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N.º 3451
FRIDAY
10 Jan 2020
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Air Quality Moderate

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MOP 8.00
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A DRAFT BILL TO IMPOSE AGE RESTRICTIONS ON THE SALE OF ALCOHOL IS RUNNING BEHIND SCHEDULE

P5

ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT SYMBOLS UNITE AND DIVIDE HONG KONG PROTESTERS

P8

MACAU RESIDENTS EXPRESSED OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR A VISITOR TAX, BUT INDUSTRY OPERATORS AND TOURISTS REJECTED IT

P6



China's economy czar will visit Washington next week for the signing of an interim trade deal, the government said yesterday. Vice Premier Liu He, Beijing's chief envoy in talks with Washington over their tariff war, had been expected to attend the signing but the Commerce Ministry's statement was the first official confirmation. Washington postponed planned tariff increases following the announcement of the "Phase 1" deal in October.

China A preliminary investigation into viral pneumonia illnesses sickening dozens of people in and around China has identified the possible cause as a new type of coronavirus, state media said yesterday. Chinese health authorities did not immediately confirm the report from state broadcaster CCTV.

More on p11



Japan One of the creative directors for this year's Tokyo Olympics has resigned following allegations of what are being termed "power harassment." Kaoru Sugano stepped away from the position last month and his resignation was confirmed yesterday by the Tokyo organizing committee. Tokyo organizers said Sugano had been disciplined for conduct at his employer Dentsu, the giant Japanese advertising and marketing agency that is handling much of the promotion for the Tokyo Olympics.

More on backpage

VICTOR GARCIA

POLICE CHIEF ASKED TO DISPEL YOUTHS' FEAR OF SURVEILLANCE

P2



VAPING 'LIFESTYLE' UNDER ATTACK

ANTONIN FELS



P4



INSIDE

REGIONAL COOPERATION NEEDED FOR TELEMARKETING CRACKDOWN

The Office for Personal Data Protection (GPDP) wants to work more closely with other regions to combat illicit telemarketing tactics. In the GPDP's reply to lawmaker Sulu Sou's earlier interpellation, the office stated that it had difficulties in terms of cross-boundary law enforcement when cracking down on telemarketing tactics. The GPDP will enhance communications with other regions in order to draft a feasible plan for cross-border law enforcement. Currently, the GPDP has one hotline receiving residents' reports concerning personal data. The office disagreed with Sulu Sou, who criticized the reporting procedure as inconvenient. The office said that no abnormalities have appeared with the GPDP's current reporting mechanism.

