downplayed concerns on the outlook in the world's largest gaming hub.

Analysts are "overreacting" in forecasting that gaming revenue will decline in Macau, Melco Chief Executive Officer Lawrence Ho, said in an interview Wednesday in Macau. He said he expects gaming revenue in the hub to grow to mid- to high- single digit this year. That's in contrast to a 1 percent revenue decline for 2019 forecasted by analysts in a Bloomberg survey.

"The global economy has started to weaken but at the same time, China mainland where we depend on heavily, has been aggressively loosening policies, asking banks to facilitate more liquidity to small and median businesses," Ho said. "The overall consumer sentiment is still okay."

Melco expects business to be booming during the lunar new year holiday next month, when



Lawrence Ho

Chinese are expected to travel and spend during their week off. Melco's hotel rooms at its three properties are all sold out - at higher rates than last year, Ho said.

The casino operator's U.S. shares fell 1.1 percent at the close Wednesday, while the S&P 500 Index was little changed.

Ho's optimism contrasts with industry analysts, who expect this year's gaming receipt growth to decline as China's economy

counters a slowdown and uncertainties over the renewals of casino licenses in Macau creates an overhang. A likely dip in casino receipts this month may end the hub's streak of 29 straight months of revenue growth.

The concerns in Macau reflect the overall anxiety about the impact of China's slowing economy and consumer sentiment. Investors of global luxury brands from Prada SpA to LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton are ji-

ttery after Apple Inc. shocked the market with a profit warning and said Chinese consumers are cutting back on iPhones.

“The overall consumer sentiment is still okay.”

LAWRENCE HO

Earlier this month, Morgan Stanley forecast gaming revenue growth to drop as much as 2 percent and lowered its price targets for most of Macau's six listed casino operators. Morgan Stanley and other analysts raise concerns the high-roller business may be volatile, with many of those premium clients in the property and manufacturing sectors that's affected by China's slowdown.

Melco is shifting its business to attract the so-called mass market of tourists, casual gamblers and families to its properties that feature roller coasters and live shows. The company announced

this month that its Studio City resort will not host tables or elite gaming rooms for high stakes players come the next lunar new year in 2020.

Adding to its mass appeal, Melco is awaiting government approval to begin the \$1.4 billion construction of phase two of its Studio City project, Ho said. That project will be gaming-free and boast one of the world's biggest indoor water parks with a Hollywood theme, he said. The project will also include two, five-star hotels with 1,000 rooms.

The new project is also strategic. Macau operators including Melco, have increasingly invested in non-gaming facilities to meet the requirements of Beijing and Macau authorities who want to see more revenue diversification in the former Portuguese colony. The operators have met the non-gaming revenue contribution target of 9 percent, the city's gaming regulator said in November.

Melco will have competition in its shift. MGM Resorts International debuted a \$3.4 billion Cotai property last year, while Las Vegas Sands Corp. is remodeling its Cotai Central property with a London theme, adding replicas of the Big Ben, Parliament and Tower Bridge.

For now, Ho said he has reason to be optimistic. "This Chinese New Year we will definitely see business growth," he said. "Overall, it's better than last year for us." **MDT/Bloomberg**

HEALTH

Three more serious cases of flu infection reported, one death

THREE serious cases of influenza accompanied by pneumonia and other complications were reported on Wednesday at both Conde de São Januário Hospital Center (CHCSJ) and Kiang Wu Hospital, the Health Bureau (SSM) has said in a statement.

One of the severe cases led to the death of the patient soon after hospitalization, with the cause of death still to be ascertained. The deceased was a 69-year-old man living in Macau with a medical history of several chronic diseases.

The patient showed symptoms such as cough and expectoration from January 21 and on the early morning of January 23, stopped responding to the calls of his family, prompting the emergency services to be called.

He was transferred to the Emergency Services of Hospital Kiang Wu, but upon arrival at the Hospital, the patient was no longer breathing and had no pulse. He was subjected to cardiorespiratory resuscitation maneuvers which resulted positively in a resuscitation. The fast test for the influenza virus was then done, testing positive for Influenza A. The patient was then transferred to the emergency room of the CHCSJ.

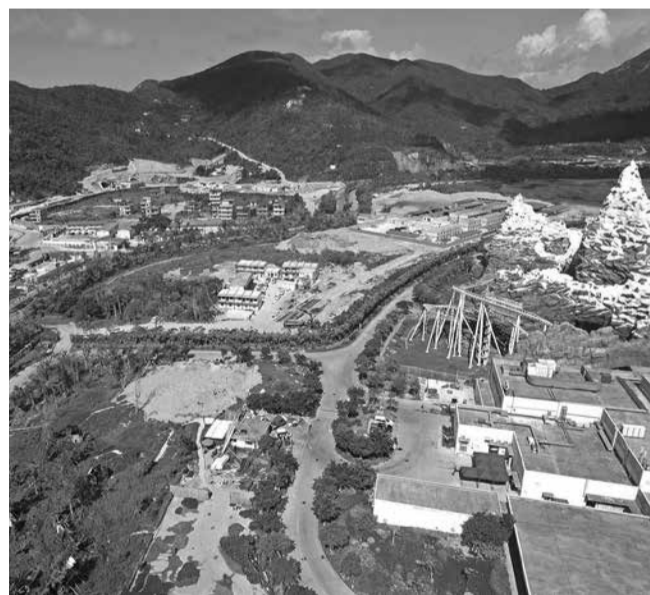
A chest x-ray showed pneumonia in both lungs with the patient presenting a status of heart and respiratory failure, which was treated with assisted ventilation, but he eventually passed away around noon that day.

The bureau also noted that, at the moment, there are 14 people hospitalized

due to the disease, noting that the most critical case is of a pregnant woman who was diagnosed with the flu on January 21 and needs artificial respiratory help in order to facilitate her recovery. The patient's clinical condition has improved, but it is still critical. All other cases are in a stable clinical condition.

The SSM also noted that on January 23, another case of influenza was found but, this time, of a collective infection by influenza in a local school. However, for the time being, none of these patients are in a concerning situation.

The case occurred in two kindergarten classes of Tong Sin Tong Kindergarten, located in the NAPE area, where 10 students aged between 3 and 6 years old were reportedly infected.



Chimelong Museum aiming to open after Q2

ZHUHAI officials have announced the opening of a Chimelong Museum that will be constructed within the Hengqin New Area, it has been reported.

Slated to open after the second quarter of this year, the museum will hold a 2,606 square meters aquarium complex, where 67 ocean engineering basins will house a collection of marine mammals.

According to reports, the museum, which will be part of the Chimelong International Ocean Tourist Resort and house at least nine killer whales, is set to be 102 meters long and 32 meters wide.

To be constructed by China Construction Third Bureau First Engineering, the aquatic display is said to be capable of accommodating up to 5,000 spectators.

In late 2017, Zhuhai announced several projects concerning the integrated development of the Hengqin area.

The projects are part of the Zhuhai authorities development plan for the area, spanning 26 square kilometers, that aims to build an economic zone and new urban center for Zhuhai, as previously reported.

That year, the Hengqin district also signed a cooperation agreement with six of China's state-owned companies.

Nine major social investment and construction projects were also signed this week. These projects include the Zhuhai's Chimelong marine resort; a Macau future center; and a cultural and recreational center.

Meanwhile, along with the development of the area, just last month Hilton announced the opening of Hilton Garden Inn Zhuhai Hengqin, which will be the nearest international brand hotel to Chimelong Ocean Kingdom and Hengqin Port, which are only eight kilometers and 10 kilometers away, respectively.

Q&A BOB ESSERT
ACOUSTICIAN

'Hong Kong's cultural industry still has some way to go'

Lynzy Valles

THE Xiqu Center at the West Kowloon Cultural District - Hong Kong's largest arts and cultural site - officially opened to the public on Sunday.

The center, featuring a 1,073-seat Grand Theater and a 150 to 200-seat Tea House is designed for educating, preparing, rehearsing and performing Chinese Opera.

London-based firm Sound Space Vision (SSV), led by its director, Bob Essert, is the firm responsible for the center's acoustics and audio systems - including both natural and amplified performances.

In planning the acoustics and audio design for the Xiqu Centre, the company said that it took into account the heritage and expectations of Hong Kong audiences and practitioners.

SSV was asked to improve and enhance the stalls-level sightlines, and collaborate with the architects to create a new configuration and design for the stalls.

Speaking to the Times, Essert said that such mega-projects in Hong Kong can bring a high-quality and international stature to the city - promoting its culture and creative industry.

Macau Daily Times (MDT) - How challenging was it for a London-based firm to build and design the acoustics in a way that keeps the traditions of Cantonese and other mainland opera?

Bob Essert (BE) - It was very



interesting [...] to really get into the Chinese opera sound world. Before we started designing and as we were designing, we went to quite a few concerts and talked to the artists about how they feel about different rooms and spaces that they perform in [so] that was fortunate for us.

It's a different sound world, a different acoustic, a different symphony orchestra and [it's] different from the Western opera, [so] it's kind of a mixture of many things. We also learned about the existing facilities here in Hong Kong and other parts of China where these kinds of art forms are done and have [...] evolved over many years.

I think there were still some considerable challenges in the construction phase. [...] It's a complicated building as it is an arts building and not just standard office tower or residential [building] that they were used to building in this part of the world. From an acoustical point of view, we had challenges in educating the builders on how to build good walls that separate the studios from each other [...] so some of the artists can do loud percussion [work] and not disturb what's happening in the next studio. [...] We have a long background in knowing how to make that, but it was a matter of educating builders so they can follow through with high quality.

MDT - How long did it take for your team to conclude the sound designs and construction?

BE - I think the design was two and a half years and the construction was three to four. There was a bit of an overlap. They started the construction excavation and piling into the ground at the same time we were still designing the interiors so there was a process overlap to keep the speed going [even] if it took slightly longer than the original [completion date].