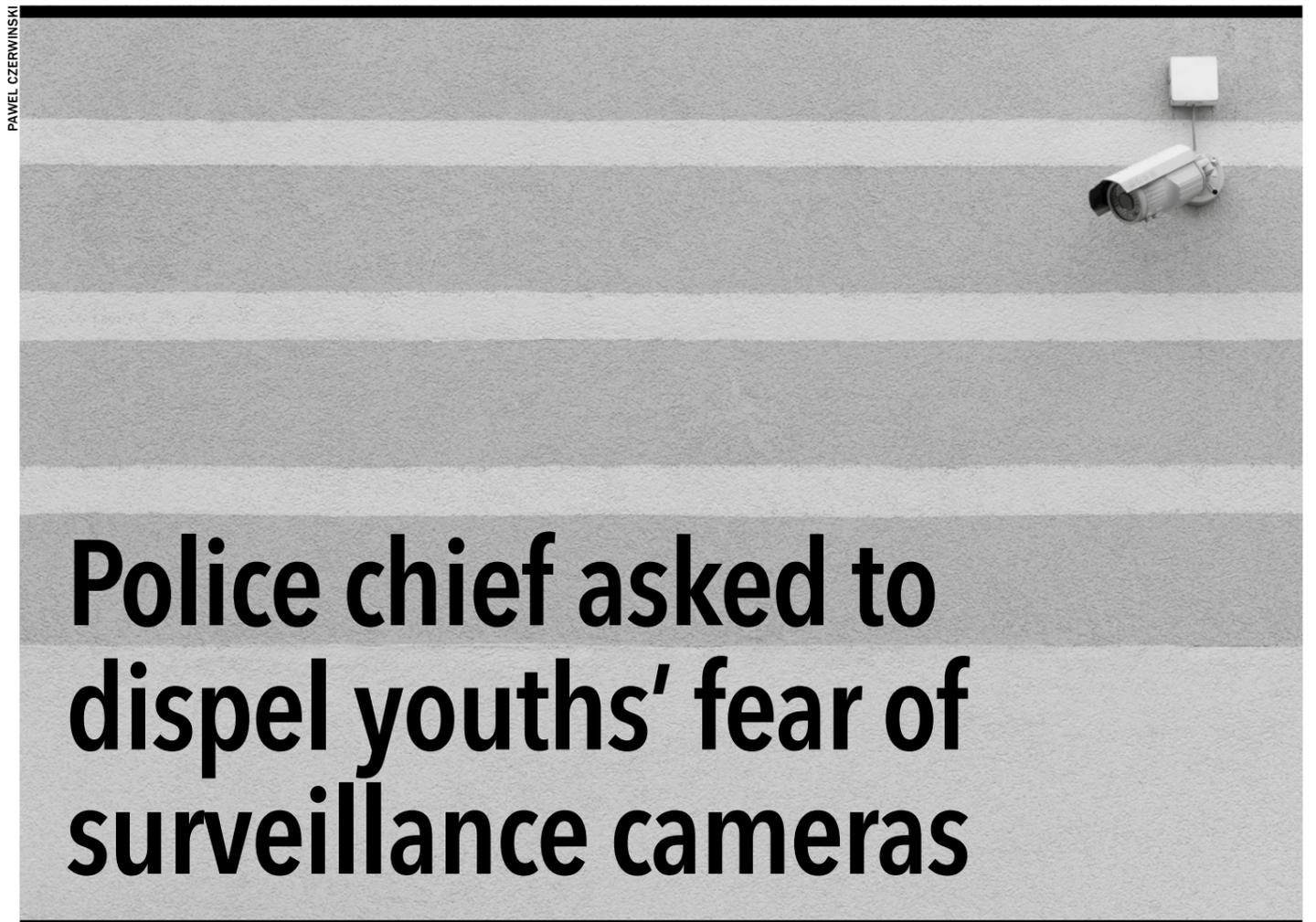
LAWMAKER WANTS GOVERNMENT SCHOOL OF ADMINISTRATION

Lawmaker Lei Chan U has once again proposed that the local government establish a government school of administration, with the purpose of training civil servants. Lei wrote to the local government asking about training for civil servants. He argued that Macau's current civil servant training system and methods were not able to meet society's demands in terms of public services. The lawmaker revived his old idea of establishing a government school of administration to train civil servants. He had previously made this suggestion in 2017, before he was a lawmaker. He asked whether the current government would consider establishing such a school and start looking for educators. Mainland China has its equivalent, the China National School of Administration, also called the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China.

DSPA HIGHLIGHTS RESULTS IN ELECTRONICS' RECYCLING

The Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) said it has recorded positive results in the latest electronics recycling program. The local government began implementing a new recycling program from January 1 for more types of electronics and electrical devices, including refrigerators, air conditioners, washing machines, television sets and computers. It has also been providing free door-to-door recycling collection services. As of yesterday, a total of 572 items have been recycled by the DSPA. The bureau also received 147 appointments for recycling collections services. More than 350 buildings have signed up for the building recycling scheme. The DSPA believes that the number will continue to increase in future.

PAWEL CZERWINSKI



Police chief asked to dispel youths' fear of surveillance cameras

ANTHONY LAM

THE heads of some Macau media outlets yesterday expressed their belief at a Judiciary Police (PJ) media seminar that young people had misunderstood the purpose and scope of public surveillance cameras. Their comments are a response to public criticism of the under-development surveillance system and what many see as a lack of detailed legislation governing it.

The media representatives also said that these same young people in Macau have been misinformed by the incidents taking place in Hong Kong, and have begun to feel anxious about the surveillance camera system.

They asked the PJ director, Sit Chong Meng, to make clarifications on the use of the system.

The PJ director explained the procedure which must be followed if any PJ investigation team needs to filter information from the raw footage captured by the cameras.

Currently, the department supervising the surveillance camera system is an information technology department, rather than an investigative

department.

"If any investigation department needs to access the footage, first and foremost, there must be a case," said Sit. "If you don't have a case number, I'm sorry, no access for you."

Afterwards, a form must be completed and signed by the head of the investigation team before being submitted for approval by the information technology team.

Even with access granted, the competent investigators can only view the footage at the information technology department, with their phone kept outside of the viewing room. Furthermore, the computer keeps a record of all the viewing conducted.

Unless it is a life-threatening situation, such as an Alzheimer's disease patient who has gone missing, a case number is the key to opening the first door, according to the PJ head.

He expressly disclosed that there were complaints regarding the time-consuming nature of the procedures. Sit believes, however, that guidelines from the Unitary Police Service, which are currently in effect, must be followed.

At the interview session held following the seminar, Sit,

who constantly reiterated the efficiency and effectiveness of solving crimes with the help of surveillance cameras, was asked once again about the system. He made reference to the system's utility at the seminar.

"I cannot emphasize enough that the surveillance camera system is extremely helpful in solving street crimes," the PJ head stressed. "Like I have mentioned several times, we traced down certain suspects with the help of the surveillance camera system in a murder case last year."

The PJ chief was referring to a case that took place in Cotai, caused by conflicts between prostitution gangs. Sit also disclosed that a number of robbery cases were also solved using the system.

In the fourth phase of the project, cameras will be installed in less populous areas. Sit believes that the addition of surveillance cameras in such areas will deter those inclined to commit crimes.

Last year, the Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak, disclosed that his authorities would start testing the technology from 2020, but that date was later postponed.

The Cyber Security Law was

also discussed during yesterday's seminar, which came into effect on December 22 last year. At the same time, the PJ officially launched its Cyber Security Incident Alert and Emergency Center. The law raised concerns among members of the younger generation too.

Sit explained that under the stipulation of the law, his bureau can only monitor the flow of data at a particular time. The particulars of the data will remain unknown to the PJ.

"Of course, further details and guidelines [on the PJ's authority] need to be deemed by future meetings of the Cyber Security Commission," Sit added.

As for a new law, also enacted on December 22, that requires the buyer of prepaid SIM cards to be registered, the PJ was told by various sources, including telecom operators and independent sellers, that customers abide by the law without hesitation.

Some who bought the SIM card before the enactment of the law had even returned to have their identities registered with the operators, said the police director, who was not able to cite the number of such cases yesterday.

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MacauDaily 澳門每日時報
Times

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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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Advertisement advertising@macaudailytimes.com
For subscription and general issues: general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd

SURVEY

MAJORITY OF MACAU RESIDENTS SAY THEY TRUST BEIJING

JULIE ZHU

SEVENTY-EIGHT percent of local residents say they trust the central government in Beijing, a survey released by the Macau University of Science and Technology has shown.

Yesterday, the school's Macau Media Research Center released a report on Macau residents' new media habits. For the first time, the center measured local residents' levels of trust towards and views on both the central government and the Macau local government.

Local residents put less faith in the Macau government than the central government in Beijing, according to the survey, with about 72% of respondents saying they trusted the local authorities.

The rest of the respondents either distrusted the two governments or did not express a clear opinion.

Age and an interest in following new media were both positively correlated with the level of trust resident respondents had in the

DANIEL BEITLER



governments. Meanwhile, income had a negative correlation, meaning that the more money a respondent made, the less confidence they had in the local and central governments.

More than 80% of respondents follow at least one social media account belonging to a traditional media organization. About half followed official government accounts on social media, while 61% followed those of at least one private enterprise.

The survey also found that Macau residents who followed an official WeChat account were more likely to trust the government. Forty-four percent of respondents followed bloggers on WeChat.

However, Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), a term to describe people who are very influential on the internet and social media, tended to drag down Macau residents' confidence in both the central government and the local government. Those who followed KOLs tended

to have less confidence in the government.

The survey showed that only 22% of respondents followed KOLs, suggesting that "Macau residents pay less attention to KOLs," according to Guo Yu, an associate professor at the Macau University of Science and Technology's Faculty of Humanities and Arts.

Guo remarked that "this is a really good sign for the Macau government if it wishes to lead public opinion."

The more frequently Macau residents engaged with traditional media, the more trust they had in the central government, the survey found. It did not specify whether non-Chinese-language media was included in the survey.

A higher level of trust in the governments was also recorded among respondents who engaged with entertainment and leisure media.

Most of the respondents also said that they were confident about the development of the 'one country, two systems' policy framework in Macau and about the city's own economic development.