MDT - How different was this project compared to previous projects that you led?

BE - We made special efforts to make the sound project more for the singers and to restrict the loudness of percussion. The [Chinese] opera comes from a culture of playing in outdoor theaters and other kinds of outdoor spaces [...] but when we moved it to indoors, we knew that we had to take special precautions to make it work and make a good balance.

[...] I think the main thing is to have a very clear sound so it's bit more like a drama theater than a symphony hall. The sound doesn't bounce around the room as much as it does in a concert hall or even in western opera house because the speech part of the xiqu art form and the percussive music and clear text and diction that they are speaking and singing must come through, more like in a drama theater, and there is not a need to make the sound resonant and reverberate as you would in a concert hall.

MDT - The center is part of Hong Kong's biggest cultural project and this is its first construction. Was there a pressure to execute this in an excellent manner?

BE - I think pressure is not the word I'd use [but rather] enthusiasm. We, the design team, would always be very keen to make the very best project for any client and this is very prestigious client. So knowing that we were the first ones of a series, it was very important to make it high quality and make it on time, and make it not cost too much money. All of those things put pressure on the West Kowloon District Authority but we did our best work to fulfill that.

MDT - How can these mega projects in Hong Kong further boost their creative and cultural industry?

BE - I'm sure it can. Hong Kong's cultural industry still has some way to go to achieve international top standards and I think West Kowloon has made it its mission to really raise the stakes and look at the 21st century, look at the culture in the context of the world. They are already bringing wonderful arts groups to Hong Kong from all over the world in the arts festival. There are a couple of good western orchestras here but Chinese opera, the Cantonese opera and the appreciation for the mainland xiqu forms is a very important leg of a stool and a key component for making all these happen.

It suggests that the facilities within West Kowloon mean it is going to conclude high profile musicals. [...] Local arts and dance groups are crying out for more and better space to perform and I think following buildings [in the district] have spaces for that and they can grow in size, quality and international stature.

Xiqu Center designed to keep Chinese opera traditions

WEST Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) is Hong Kong's cultural quarter, featuring a blend of arts, education, and public space.

Its first finished institution - The Xiqu Centre - is dedicated to the performance of Chinese Opera (Xiqu), and will also serve as a centre for preservation and development of the variety of Chinese Opera art forms.

Aside from the Grand Theater and Tea House, the center also features a seminar hall, large and small rehearsal facilities, a recording/broadcast suite and, retail and food and beverage areas inside the atrium.



The acoustical design keeps the sound image focused precisely on the singers, which allow performers who prefer natural acoustics (without amplification) - as is the case for some mainland traditions - to work with the supportive, but clear, room acoustic.

Aside from the center, five art and cultural institutions are also being integrated to the area. Duncan Pescod, director of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority, previously told local media that the site would house some 50 individual spaces where performances, exhibitions, workshops and different events will be held.

The initial budget of the 40-hectare space stands at HKD21.6 billion.



No damage to Ruins of St. Paul's after drone crash

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) said that no damage was found after a drone crashed into the Ruins of St. Paul's on Thursday night. According to a statement, after the incident, IC staff made a "detailed inspection of the site, including photo comparison and data analysis through 3D scan." The IC reported the case to the Civil Aviation Authority and pledged to link with the relevant authorities in order to decide if it is necessary to take measures regarding the use of drones in the vicinity of monuments. The police said that the person operating the drone was a 23-year-old male tourist from the mainland.

Vietnamese hold Tet celebrations

Overseas Vietnamese in the two special administrative regions of China gathered last weekend at celebrations of the Lunar New Year (Tet) organized by the country's Consulate General in Hong Kong and Macau. Vietnamese Consul General Tran Thanh Huan attended the Macau celebration on Saturday and used the occasion to highlight his compatriots' contributions to building their homeland into a more prosperous nation, according to Vietnam News. The Consul General also presented certificates of merit to individuals, honoring their efforts to develop the Vietnamese communities in the Hong Kong and Macau.

KIM JONG NAM MURDER

Indonesian in North Korea trial wins appeal for statements

An Indonesian woman jointly accused of killing the estranged half brother of North Korea's leader won an appeal yesterday to obtain witness statements given to police as part of her defense.

Prosecutors said they will challenge the Appeal Court's ruling in the nation's top court.

The High Court in August found there was enough evidence to infer that Siti Aisyah and Doan Thi Huong of Vietnam, along with four North Korean suspects at large, had engaged in a "well-planned conspiracy" to kill Kim Jong Nam.

The two young women are accused of smearing VX nerve agent on Kim's face in an airport terminal in Kuala Lumpur on Feb. 13, 2017 when he was bound to catch a flight to Macau. They have said they thought they were taking part in a prank for a TV show. They are the only suspects in custody. The four North Koreans fled the country the same mor-



Indonesian Siti Aisyah (left) is escorted by police as she leaves the Court of Appeal

ning Kim was killed.

Gooi Soon Seng, a lawyer for Aisyah, said the Appeal Court overturned the lower court's ruling that the statements were privileged, and ordered prosecutors to supply the police statements made by seven witnesses to the defense within two weeks.

But he said the order has been put on hold pending pro-

secutors' appeal to the Federal Court. The trial, which is due to resume Monday, will also likely be deferred pending the appeal, he said.

Gooi reiterated the statements were crucial to providing a clearer picture of the case as one of the witnesses, the man who drove Kim to the airport, had died while four others were unreachable. The

defense had interviewed two of the witnesses but they were uncooperative and the police statement would help them determine if they were lying.

"If we are allowed to see the statements, then we will get a fairer trial. [...] If we do not get a fair trial, where do we get justice?" Gooi said. "Why must truth be shrouded by the policy of privilege?" **MDT/AP**

AD



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AL PLENARY

Criminalization of public disrespect of national symbols passed

Julie Zhu

A law which proposes a maximum of three years imprisonment for behavior which publicly insults national symbols has been passed at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

The legal amendment that was passed relates to the national flag, national symbols and anthem.

Sulu Sou and Au Kam San expressed their opposition toward the article, which proposes im-

prisonment.

"Respecting or not should not be enforced by law. I oppose using criminal measures to handle it [respect]. Even in mainland China, the government uses administrative methods. But, in Macau, we are using criminal methods," said Sou.

"Actually, the public power should [set] the example [in respecting the people]," said Sou.

The law also proposes to include anthem education in non-tertiary education institutions. Currently, 68 local primary and

middle schools are teaching students about the Chinese anthem.

"It is already included in the educational frame[work]. It is not needed to be regulated here in this law," said Au.

"Is anthem education going to include all the details regarding the anthem itself, such as the life of the lyricist [who was attacked and died in jail because of the Cultural Revolution in China, Sou noted], so that everybody knows about the development of the anthem and its history?" asked Sou.



Lawmakers call for regulation on domestic noise

DURING yesterday's Legislative Assembly (AL) plenary meeting, many lawmakers called on the government to generate better measures for handling noise issues in the city. The director of the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA), Tam Vai Man, said that the government would conduct research regarding low-frequency noises.

Yesterday, the Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo do Rosário, brought the noise law amendment to the lawmakers, with the amendment proposing that some public engineering projects' night works only be announced on DSPA's website and that a sign detailing the night work should be displayed at the concerned construction site.

The amendment was passed, although 10 lawmakers expressed their concerns over domestic and low-frequency noises, including Sulu Sou and Agnes Lam. These lawmakers pointed out the noise coming from people's entertainment activities in public spaces, for example singing and dancing in public gardens.

Lam proposed that the community committee help coordinate disputes over noise issues.

Including Lam herself, many lawmakers further noted that, in several cases, noise-makers or evidence of people making noise disappear when the governmental officers on law enforcement duty arrive at the noisy scene.

"How can the issue be solved when no evidence can ever be obtained?" Lam asked.

Pereira Coutinho said that "what I am seeing now is a very simple and disappointing amendment. The amendment should aim at protecting the residents' health. Most people in the SAR work on shift duty. If [the city] only controls noise at night but does not amend the laws regarding noise during the day, I will not accept the amendment."

"Should the government face the fact that many individual cases were unsolved?" Coutinho enquired.

In response to the lawmakers, Raimundo said "if it is needed, we will consider how to amend laws regarding domestic noise."

According to statistics provided by the DSPA director, 85 percent of noise complaints were regarding noise during night periods, between 10 p.m. and 9 a.m.

"During the noise law legislative procedure, 15 percent of the people agreed with a 24-hour noise regulation. The majority agreed with regulating noise during a certain period," said Tam.

Regarding noise coming from trash collection, Tam noted that, currently, Macau has more than 200 compression refuse collectors, and that in the north-eastern district there are pipe refuse collectors which can attenuate noise.

"We will continue paying attention to public opinion regarding domestic noise," said Tam.

Later, while making remarks about the noise law, Lam suggested a public consultation period on domestic noise control regime be held as soon as possible. The bill was passed yesterday. **JZ**

Worries that private school boards will deprive schools' autonomy

A law proposing the establishment of school boards in private schools at the non-tertiary level triggered lawmakers' suspicions during yesterday's Legislative Assembly (AL) session. However, the law was passed.

The System Framework for Private School Teaching Staff of Non-tertiary Education proposes that the operational entity must establish a school board that will be able to appoint and dismiss the rector, approve the number of permanent school staff, make decisions regarding the school's teaching policies and development plan, as well as supervise the school's operation.

The school board will be composed of a minimum of seven members, consisting of the rector, teachers, and parents.

Sulu Sou first criticized the school board for having been established for vested interests.

"How are the teachers and parents selected? How can the schools balance the board?" Sou asked, adding "the generation method of the school board is not transparent enough."

"Discussion about this law started in the 90s. The appearance of the school board wants to include

the parents' and the teachers' participation in the school's management. But [the teachers and the parents] are completely appointed by the school's organizing entity," said Au Kam San.

Pereira Coutinho is worried about the school board depriving schools of their autonomy. "To what degree do you want to watch over the schools' operation? I think the schools should deserve our trust. School autonomy is really important because it allows students to learn more things," Coutinho said.

"Why can't we trust the school? The schools should have a mentality of 'freedom' and 'criticism'. But now, [the school board] is watching the schools do things. Then, the schools will also watch the students the way the schools are being watched by the board," Coutinho noted.

Replying to the lawmakers, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Alexis Tam, only remarked that, in the past, school boards did not have a parents' representative, and that the new law includes the parents.

Tam claims that the government wants to push forward the city's educational standing.

ON THE LAWMAKERS' AGENDA

PUBLIC HOUSING Ella Lei, Zheng Anting and Ng Kuok Cheong asked the government about Ilha Verde's affordable housing issue. The three lawmakers have doubts about the government's use of public funds. Zheng criticized the government for wasting public money on governmental projects. Lei wants to know about the accountable parties behind the problem with the Ilha Verde affordable housing fire damper change. She asked why the government did not spot problems during the construction. By citing this specific project, Ng wants the government to take initiative in revealing costs and expenditures of large-scale public projects.

MAINLAND PROPERTY Leong Sun Iok hopes that the local government can establish a cooperation mechanism with mainland China authorities in order to take care of Macau citizens' property purchases in mainland China. Leong first noted that some local residents had fallen victim to mainland property traps because they were unaware of mainland laws and the mainland's land situation. He also criticized some real estate agencies and property developers for using fake promotional campaigns to attract buyers, including buyers from Macau. The lawmaker noted that the lawsuit procedure regarding Macau residents' property purchase problems in mainland China takes a long time, which leads to local residents losing their money. Leong wants the local government to provide suitable protection to local residents who invest in properties across mainland China, and also to assist these residents in solving cross-border investment disputes.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM Pereira Coutinho said that "the SAR government needs some measures based on responsible tourism." "Streets mostly visited by visitors are becoming dirtier, and, due to the large number of tourists, the streets can't be kept clean at all," complained Coutinho. "The lack of a clear policy for sustainable tourism development, the lack of public morality and responsible tourism lead to the continuous increase of illegal guesthouses, dishonest sales of suspicious products and other situations," said Coutinho.

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REAL ESTATE MATTERS

Can we predict what will happen to Macau's property market in 2019?

Sam Lee is a marketing manager and property consultant at JML Property. JML was established in 1994 and offers Investment Property & Homes. It specializes in managing properties for owners and investors, and providing attractive and comfortable homes for tenants.

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SAM LEE

Those intent on peering into the Macau market's future often try their luck by looking next door to Hong Kong. Macau's market has tended to track Hong Kong's with a lag, both in terms of price trends and policy changes. Although there are notable differences in demographics and economics, money moves a lot faster in Hong Kong's property market and the market sentiments in Hong Kong tend to spill over into Macau. Hong Kong's market has come off of a longstanding bull-rally late 2018 and analysts predict a strong correction in prices in 2019. Both prices and transaction volumes have fallen since December 2018. Is this what is in store for Macau? Whatever happens in Hong Kong it will no doubt impact Macau, but it's far from certain that the same thing will happen here.

Firstly, Macau's property market is not as 'frothy' with

speculation as the Hong Kong market. Also, hoarding of empty flats by developers is not a big factor in Macau, so the government introducing a 'vacancy tax', in the unlikely event that they decide to do so at all, will not have the same incentive for developers to slash prices and offload their stock quickly. Over the last fifteen years, Macau's property market has definitely been on a journey. Some describe the journey as 'profitable'. Others might describe it as 'absurd'. No matter how you see it, there is one word that cannot be used to describe what has happened - predictable. One of my favourite authors, a Lebanese-American academic named Nassim Nicholas Taleb often talks about "Black Swans". A Black Swan Event is a random and unexpected event that has a massive impact. Looking back at the last 20 years, we can recognise that the events

that have had an impact on the market were mostly things that could not have been reasonably foreseen. SARS, 2008. Beijing's random fits of VISA policy regulations and money laundering crackdowns. Trump. The trade-war. Macau potentially earning the status of the 'richest place on the planet' with the highest GDP per capita by 2020. If we could have foreseen any of these events with any certainty in year 2000, we would all have much fatter wallets by now. Many have 'predicted' that the opening of the HZMB will massively boost property prices in both Hong Kong and Macau. The bridge has been operational for a couple of months now, and although we are yet to see the long-term effects, the market has generally greeted the grand opening with crickets. So here is my humble opinion for anyone trying to predict where Macau's property market is going to go - don't even try!

A USD5,000 electric pickup truck from China wants to enter US

CHINESE automakers have tried to crack the U.S. market for over a decade. A petite USD5,000 pickup truck is up next. Kaiyun Motors is poised to start mass exports to the U.S. in 2019 after spending the past four years analyzing consumer needs, founder Wang Chao said in a phone interview. The startup has the required approvals and plans to sell as many as 10,000 of its Pickman electric trucks in the U.S. this year, he said.

The company is trying to win over cost-conscious buyers with stuff to haul and no need for a larger pickup such as Ford Motor Co.'s F-150, America's best-selling model. The Pickman, with a top speed of 45 kilometers per hour, is suitable for farm owners, factory employees moving loads at their work sites, and commuters, Wang said.

While the Pickman is nimbler than U.S.-built pickups and costs as little as one-tenth of a F-150, its limited speed and driving range of 120 kilometers (75 miles) on one charge may put off some potential customers. Chinese brands also need to convince U.S. buyers of their quality and safety features in a market that's been dominated by domestic and Japanese manufacturers for decades.

"2019 will be year one for Kaiyun as we take on overseas markets including the U.S.," Wang said. "We can make our Pickman as successful as the F-150." In China, the battery-powered Pickman carries a price tag of 16,800 yuan (\$2,470),



less than the cost of two higher-end iPhones. The pickup will be sold for \$5,000 in the U.S. and 5,000 euros (\$5,700) in Europe, as variants in those markets come with revisions and added features such as reinforced structures and storage space for guns.

Wang said his company shipped a small volume of Pickmans to the U.S. over the past year to test them out and get consumer feedback, and has continued to tailor the vehicle to the market. The company cleared regulatory approvals and certification processes for sales in the European Union in January and will start shipping the first batch of Pickmans to Germany and Italy after next month's Lunar New Year holiday, he said. **Bloomberg**

Malaysia probes how Jho Low may have gained from pre-1MDB Deal

Elffie Chew, Anisah Shukry

MALAYSIAN investigators have uncovered details of how fugitive financier Jho Low could have made financial gains from the entity that predated scandal-plagued state fund 1MDB, through a bond sale involving local bankers and a Thai brokerage.

Authorities are probing a 5 billion ringgit (USD1.2 billion) bond sale in 2009 by Terengganu Investment Authority, or TIA, a sovereign wealth fund that later became 1MDB, according to people familiar with the matter. Investigators believe that \$126 million of illicit funds - which Low and his associate Eric Tan have been charged with receiving - came from the deal arranged by AMMB Holdings Bhd. and involving companies in Thailand and Singapore, said one of the people.

The investigation is focused on tracing money flows that led to Low, as well as officers at TIA and AMMB, who may have abetted Low in the dealings, according to the people. Authorities are looking into whether any individuals concealed or misrepresented statements related to the bond sale and whether any of the funds were misappropriated, the people said, asking not to be named discussing an ongoing probe.

Low, who remains at large, has been named by U.S. prosecutors as the alleged mastermind of a \$4.3 billion scheme to siphon money from 1MDB - putting him at the center of a massive scandal that has ensnared Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and spawned investigations on three continents. Low, whose full name is Low Taek Jho, has repeatedly denied



wrongdoing, and said he held no formal position at 1MDB.

Malaysian authorities are probing whether Low and Tan benefited from a complex series of transactions that involved bonds issued by TIA changing hands twice in the same day at vastly different prices, the people said.

A spokesman for the finance ministry, which now oversees 1MDB, declined to comment. The state-owned investment fund's full name is 1Malaysia Development Bhd.

1MDB INQUIRIES

The Securities Commission is conducting inquiries into matters relating to 1MDB, including the TIA bond issuance, a spokesperson said in response to a Bloomberg query. The regulator has the authority to enforce securities rules on institutions or individuals if there's any wrongdoing.

Representatives for Ambank, Jho Low and the Malaysian

Anti-Corruption Commission couldn't immediately comment on the matter. A spokesman for the police declined to comment. Previous efforts to reach Tan were unsuccessful.

The series of transactions in 2009 may have started with TIA reaching out to Ambank to help it raise 5 billion ringgit, the people said. Ambank then sold 3.8 billion ringgit of the TIA notes to Country Group Securities Pcl in Thailand, and 700 million ringgit to a Singapore-based company, while buying 500 million ringgit for itself, the people said. The three parties bought these notes at a discounted price of about 87 ringgit for 100, on account of the notes being the first 30-year Islamic notes out of Malaysia.

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

Investigators got suspicious when documents they obtained showed that the parties resold the bonds for profit on the same

day. Ambank helped them sell the notes for 100 ringgit to 105 ringgit to local investors, according to the people.

Low served as an adviser to TIA at the time and was involved in the discussions on the bond issuance from the start, the people said.

That the transactions were done within 24 hours has raised many questions for investigators who are probing why Ambank didn't arrange for the bonds to be sold directly to the investors, and how Country Group - a new name in the 1MDB investigations - came into the picture. It's unclear if any new charges will be filed related to the transactions.

Veeraphat Phetcharakupt, chief executive officer of Country Group, couldn't immediately comment. Thailand's Securities and Exchange Commission hasn't been contacted about any investigation involving 1MDB, said Secretary-General Rapee Sucharitakul.

ILLICIT FUNDS

As for how the money may have gotten to Low, investigators uncovered a put option agreement that Country Group signed with Singapore-based ACME Time Ltd., whose beneficiaries are Low and Tan. That agreement paved the way for Country Group to send a third-party transfer instruction to Ambank to pay \$113 million of the windfall, generated by reselling the TIA notes, to ACME Time, one of the people said.