In August 2019, the Public Security Police Force refused to allow a demonstration to be held opposing the perceived brutality of the actions of Hong Kong police authorities last year. Forty-four percent of the respondents "highly supported" this decision. Guo concluded that Macau residents "very much cherish local security and stability."

Less popular were respondents' views on Macau's participation in the Greater Bay Area initiative. Whereas 42% of respondents agreed that the central government's Greater Bay Area policies were beneficial to Macau, only 38% support the city's integration into the region.

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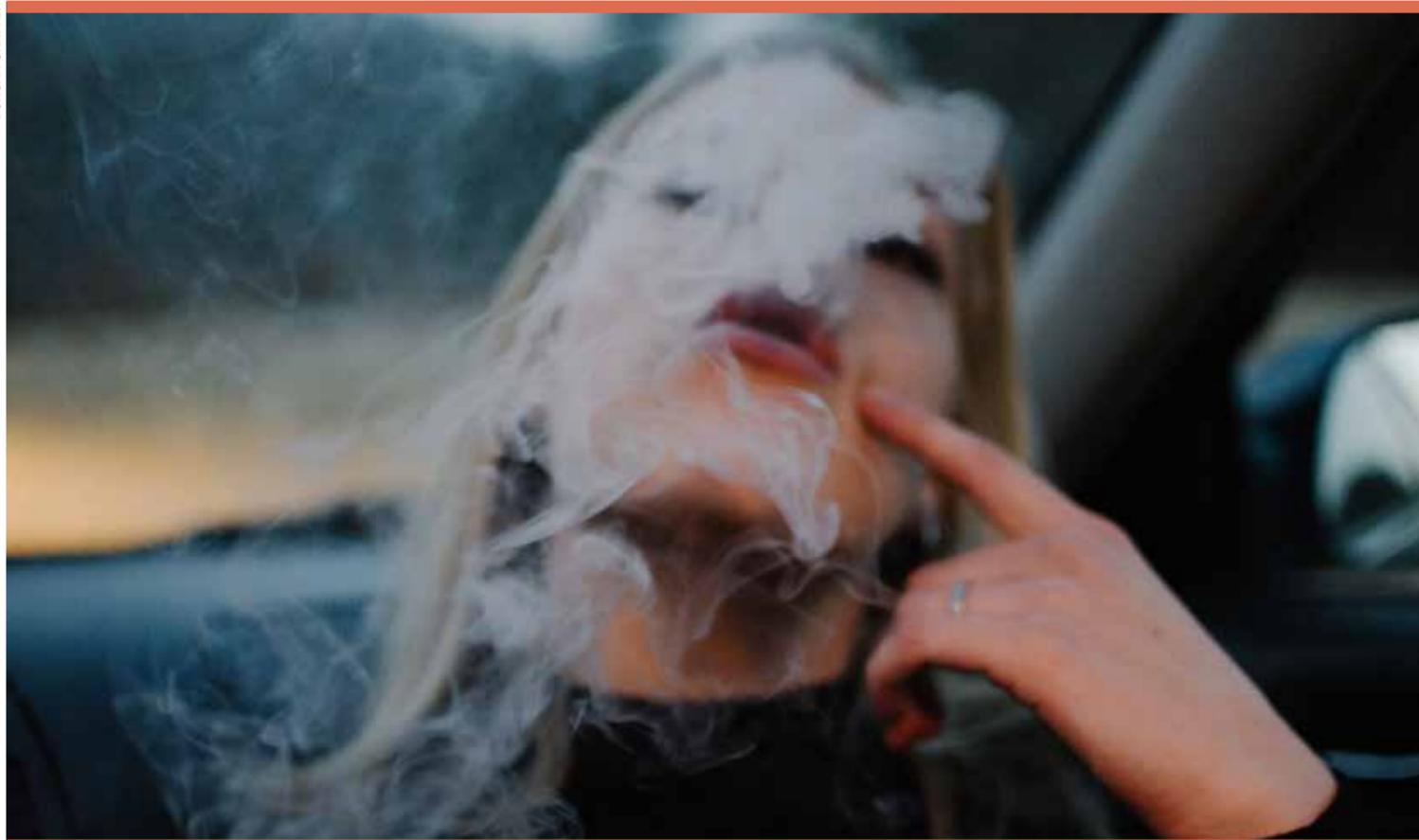
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DUNCAN SHAFFER



Authorities say e-cigarette risks justify ban on vaping 'lifestyle'

RENATO MARQUES

MACAU'S initial distrust of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) is becoming more popular among other countries and regions around the world, where attitudes towards the once-lauded alternative to traditional smoking are beginning to change.