Low, who remains at large, has been named by US prosecutors as the alleged mastermind of a USD4.3b scheme

Malaysian prosecutors have leveled multiple charges against Low and Tan in their absence, including allegations of receiving \$113.4 million of illicit funds through ACME Time from an Ambank account in May 2009, followed by another \$12.6 million in July 2009, according to charge sheets issued in December. The charge sheets didn't link the illicit payments to TIA's bond sale.

Former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, who has pleaded not guilty to dozens of charges linked to 1MDB, has said that Low never worked for or represented 1MDB, and instead Low was a representative of "Arab parties." Low said he was never employed by the governments of Malaysia or Abu Dhabi. **Bloomberg**

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China says Australia writer held on national security charge

Christopher Bodeen
& Rod McGuirk, Beijing

CHINA yesterday said it has detained a Chinese-Australian writer on charges of involvement in “criminal activities endangering China’s national security.”

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying offered no details about the charges against Yang Hengjun, a novelist and online commentator, in response to a question at a daily news briefing.

Such charges are extremely vague and frequently leveled at critics of the ruling Communist Party, with little hard evidence provided in support.

“According to our understanding, the Australian national Yang Hengjun was suspected of engaging in criminal activities endangering China’s national security,” Hua said.

“At present, the case is being handled according to law, and Yang Hengjun’s legitimate rights and interests have been fully guaranteed,” she said.

Hua said Yang’s case was in the hands of the Beijing city branch of the national intelligence bureau, potentially raising it to a higher level of scrutiny by state authorities. She said Australia’s embassy in China had been informed of the measures taken against him.

Friends said Yang, 53, had been living in New York as a visiting scholar at Columbia University with his wife and her child and had returned to China last week. Australia raised the issue of his disappearance on Wednesday.

Australia’s defense minister said yesterday he would press Chinese officials to treat Yang fairly and release all information about his case.

Christopher Pyne told reporters at the start of a previously scheduled visit to Beijing that



The Australian Embassy in Beijing

Yang was being held under a type of home detention in Beijing.

It’s unclear why Yang would have been detained, although China has become increasingly intolerant of even the hint of criticism.

Pyne said he would raise Yang’s case in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Wei Fenghe.

“The Australian government is obviously concerned with the residential surveillance of Mr. Yang,” Pyne told reporters. “He is an Australian citizen and we are seeking to provide him with consular assistance and support to ensure that he is treated fairly and transparently.”

China’s defense ministry had no immediate response.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne said earlier in Sydney that Australia has asked for consular accesses to Yang along with an explanation for his detention and details of the charges brought against him.

Payne said the government would be concerned if the detention was related to China’s arrest of two Canadians last month or her government’s decision in August to block Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei from rolling out Australia’s 5G network due to security concerns. Both issues have figured in speculation about the reasons

for Yang’s detention.

China detained the two Canadians, entrepreneur Michael Spavor and former diplomat Michael Kovrig, on national security charges in what was widely seen as retaliation for Canada’s arrest of Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou at the request of the United States.

Meng is also the daughter of the founder of the company, which enjoys strong Chinese government and military backing. The U.S. has led a campaign joined by allies such as Australia to ban Huawei from major projects based on national security grounds.

“At this stage there is no evi-

dence of such a connection,” Payne told reporters of a possible link to the Canadians’ detention.

“I’d be concerned if there was an indication of that. So we are calling on the Chinese authorities to ensure this matter is dealt with transparently and fairly,” she added.

Payne declined to make public details of where and when Yang had been detained. She said she wanted an explanation for why Australia was not informed until Wednesday night after Yang’s friends and family had raised the alarm that he was missing.

A friend of Yang, University of Technology Sydney academic Feng Chongyi, said he had warned Yang against traveling to China in light of the Canadians’ arrest. Yang had argued that he was safe because he had flown to China several times since taking the university job in New York in 2016.

“I told him the situation had changed. He didn’t believe me. It was a horrible misjudgment,” Feng said.

Feng was detained for two weeks in 2017 while visiting China to research human rights lawyers and said later that he couldn’t discuss details of his experience.

Rory Medcalf, head of the Australian National University’s National Security College, had warned after the Canadians were detained that an Australian could be the next victim of “China’s hostage-taking.”

“It’s hard to tell the precise reason for this detention,” Medcalf said. “I think rather it’s a signal that we’re now — not only Australia, but really all democracies, all middle powers — are in for a period of sustained tension with China where the safety of our nationals in China simply cannot be assured.”

Columbia University said Yang had been a visiting scholar with the School of International Public Affairs’ Institute for the Study of Human Rights since 2016. Spokeswoman Caroline Adelman said the university had no comment on Yang’s detention. AP

Alleged cocaine smuggler appears in Australian court

AN Australian businessman who was allegedly part of a criminal syndicate that smuggled 1.28 metric tons of cocaine inside a shipment of prefabricated steel from China faced a Sydney court yesterday after becoming the last of three accused conspirators to be extradited from Serbia.

Tristan Waters, 35, was the last of three Australian alleged accomplices to be charged in a Sydney court with helping to import

Australia’s second-largest cocaine haul valued at USD400 million. The illicit drug was found in 2,576 individual blocks inside a shipping container aboard a Chinese freighter

docked in Sydney in April 2017.

Serbian police arrested Waters, Rohan Arnold, 44, and David Campbell, 49, at gunpoint in the foyer of a luxury Belgrade

hotel in January last year and they each fought extradition to Australia.

All three have now been charged in Sydney with drug smuggling offenses that carry potential sentences of life imprisonment.

Waters did not apply for bail or enter pleas when he appeared by a video link in Sydney’s Central Local Court. He will appear in the court next on Feb. 13.

He left Australia for the United Arab Emirates in

2016. Court documents list a luxurious hotel on Dubai’s Palm Jumeirah canals as his address there.

Arnold was extradited from Serbia in March last year and Campbell in July.

Prosecutors allege the trio was lured to the Belgrade hotel by an undercover police operative who told them the cocaine had been mistakenly delivered to New Zealand. They were told they wou-

ld have to hand over \$3 million to get the drugs back.

The largest Australian cocaine haul was 1.4 metric tons (1.5 U.S. tons) found in February 2017 in a yacht that had allegedly smuggled it from the South Pacific. Six people were charged and face potential life prison sentences.

That larger haul was valued at only around \$210 million because its purity was lower than the second-largest haul. AP

■ The illicit drug was found in 2,576 individual blocks inside a shipping container aboard a Chinese freighter docked in Sydney

AP PHOTO



Richard Yu, CEO of Huawei Consumer Business Group

Huawei phone chief counters 'political forces' with record sales

HUAWEI Technologies Co.'s consumer chief dismissed U.S. "political forces" and attempts to crimp the company's growth, saying sales of smartphones and other devices surged by about 50 percent to a record USD52 billion in 2018.

Consumer division president Richard Yu yesterday called reports of Huawei spying for China "fake news" and said its product launch schedule for 2019 remains on track. The outspoken executive, speaking to reporters after helping unveil two in-house developed chipsets for fifth-generation wireless gear, waved off concerns the equipment could be employed in espionage.

Richard Yu called reports of Huawei spying for China 'fake news'

"The concerns all came from the political guys making noise," he said, brushing away a public relations executive who tried to end the briefing. "That's some influence, but definitely we are confident about our future," he said in English.

Huawei faces mounting scrutiny as Washington convinces a growing list of allies to blacklist its networking equipment. Billionaire founder Ren Zhengfei broke years of public silence

last week to dismiss U.S. accusations the closely held telecoms giant helps Beijing spy on Western governments.

It's unclear whether that pressure has affected business. Ren said the company's 2019 revenue is expected to top USD125 billion, while Yu said smartphone shipments rose 35 percent to 206 million units in 2018. He expects Internet of Things devices and 5G to drive sales this year and propel Huawei's goal of becoming the world's No. 1 smartphone maker after surpassing Apple Inc. last year.

"The U.S. market is big, but unfortunately there is a political guy there, we can't do anything," he said. "Even without the U.S. market, we will be the No. 1."

Huawei is angling for the lead in 5G, the technology that powers everything from self-driving cars to smart cities. On Thursday, it unveiled a self-developed chip for 5G base stations as well as a modem chip for devices. The company said it's now shipped over 25,000 of its 5G base stations worldwide. Ryan Ding, chief executive of the carrier business, said 18 out of Huawei's 30 contracts so far have come from Europe.

It intends to show off its first 5G-capable smartphone with a folding screen during the Mobile World Congress next month, though Yu stressed that - at more than 1,000 euros (\$1,135) - it won't be for the masses.

"Our products don't have any ideology," he said. **Bloomberg**

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INDONESIA

Governor convicted of blasphemy freed from prison

A polarizing Christian politician whose campaign comments ignited the largest protests in years in Muslim-majority Indonesia was freed yesterday after serving nearly two years in prison for blasphemy.

Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama, the former governor of Jakarta, left a paramilitary police prison outside the capital early yesterday with members of his family, said his spokesman Sakti Budiono, avoiding waiting supporters and media.

In 2016, Purnama made lighthearted campaign-trail comments that voters shouldn't heed his detractors who said the Quran prohibits Muslims from being led by Christians. Hardliners seized on the remarks as blasphemy, triggering protests that brought hundreds of thousands of white-robed Muslims to the center of Jakarta.

He was defeated in an election by a rival aligned with the protesters and sentenced to prison in May 2017 for blaspheming the Quran. Rights groups said the sentence highlighted why the easily abused blasphemy law should be repealed.

Days before being freed, Purnama posted online that he didn't want supporters to make a fuss about his release and apologized to Jakarta civil servants, including "even my haters" that he'd offended by being rude and arrogant.