E-cigarettes, as well as vaporizers that allow the inhalation of flavored vapor (commonly known as vaping), were included in the smoking ban bill amendment passed in 2017. The ban prohibits the sale and advertising of vaping products, but does not criminalize their consumption.

Local health authorities justify the ban using recent studies showing some of the harms that might arise from the use of e-cigarettes. However, not everyone is convinced of the effectiveness of the law.

Proponents of e-cigarettes say they can be used as a replacement for traditional tobacco products to help smokers quit.

Critics argue that the product is more attractive to young people than traditional cigarettes and might lead to habitual smoking at earlier ages. Of further concern was that in some cases, e-cigarette products were found to contain tetrahydrocannabinol, cannabidiol or amphetamines, all of which are illicit substances with addictive potential in addition to the existing nicotine present in

tobacco products.

Local 'vapers' heard by the Times admit that while the ban on the sale and advertising of the products might have restricted consumers' access to the product, it has not been able to entirely suppress it. They told the Times that the ban has had a relatively low impact in terms of lowering the use of vaping products.

A Filipino national and administrator of a local social media group dedicated to vaping, who wished to remain anonymous, said that "it used to be easier [to vape] as there were shops where we can buy the liquids. [After the ban,] they closed them but we can still buy outside of Macau."

Acquiring his vaping products mostly in the Philippines, the source said that vaping for the members of the group is "more than a habit. It is a lifestyle."

"When we go somewhere where vaping products are allowed, we buy [them] and bring [them back] for personal use or sometimes we trade among group members. It's not a business, it's sharing," he remarked.

Another user, a local resident surnamed Santos, told the Times that the ban was an "exaggerated response."

"I think it really is an exaggerated response to ban [these products from being sold]. Many countries have issued warnings and explained the risks, then it's up to each person to make individual choices," Santos said, adding, "contrary to normal cigare-

ttes, vaping does not cause harm to passive smokers, although it may cause harm to the users. Again, is not a case of public health."

Questioned on why he thinks the government implemented the swift ban while other countries have taken time to evaluate the consequences of the activity, Santos remarked, "we are already used to that in Macau."

"When something touches the business interests of a few important people, laws are easy to approve and fast to enforce," he said, hinting that the ban could be related to interests in the tobacco business.

Vaping has soared in popularity over the last decade, growing from about 7 million users in 2011 to 41 million in 2018. Even as countries such as the U.S. are beginning to review their laws on vaping, market research group Euromonitor has estimated that the number of vapers worldwide may climb to 55 million by next year.

Local associations dedicated to the promotion of a smoke-free society and healthy living have praised the government's tough stance. They say more deterrent measures are needed.

This is the case of the Smoke-free & Healthy Life Association of Macau (SHALM), which proposes three additional measures to be adopted by the authorities.

"We think the ban on e-cigarettes is very necessary, and we feel fortunate that the Macau government implemented the law

of e-cigarettes control in time, especially when we read the reports about the outbreak of lung damage associated with the use of e-cigarettes in the U.S.," said Brenda Chan, executive director of SHLAM.

As of November 20 last year, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had recorded a total of 2,290 cases of lung problems derived from the use of e-cigarettes, with 47 fatal cases. The Philippines recently reported the first case in the country of lung damage caused by e-cigarette use.

Chan also said that although the existing measures have achieved some positive results in the decline of smoking activities, namely among the younger generation, there is still a lot of work to be done.

"We suggest expanding the non-smoking areas in outdoor public places, like main streets, and commercial centers," said Chan, as well as "increasing the tobacco tax and an implementation of the plain tobacco packaging [restrictions]."

The plain packaging of tobacco products highlighted by SHLAM has already been implemented in countries such as Australia (2012), France and the United Kingdom (2016), Norway and Ireland (2017), New Zealand and Hungary (2018), Uruguay (2019) and Slovenia (2020).

Another anti-smoking group said that the measures undertaken by the government were hi-

ghly positive, but that more work was needed in the enforcement of the law.

"The most critical part is on how to enhance law enforcement," said Viviana Lai, the director general of the Macau Youth Stop Smoking Action Network Association.