The movement against Purnama, an ally of President Joko Widodo, brought fringe Islamic groups into the political mainstream and rattled the govern-



Supporters of former Jakarta Gov. Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama, hold a poster outside a police prison in Depok

ment, highlighting the mingling of religion with politics in Indonesia, the world's third-largest democracy.

Widodo subsequently chose a conservative cleric as his running mate for April's presidential election, hoping to deflect attacks that he is insufficiently Islamic. Last week he announced the release of a radical cleric linked to the Bali bombers and other extremists, but backtracked within days as local and international criticism grew.

Widodo told reporters on Wednesday that Purnama, who was

his deputy governor before he was elected president in 2014, had "gone through a legal process" and he currently had no plans to meet him.

It's unclear if Purnama will return to politics but in a handwritten note posted on Instagram earlier this week he told supporters to not be discouraged and to vote for candidates in April's presidential and legislative elections who support diversity.

Islamic Defenders Front member Novel Bakmumin, who filed a police complaint that led to Purnama being investigated

for blasphemy, said the former governor should stay out of politics.

"I hope Ahok will not repeat a mistake that can cause unrest among Muslims, not only in Indonesia but in the world, because Islam is not his realm to be critical of, he should take care of his own religion," he said.

Purnama, part of the tiny ethnic Chinese minority in Indonesia, was popular with Jakarta's middle class for efforts to stamp out corruption and make the teeming capital more livable.

But others were angered by his brash outspokenness and the demolition of slums that were home to Jakarta's poorest residents.

An activist from the Friends of Ahok group said Purnama's true calling is politics and predicted he would "become a leader, whether a leader of a political party or a leader of this country."

"He is a fighting politician, he fights against corruption, injustice and upholds order and democracy. That caused many people to dislike him and become his political enemies," said Hasan Nasbi.

'Ahok' Purnama left a paramilitary police prison outside the capital early yesterday with members of his family

In an unlikely twist, the 2016 protests also provided opportunists with the impetus for an alleged plot to topple Widodo, the first Indonesian president not from the country's military and political elite.

Police arrested numerous high-profile Indonesians, including a daughter of the founding president, accusing them of plotting to hijack the protests to cause chaos. Their apparent aim was to provide a pretext for military intervention that would unseat Widodo.

They were later released and have not faced trial. **AP**

NORTH KOREA

Kim orders preparations for second Trump meeting

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un has ordered preparations for a second summit with President Donald Trump, saying he'll "wait with patience and in good faith" to work toward a common goal, the North's state media reported yesterday.

Despite Kim's determination for another meeting with Trump, the two remain at odds over fundamental issues. Experts say a major sticking point is what denuclearization steps Kim should take to move forward stalled nuclear negotiations and what rewards Trump should provide to push Kim to take those measures.



The Korean Central News Agency said Kim received a letter from Trump from a North Korean envoy who met the U.S. president in Washington last week. After meeting Kim

Yong Chol, Trump said that he and Kim Jong Un will probably meet around the end of February but did not say exactly when and where the summit would take place.

Yesterday's report said Kim expressed satisfaction with his envoy's meeting with Trump and spoke highly of the U.S. president for "expressing his unusual determination and will for the settlement of the issue with a great interest in the second summit."

"We will wait with patience and in good faith and, together with the U.S., advance step by step toward the goal to be reached by the two countries," Kim was quoted as saying.

Kim also "set forth tasks and orientation for making good technical preparations" for the

second summit high on the agenda, according to KCNA.

Nuclear negotiations have been stuck since Kim and Trump met in Singapore last June for their first summit, which ended with Kim's vague denuclearization pledge that his government had previously used when it called for the withdrawal of the 28,500 U.S. troops in South Korea. A summit accord also stated that the United States and North Korea will commit to establishing new relations and join efforts to build a lasting and stable peace on the Korean Peninsula.

The strongest step Kim could promise during a second summit may be abandoning his long-range missile program targeting the U.S. mainland. That step, if realized, would trigger a strong backlash from many in South Korea and Japan, which are within the striking distance of North Korea's short- and medium-range missiles. In return, Kim is seeking to get U.N. sanctions lifted. He also wants better relations with the United States to try to revive his country's moribund economy to pave the way for a prolonged rule by his family, experts say. **AP**

SINGAPORE

Actor Aloysius Pang dies from military injuries

SINGAPOREAN actor Aloysius Pang died yesterday from injuries he sustained during a military training exercise in New Zealand. He was 28.

Pang was injured in his chest and abdomen when the gun barrel was lowered on a large artillery device he was helping repair Saturday. Singapore's defense ministry said in a statement that Pang had been put on life support following surgeries to repair his damaged organs but died at Waikato Hospital.

Also known as Pang Wei Chong, the actor was known for the movie "Young & Fabulous" (2016) as well as television series that include "The Truth Seekers" (2016) and "C.L.I.F." (2011).



Pang's Singapore agency NoonTalk Media posted a photo of the actor on Facebook and wrote "Dear Aloysius, you'll be missed"

Singapore mandates young men serve in its armed forces, police force or civil defense force. Most serve full-time for two years, and then have annual training obligations. Pang had completed his full-time service, and was an armament technician whose rank

was corporal first class. Before leaving for New Zealand, Pang wrote on Twitter that "Unfortunately, my 2019 will start off with me flying to New Zealand for 3 weeks due to reservist. I'll be back in action soon." The military said it would convene an inde-

pendent committee of inquiry to investigate the circumstances leading up to Pang being injured.

He had been working on a Singapore Self-Propelled Howitzer, a motorized piece of artillery that looks similar to a small tank. The live-firing training exercise took place at the Waiouru training area on New Zealand's North Island and is hosted by New Zealand's military each year.

Pang's Singapore agency NoonTalk Media posted a photo of the actor on Facebook and wrote "Dear Aloysius, you'll be missed."

Other actors also paid tribute. Shane Pow Xunping wrote on Instagram: "It is not enough for you to be a brother in this life. We will continue to be brothers in the next life. I love you." AP

MALAYSIA

Royals pick Pahang sultan as new king

SULTAN Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah of central Pahang state was named Malaysia's new king yesterday, replacing Sultan Muhammad V who abdicated unexpectedly after just two years on the throne.

Sultan Muhammad V, 49, resigned Jan. 6 as Malaysia's 15th king, cutting short his five-year term in the first abdication in the nation's history. No reason was given, but it came after he reportedly married a 25-year-old former Russian beauty queen in November.

The keeper of the ruler's seal, Syed Danial Syed Ahmad, said the Conference of Rulers elected Sultan Abdullah on Thursday under a unique rotating monarchy system. Sultan Abdullah, a key figure in several international sports bodies, will be sworn in on Jan. 31 for a five-year term, Syed Danial said in a statement.

Sultan Abdullah's election had been widely expected, as the Pahang ruler was next in line based on a rotation order established among the



Pahang state Crown Prince Tengku Abdullah

country's nine state rulers. Just days ago, Sultan Abdullah, 59, succeeded his ailing 88-year-old father, Sultan Ahmad Shah, as Pahang sultan. He has been state regent for the past two years due to his father's ill health and the state succession was seen as paving the way for him to become king.

British-educated Sultan Abdullah is a council member of FIFA, the world football governing body, president of the Asian Hockey Federation, and an executive board member of the International Hockey Federation.

AD

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An anti-government protester covers her face with a Venezuelan flag

VENEZUELA

Maduro faces off with US over rival's power claim

Joshua Goodman, Caracas

VENEZUELANs headed into uncharted political waters today [Macau time], with the young leader of a newly united and combative opposition claiming to hold the presidency and socialist President Nicolas Maduro digging in for a fight with the Trump administration.

Violence flared again yesterday during big anti-government demonstrations across Venezuela, and at least seven protesters were reported killed in the escalating confrontation with Maduro, who has been increasingly accused of undemocratic behavior by the United States and many other nations in the region.

Juan Guaido, the new leader of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, turned up the heat by declaring himself interim president before a mass of demonstrators in Caracas. He said it is the only way to end the Maduro "dictatorship" in Venezuela, which has seen millions flee in recent years to escape sky-high inflation and food shortages.

"We know that this will have consequences," Guaido shouted to the cheering crowd, then slipped away to an unknown lo-

cation amid speculation that he would soon be arrested.

In a united and seemingly coordinated front, the U.S., Canada and another dozen mostly Latin American countries, including Brazil, Colombia and Argentina, quickly announced that they supported Guaido's claim to the presidency.

President Donald Trump promised to use the "full weight" of U.S. economic and diplomatic power to push for the restoration of Venezuela's democracy. "The people of Venezuela have courageously spoken out against Maduro and his regime and demanded freedom and the rule of law," he said in a statement.

Maduro fired back by breaking diplomatic relations with the U.S., the biggest trading partner for the oil-exporting country, and ordering American diplomats to get out of the country within 72 hours. Washington said it would ignore the order.

The socialist leader, who so far has been backed by the military, as well as the government-packed courts and a constituent assembly, recalled the long history of heavy-handed U.S. interventions in Latin America during the Cold War as he asked his allies for support.

"Don't trust the gringos," he

thundered to a crowd of red-shirted supporters gathered at the presidential palace. "They don't have friends or loyalties. They only have interests, guts and the ambition to take Venezuela's oil, gas and gold."

Russian officials reacted with anger to the opposition protests, with some placing the blame on the U.S.

■ **Today, attention will shift to Washington, where diplomats at the Organization of American States will hold an emergency meeting**

Alexei Pushkov, chairman of the information committee at the Russian Federation Council, called Guaido's declaration "an

attempted coup" backed by the U.S.

Russia has been propping up Maduro with arms deliveries and loans. Maduro visited Moscow in December, seeking Russia's political and financial support.

Today, attention will shift to Washington, where diplomats at the Organization of American States will hold an emergency meeting on the Venezuelan situation. The debate promises to be charged, and the National Assembly's newly picked diplomatic envoy will be lobbying to take Venezuela's seat from Maduro's ambassador.

Meanwhile, many Venezuelans will be looking for Guaido to re-emerge and provide guidance on the opposition's next steps. The armed forces' top command, which has so far remained silent, is also expected to issue a statement, although nobody expects the general's loyalties to Maduro to have shifted.

The price of oil slipped for the third time in four days, an indication that international energy markets are not overly concerned yet that the situation in Venezuela — America's third top oil supplier and owner of Houston-based Citgo — will disrupt global crude supplies.

Tensions began ramping up earlier this month as Maduro took the oath of office for a second six-year term won in an election last May that many in the region contend was not free or fair because his strongest opponents were barred from running.

The 35-year-old Guaido, a virtually unknown lawmaker at the start of the year, has reignited the hopes of Venezuela's often beleaguered opposition by taking a rebellious tack amid Venezuela's crushing economic crisis.

He escalated his campaign by declaring that the constitution gives him, as president of the congress, the authority to take over as interim president and form a transitional government until he calls new elections.

Raising his right hand in unison with tens of thousands of supporters, he took a symbolic oath to assume executive powers: "Today, January 23, 2019, I swear to formally assume the powers of the national executive as president in charge of Venezuela."

The assault on Maduro's rule came after large crowds gathered in Caracas waving flags and chanting "Get out, Maduro!" in what was the biggest demonstration since a wave of unrest that left more than 120 dead in 2017.

There were no signs that security forces heeded Guaido's call to join the anti-Maduro movement and go easy on demonstrators. Hours after most demonstrators went home, violence broke out in Altamira, an upscale zone of Caracas and an opposition stronghold, when National Guardsmen descended on hundreds of youths, some of them with their faces covered, lingering around a plaza. Popping tear gas canisters sent hundreds running and hordes of protesters riding two and three on motorcycles fleeing in panic.

Blocks away, a small group knocked a pair of guardsmen riding tandem off their motorcycle, pelting them with coconuts as they sped down a wide avenue. Some in the group struck the two guardsmen with their hands while others ran off with their gear and set their motorcycle on fire.

Meanwhile, four demonstrators were killed by gunfire in the western city of Barinas as security forces were dispersing a crowd. Three others were killed amid unrest in the border city of San Cristobal.

Amid the showdown, all eyes are on the military, the traditional arbiter of political disputes in Venezuela — and to which Guaido has been targeting his message.

On Monday, a few dozen national guardsmen seized a stockpile of assault rifles in a pre-dawn uprising that was quickly quelled, although residents in a nearby slum showed support for the mutineers by burning cars and stoning security forces. Disturbances flared up that night in other working-class neighborhoods where the government has traditionally enjoyed strong support, and more violence was reported Tuesday night. **AP**

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CINETEATRO

24 JAN - 30 JAN



GLASS

ROOM 1

2:30, 4:45, 7:15, 9:30 pm

Director: M. Night Shyamalan

Starring: Bruce Willis, James McAvoy, Samuel L. Jackson

Language: English

Duration: 112min

SECOND ACT

ROOM 2

2:30, 7:30, 9:30 pm

Director: Peter Segal

Starring: Jennifer Lopez, Vanessa Hudgens

Language: English

Duration: 89min

MORE THAN BLUE

ROOM 2

4:30 pm

Director: Gavin Lin

Starring: Jasper Liu, Ivy Chen

Language: Putonghua (Chinese & English)

Duration: 105min

TAKE POINT

ROOM 3

4:30, 4:45, 9:30 pm

Director: KIM Byung-woo

Starring: Ha Jung-woo, LEE Sun-kyun

Language: Korean (Chinese & English)

Duration: 95min

Offbeat

JIMMY PAGE'S DRAGON GUITAR
REBORN AFTER 50 YEARS ON ICE

After five decades, Jimmy Page's dragon has re-emerged from its lair.

Fender instruments on Wednesday gave the public its first look at its recreation of a Telecaster guitar that Page once painted with a dragon, a long-lost piece of six-string history that marked the guitar hero's last days in the Yardbirds and first days in Led Zeppelin.

The instrument with the psychedelic green-and-red serpent on its body represents "a pivotal moment for the guitar and music," said Paul Waller, the master builder who worked side-by-side with Page to make him a spot-on match of the guitar before making 50 more by hand to sell to the public.

The reboot was hatched when Page was looking through photographs for a book celebrating last year's 50th anniversary of Led Zeppelin. The dragon guitar, which he says was once his "Excalibur," kept popping up in them, and he started to think it was time to get past his bitterness about its fate.

The 1959 Telecaster, pre-paint, had been a cherished gift from his fellow former Yardbird bandmate Jeff Beck.

"It was given to me with so much affection," Page told The Associated Press in October. "I really wanted to customize the instrument, almost consecrate the instrument."

Page first decorated it with mirrors, then pulled out poster paints and used his art-school skills to summon the dragon.

He would use the guitar to write and record songs like "Dazed and Confused" for the first Led Zeppelin album, work as significant as any in the history of the electric guitar.

But a clueless house-sitter, not thinking much of Page's painting, put his own mosaic artwork over the dragon and presented it to Page as a gift. Page said it was all he could do not to hit the guy over the head with it. Instead, he stripped it bare and angrily threw it into storage, where it sat for 50 years.

TV canal macau



FRIDAY

13:00	TDM News (Repetição)
13:30	Telejornal RTPi (Diferido)
15:00	Mistura Fina
15:45	Zig Zag
16:00	Os Compadres
16:40	Quem Quer Ser Milionário
17:35	Portuguese In New England - Fim
18:00	João Semana
18:50	TDM Talk Show (Repetição)
19:25	Livros com João Guedes (Repetição)
19:35	Os Nossos Dias Sr.2
20:30	Telejornal
21:15	Sinais de Vida - Estreia
22:00	Contentor 13
22:30	Motel Bates Sr.1
23:15	TDM News
23:50	Dot.Com
01:35	Telejornal (Repetição)
02:05	RTPi Directo

SATURDAY

10:30	Zig Zag
11:00	Os Ursos Boonie e o Fantástico Outono
11:30	Beo and Peno Sr.2
11:40	Chai Chai
12:00	Novos Descobridores
12:30	Uma Mesa Portuguesa... Com Certeza!
13:00	TDM News (Repetição)
13:30	Telejornal RTPi (Diferido)
14:30	Os Nossos Dias Sr.2 - Compacto
16:50	Janela Indiscreta
17:20	Hora dos Portugueses Sr.2
18:10	Animais Anónimos
18:50	Joker
19:35	O Mundo da Dança Sr.1
20:30	Telejornal
21:15	Um Santo Vizinho
23:00	Fotobox
23:15	TDM News
23:50	Cá Por Casa Sr.2
00:55	Telejornal (Repetição)
01:40	RTPi Directo

SUNDAY

10:30	Animaizinhos Selvagens Exploradores
11:00	Missa Dominical
12:00	Visita Guiada Sr.2
12:30	Cozinha em Forma
13:00	TDM News (Repetição)
13:30	Telejornal RTPi (Diferido)
14:30	Top Chef Jr. Sr.1
15:15	Rat-A-Tat Sr.1
15:25	Míudo Graúdo
16:05	Viva a Música Sr.4
16:55	Brainstorm
17:40	Um Santo Vizinho (Repetição)
19:25	Bem-Vindos a Beirais
20:10	Aqui Há História
20:30	Telejornal
21:15	Contraponto
22:20	A Terra do Padre
23:15	TDM News
23:50	TDM Reportagem (Repetição)
00:10	Mulheres Assim
01:05	Telejornal (Repetição)
01:45	RTPi Directo

this day in history

1998 POPE CALLS FOR
REFORM IN CUBA

Pope John Paul II has called for reform in Cuba and the release of political prisoners while condemning US attempts to isolate the country.

The Pope is the first pontiff to visit the Communist Caribbean island.

Speaking in the capital, Havana, he said freedom of conscience was "the basis and foundation of all other human rights".

"A modern state cannot make atheism or religion one of its political ordinances," he added.

The Cuban President, Fidel Castro, who was educated in a Jesuit school, declared Cuba an atheist state after he took power in 1959.

In 1992 Cuba dropped its commitment to atheism from its constitution and last December Christmas was reinstated as an official holiday ahead of the Pope's five-day visit.

Today the Pope urged an end to Cuba's political and economic isolation: "She needs to open herself to the world and the world needs to draw close to Cuba".

He also condemned the "resurgence of a certain capitalist neo-liberalism which subordinates the human person to blind market forces" and "often places unbearable burdens upon less favoured countries.

"We thus see a small number of countries growing exceedingly rich at the cost of increasing impoverishment of a great number of countries," he said.

President Castro, whom the Church blames for decades of persecution of Catholics, urged every able-bodied Cuban to attend the papal mass, if not out of conviction, at least out of respect.

And according to BBC correspondent Tim Gibb there was a mood of intense excitement in a crowd of several hundred thousand.

During the address in Havana's Revolution Square, which lasted more than three hours, the Pope was constantly interrupted by people chanting, "Long live Juan Pablo; he wants everyone to be free!"

The president, sitting in the front row, listened intently and smiled occasionally while alongside him sat Nobel-winning novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez of Colombia.

The Mass, like his earlier one in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba, was also broadcast on television nationwide.

The Pope looked tired at times during the long ceremony, but he was not too weary to joke about it. "I am not against applause, it allows the Pope to rest," he said on one occasion with a wry smile.

This morning he called for the release of Cuban political prisoners at a Mass on the outskirts of Havana at one of the country's principal shrines.

There are an estimated 500 prisoners of conscience in Cuba. Opposition activists face constant harassment and arrest.

Earlier in the week, the Pope personally handed Fidel Castro a list of names which the Church would like to see released.

So far there's been no public response from the Cuban government; however the country's vice-president, Carlos Lahe said the list would be given proper attention.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

In his farewell speech the following day, the Pope condemned the economic embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States, describing it as an indiscriminate measure that hurt the poor.

On his return, the Pope described the trip as unforgettable, and a great event of spiritual, cultural and social reconciliation for the island.

He compared the five-day Cuban trip to the one he made to his native Poland in 1979 and hoped it would set off a train of events that would benefit the Cuban people.

Two weeks later his prayers were answered when Cuba released more than 300 political prisoners as an act of goodwill.

In March 1998, the US announced it was ready to allow the return of direct flights to Cuba to increase the flow of humanitarian aid to the Cuban people.

But it was not until October 2000 that the US House of Representatives approved the sale of food and medicines to Cuba. In November 2001 the US exported food to Cuba for the first time in more than 40 years after a request from the Cuban government to help it cope with the aftermath of Hurricane Michelle.

But tensions between Cuba, the US and Europe resurfaced in 2003 after a crackdown on dissidents that saw the execution of three men who tried to escape to America.

In May 2004 new US sanctions restricted US-Cuba family visits and cash remittances from expatriates. President Castro led a protest march against measures.

The Pope died on 2 April 2005 after he failed to recover from a throat operation.

YOUR STARS

Aries Mar. 21-Apr. 19 You need to slow down a bit and try to just relax...

Taurus April 20-May 20 Someone new blows into your life and shakes things up for the better.

Gemini May 21-Jun. 21 Things are a bit weird today - so see if you can just nod along and pretend to understand...

Cancer Jun. 22-Jul. 22 People are likely to misunderstand you today - so make sure that you are being as clear as you can be.

Leo Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Try to help someone today - your energy is meant to be shared!

Virgo Aug. 23-Sept. 22 You don't mind openly lusting after that job, gadget or project - your ambition is perfectly okay...

Libra Sep.23-Oct. 22 This isn't the best feeling in the world, but you are still committed to this project or person.

Scorpio Oct. 23 - Nov. 21 Today is perfect for arranging new deals of all kinds - especially related to business.

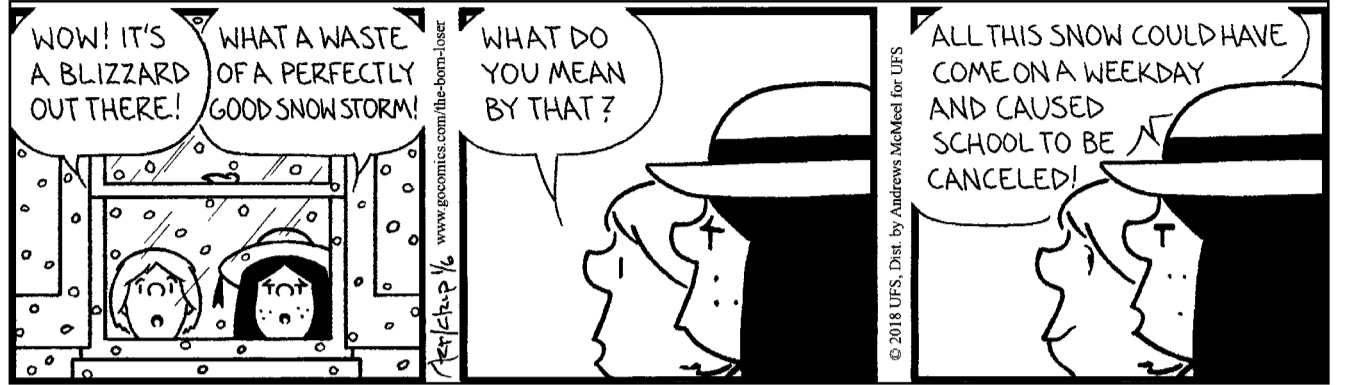
Sagittarius Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Things are a little weird today - but that's not such a bad thing!

Capricorn Dec. 22-Jan. 19 You need to feel a sense of accomplishment today - and fortunately, it's easy to come by!

Aquarius Jan. 20-Feb. 18 You're not sure what's going on today - and that's not the end of the world.

Pisces Feb.19-Mar. 20 You need to deal with a leadership vacuum today - it could be anywhere.

THE BORN LOSER by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

Easy

9x9 grid for Easy Sudoku puzzle.

Easy+

9x9 grid for Easy+ Sudoku puzzle.

Medium

9x9 grid for Medium Sudoku puzzle.

Hard

9x9 grid for Hard Sudoku puzzle.

WEATHER

CHINA

Table of weather conditions for various Chinese cities including Beijing, Harbin, Tianjin, etc.

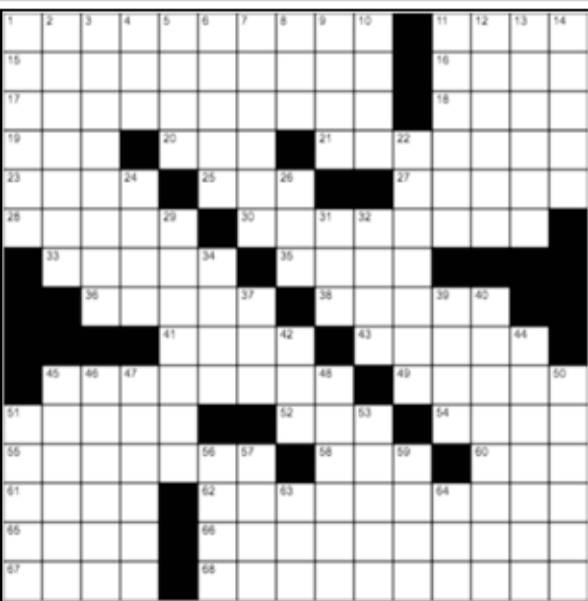
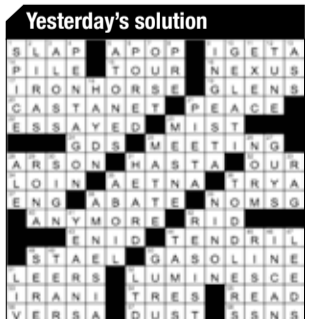
WORLD

Table of weather conditions for various world cities including Moscow, Frankfurt, Paris, etc.

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1-Edges; 11- Tailor's line; 15- Outward show; 16- Yellow spread; 17- Contrived; 18- The ___ Love; 19- Andy Capp's wife; 20- Fall from grace; 21- Natives of the Middle East; 23- Lame movement; 25- Long, thin snake-like fish; 27- Bothered; 28- Early computer; 30- Trouble; 33- Go into; 35- Musical composition for two; 36- Columbus's birthplace; 38- Raw hides; 41- Yarn; 43- Truth ___; 45- Fragment; 49- Gogol's "___ Bulba"; 51- Hermit; 52- Your, to Yes; 54- Chipper; 55- Fashionable; 58- Hearst kidnap grp.; 60- For shame!; 61- Tidy; 62- Utterly unyielding; 65- Sandy tract; 66- Rude; 67- River of Flanders; 68- Delicacy;

DOWN: 1- Confuse; 2- Like a mineral of hydrated silica; 3- About to take place; 4- Hockey goal part; 5- Orator station; 6- Bandleader Shaw; 7- Showered; 8- Daughter of Cadmus; 9- Old French coins; 10- Zaire's Mobutu ___ Seko; 11- Zoological segment; 12- Thrills; 13- Virgil hero; 14- Damp; 22- European swallow; 24- Crown; 26- Pot top; 29- 100 years; 31- Eat dinner; 32- Golf pegs, northern English river; 34- Horse shade; 37- "Rope-a-dope" boxer; 39- Mouse catcher; 40- Guaranteed to succeed; 42- Baby newt; 44- Semper Fi sayers; 45- Gift recipients; 46- Demented; 47- Dog breed; 48- Toady; 50- Spirited horses; 51- Jitterbug dance; 53- Slope; 56- Praise; 57- Poet ___ St. Vincent Millay; 59- Years in old Rome; 63- Bordeaux buddy; 64- Sawbuck;



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FOOTBALL

Spain not immune to problems in VAR's debut season

Tales Azzoni, Madrid

REAL Madrid complained about it. Barcelona defended it. Fans are struggling to understand it.

Video review is not escaping controversy in its first season in Spain.

As in other countries, the implementation of VAR hasn't been smooth in the Spanish league, with confusion and criticism coming along with the process.

The system's debut had not prompted major discussions early on, but two controversial decisions involving powerhouses Real Madrid and Barcelona were enough to make it a hot topic.

First it was a non-call of a penalty on Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior in the team's 2-0 home loss to Real Sociedad in the beginning of the month. Then came the confirmation of a goal by striker Luis Suarez in Barcelona's 3-1 win over Leganes on Sunday.

Madrid felt the images clearly showed a foul on Vinicius Junior,



while Leganes was sure the review would mean a foul by Suarez on its goalkeeper before the goal.

But both decisions stood, prompting complaints by the clubs and confusion among fans and analysts.

"It's a tool we welcomed with excitement," Real Madrid coach Santiago Solari said Wednesday. "We want it to be used correctly.

The less people talk about it, the better it is. This is the first year, it will be improved. What is important is that we all get used to it."

The Spanish federation analyzed the use of the VAR in the first half of the season and concluded it was a positive debut although more than 120 mistakes were not corrected by the system, including seven penalty calls. It

said the VAR intervened in 30 goal situations, confirming half of them. The number of overall mistakes was significantly reduced, officials said.

The biggest complaint by fans and clubs has been the lack of criteria by the officiating crews when using — or not using — the video review.

Audio from the conversation between the officials during the Madrid game was made public, with the VAR official telling the referee that "everything was OK" on the play involving Vinicius Junior, when it looked like he had his leg touched by the goalkeeper inside the area.

Fans didn't seem satisfied with what they heard, and they have been booing loudly every time the announcer at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium mentions information about the VAR before games.

"When a top team is affected, the impact is greater," Spanish league president Javier Tebas told Spanish media. "We are happy with how things are going so far."

There had been plenty of controversy with video review before the decisions involving Real Madrid and Barcelona.

Valladolid owner Ronaldo, the former Brazil great, took to Twitter to talk about VAR after his team's Copa del Rey elimination against Getafe, when a late offside call hurt his team.

"The VAR is here to correct mistakes, but it won't eliminate all of them," he posted.

Levante had already issued a statement asking for an explanation about the VAR criteria after a penalty was awarded against the team in a loss against Atletico Madrid. Last year, Atletico also released a statement criticizing how the video review was being used. Atletico felt a hand ball by a Real Madrid player was not called in its match against the city rival, despite images clearly showing it.

Spain was one of the late adopters of VAR, although the Premier League will only start using it next season. Italy was one of the countries which struggled the most with video review after it started using it last season, although things have improved significantly since then.

"Referees make mistakes and the VAR is not perfect," said Carlos Velasco Carballo, head of the referee's technical committee in Spain. "But the numbers so far have shown that we are improving. We have to be proud of it." AP

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opinion

World Views

Leonid Bershidsky, Bloomberg

MADURO'S FALL WOULD BE A DEFEAT FOR PUTIN TOO

If Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's regime falls, Vladimir Putin will have to write off yet another costly geopolitical bet. Just don't expect Moscow to stop taking such gambles as it tries to counter U.S. influence across the globe.

Russia is Venezuela's most important foreign sponsor after China. Data on these countries' financing of Venezuela are scarce, but China's investment has been estimated to be as much as USD70 billion, most of it to be paid back in oil. Russia and its state-owned companies have lent and injected more than \$17 billion over the last 20 years. President Putin promised the latest \$6 billion, plus 600,000 tons of grain, in December.

Much of Russia's lending and investment has been channeled through Rosneft, the state-owned oil and gas giant run by Putin's ally Igor Sechin. According to its most recent available annual report, Rosneft sold \$2.5 billion of oil produced by the Venezuelan state-owned company PDVSA by the end of 2017.

Though Venezuela has been slow to supply oil to cover its debts, Russia has, on the whole, been happy to let them accumulate so it can receive potentially lucrative oil and gas extraction licenses. It has large minority stakes in five joint ventures with PDVSA. They produced 59 million barrels of oil in 2017, more than 8 percent of Venezuela's annual output. "We will never leave and no one will be able to kick us out of there," Sechin once said of Rosneft's plans for the Latin American country.

That, however, may be no more than wishful thinking. After the U.S. toppled Saddam Hussein, Russian oil major Lukoil lost its license to work in Iraq's West Qurna field. It only managed to return in 2009 as part of a consortium with Norway's Statoil – and only then after Russia assented to a major debt write-off for the new Iraqi government.

The fall of the Qaddafi regime in Libya scuppered projects in which Russian companies Gazprom and Tatneft had invested \$1 billion, as well as a high-speed railroad state-owned Russian Railways was working on. Talks with the Libyan authorities about reviving the projects are continuing.

If Maduro falls and a U.S.-backed government takes his place, it's highly likely that the Russian projects will be suspended and Venezuela's debts won't be repaid. That explains Moscow's reaction to President Donald Trump's recognition of opposition leader Juan Guaido as the country's president. The West is engaged in a "hands-on regime change," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova wrote on Facebook. Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov spoke of "an attempt to usurp supreme power."

Nothing is decided yet; the Venezuelan military, which enjoys a close relationship with its Russian counterpart, still appears to be behind Maduro. But he can't hope to hold on to power for long amid economic chaos, hyperinflation and a near-famine. The Russian government has even suggested an economic recovery plan to the Venezuelans, calling for a stop to irresponsible money-printing, tax reforms, and a form of minimum basic income. But it may well be too late for any of that; no amount of repression can prolong suffering on this scale indefinitely.

So why does Putin keep choosing friends so unwisely? Despite the Libyan fiasco and the \$3 billion wasted on supporting Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's failing government in its final months, why does Moscow keep backing Maduro and others like him? [...]

Unlike China, for which even politically motivated spending is a means of getting economic influence and, ultimately, a return on investment, Putin's spending is primarily about Soviet-style geopolitics – even if it's structured as a capitalist business deal.

In Venezuela, though, the economic interest may be stronger than in many other places. Though the country can't produce much oil now because of the government's gross mismanagement, it has the world's largest crude reserves. For Russia, which has only one-third of those proved reserves, a strong presence in Venezuela helps guarantee a role in the crude market for as long as there is demand.

If Maduro loses, it will be a painful defeat for Putin. But it won't stop him from funding other Maduros the world over at Russian taxpayers' expense. And if the Venezuelan president manages to cling to power, that will only convince Putin that such spending pays off.

THE VAN GOGH'S 'SUNFLOWERS' STAYING PUT IN AMSTERDAM MUSEUM

The Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam says that a "full body scan" carried out on its version of the Dutch master's iconic "Sunflowers" has shown the painting is in "stable but vulnerable" condition and not fit to travel.

The museum's director Axel Rueger said yesterday that results of research carried out during an ongoing restoration mean that the world famous

painting will no longer be loaned out to other museums.

He says "from now on this top work from our collection is staying at home in Amsterdam, where people can admire it every day." The museum's version of Van Gogh's masterpiece is one of five similar paintings of sunflowers in a vase held by museums around the world. The painting will go back on display next month.



Station	Air quality
Roadside	70-100 Bad
High Density Residential Area	60-70 Moderate
Ambient	70-100 Bad

SOURCE: DSI/MG

WORLD BRIEFS



IRAN arrested more than 7,000 people last year, including dozens of journalists, in what Amnesty International yesterday called a "shameless campaign of repression".

SUDAN's embattled president met the ruler of the tiny, energy-rich nation of Qatar, likely looking for financial support amid weeklong protests challenging his 29-year rule in the African nation.

SWEDEN A Russian reconnaissance plane escorted by two Russian fighter jets briefly violated Sweden's air space on the country's Baltic Sea coast, the Swedish military said yesterday.



SPAIN Police say that two taxi drivers protesting for tighter regulations for app-based ride-hailing services have been arrested in clashes with police in Madrid that slightly injured three officers.

BRITAIN Lawmakers handling Brexit for the European Parliament are urging British Prime Minister Theresa May to inform her EU partners how she plans to advance the deadlocked process and what she wants from them.



VENEZUELA headed into uncharted political waters yesterday, with the young leader of a newly united and combative opposition claiming to hold the presidency and socialist President Nicolas Maduro digging in for a fight with the Trump administration. More on p14

US Prosecutors are preparing to charge a 19-year-old man from El Salvador who was living in the U.S. illegally with killing four people in two different Nevada cities, while investigators looked for possible links between the victims and suspect.

Weinstein hires pack of new lawyers for NY rape case



Harvey Weinstein (left) arrives at New York Supreme Court with his attorney Benjamin Brafman

Michael R. Sisak, New York

HARVEY Weinstein unveiled a new legal team brimming with star power yesterday [Macau time] to defend him at his upcoming New York rape and sexual assault trial. Weinstein's four new lawyers all have experience defending high-profile clients, including Casey Anthony, former sports stars Aaron Hernandez and Kobe Bryant and, in a strange twist, one of Weinstein's own Hollywood accusers.

Two of the attorneys, Jose Baez and Ronald Sullivan, represented actress Rose McGowan last year in a Virginia drug case. McGowan, who pleaded no contest last week, was among the first of dozens of women who came forward to accuse Weinstein of sexual assault.

The pair join Bryant's former lawyer Pamela Mackey and ex-Manhattan prosecutor Duncan Levin in representing Weinstein on what's shaping up to be a modern version of the "dream team" that secured an acquittal for O.J. Simpson at his 1995 murder trial.

The quartet of lawyers replaces Benjamin Brafman, a tactical and pugnacious New York City defense lawyer who had been by Weinstein's side since he was arrested and paraded out of a Manhattan police station last spring.

McGowan, who's not involved in the criminal case, blasted the involvement of her former attorneys as a "major conflict of interest."

"I knew there was shadiness going on behind the scenes," the "Charmed" star told The Daily Beast. "This is why my case didn't go to trial – my instinct was my lawyers had been bought off."

"I thought Harvey would get to them behind the scenes and I wouldn't have fair representation," McGowan added.

Baez and Sullivan said in a statement that McGowan's case had nothing to do with Weinstein and that they were certain there was no conflict.

"We were pleased to represent our former client, Ms. Rose McGowan, in a matter unrelated to Mr. Weinstein's current charges," the lawyers said. "After consultation with ethics counsel, we are certain no conflict of interest exists. We wish Ms. McGowan well with all her future endeavors."

Weinstein, 66, is charged with raping an unidentified female acquaintance in 2013 and performing a forcible sex act on a different woman in 2006. A conviction could put him in prison for the rest of his life.

Brafman and Weinstein said in a statement last week that they had "agreed to part ways amicably." Their split came a month after they lost a hard fought bid to get his

sexual assault case thrown out. Brafman and Weinstein are due in court today for a judge to formally sign off on the lawyer swap.

Baez, perhaps the best-known name on the new legal team, first gained fame for representing Anthony, the Florida mom whose televised trial in 2011 ended in an acquittal on charges accusing her of killing her young daughter.

Baez and Sullivan successfully defended New England Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez against murder charges in 2017. Hernandez, in prison for a 2015 murder conviction, killed himself five days later.

Mackey, who's based in Denver, represented Bryant when the former basketball star was accused of raping a 19-year-old at a Colorado resort in 2003. The charges were dismissed when prosecutors said the accuser was no longer interested in testifying.

In a statement released through a Weinstein spokesman, Mackey said she is thrilled to work with her friends, Baez and Sullivan, and "as they said, Harvey Weinstein is innocent and we are here to exonerate him."

Weinstein denies all allegations of nonconsensual sex. "Mr. Weinstein steadfastly maintains his innocence in this matter and we are looking forward to assisting Mr. Weinstein in his defense," Baez and Sullivan said. AP