"The current law already clearly states that smoking is not allowed indoors and on public transportation. However, most citizens in Macau still can easily smell cigarette smoke on some public transportation, such as taxis. Without an effective execution method, the law is just hollow words."

Lai also remarked on the dangers of e-cigarettes, saying that besides containing some of the same chemical compounds as tobacco products (often, but not always, including nicotine), e-cigarettes are also easier to hide and transport and therefore more convenient than regular smoking.

"Banning the sale of electronic cigarettes is a brilliant idea, as when compared with traditional cigarettes, the electronic cigarette is smaller in size, easy to hide, [produces] less smell, and no lighter [is required]," said Lai. "All these 'advantages' contribute to encouraging the youth to try them because it's difficult for the activity to be discovered by their parents," said Lai.

Lai also said that many youngsters are unaware about the product's dangers.

"Most of them believe electronic cigarettes do not contain nicotine, so they will not become addicted to it. However, recent research shows that electronic cigarette smokers are the easiest group to convert to a traditional cigarette smoker. In a nutshell, we have the same problem [as for tobacco products]. How will the government enforce the law?"

The smoking ban law was one of the first worldwide enforcement measures specifically targeting new forms of smoking by banning the display, sale, advertisement and promotion of such products within the SAR. The law is also novel in that it equates the use of e-cigarettes to other tobacco products by enforcing that same ban on e-cigarettes in places where smoking is already prohibited.

According to statistics from the Health Bureau (SSM), from January 1, 2018 to November 15, 2019, smoke inspectors have issued fines to 27 people for the use of e-cigarettes in venues and places where smoking is not allowed.

Since the enforcement of the new law, the health authorities have also issued several clarification statements on e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products and vaping. The SSM reminds the public that the definition of smoking also includes the "possession of any tobacco-based product in combustion."

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DRAFT BILL IS BEHIND SCHEDULE

RENATO MARQUES

THE government's draft legislation on the implementation of a statutory ban on the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors is behind schedule.

According to the calendar announced by the Health Bureau (SSM) in March last year, the draft bill should have concluded all the preliminary consultation work by the end of 2019 and a public consultation version was due for release in the first quarter of 2020.

The SSM admits that the draft bill is delayed and, despite not advancing a specific date for the conclusion of the preliminary work, said that such tasks are ongoing and will continue during February and March this year, Portuguese language newspaper Tribuna de Macau reported.

The bill aims to enforce new rules regarding the sale of alcoholic beverages to youngsters, namely enforcing a ban to all people under 18 years old as well as establishing a quota for when a drink is considered to be "alcoholic."



ADAM WILSON

According to the information provided so far by the SSM, in addition to the restriction of the sale of alcoholic beverages to people under 18, the law should include the classification and definition of beverages as well as a complete regulation on the advertising and promotion of such beverages, including the penalties for those not complying.

The SSM also mentioned that penalties should be similar to those currently enforced for breach of the smoking ban.

The idea of moving forward with such legislation was first announced by the former Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Alexis Tam, in early December 2018 during a plenary session at the Legislative Assembly where the government's intentions on the mat-

ter were revealed.

Three months later, the SSM held a press conference to announce the general guidelines of what should be included in the bill and the calendar which included timelines on the first phase of the consultation among associations and entities with expertise in alcoholic beverages and a second phase of public consultation to be held later.

SSM SAYS MASKS NOT NEEDED ALL THE TIME

THE public do not need to wear masks all the time, the Health Bureau (SSM) has stressed in a public statement.

The statement was made amid an outbreak of a new type of coronavirus in the mainland city of Wuhan this month, which has local authorities adopting precautionary measures to prevent its spread to Macau.

Despite their purpose as an effective disease prevention apparatus, masks are not needed in all cases, the SSM said. Wearing a mask is recommended when visiting medical facilities or institutions and in circumstances where the mask-wearer has respiratory symptoms, or a fever.

Otherwise, wearing a mask is not essential.

The health authority also reminded the public to maintain good hygiene by washing their hands, keeping indoor areas well-ventilated and refraining from touching their eyes, noses and mouths when in contact with other people.

The statement comes after the SSM sought to dispel rumors suggesting that there was a shortage of masks in some local pharmacies. The health supervisor confirmed the availability of masks at the vast majority of the city's 294 pharmacies.

It also stressed that the supply of masks should be sufficient for the city's population. **AL**

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The people in favor of visitor tax

DANIEL BEITLER

THE people of Macau are overwhelmingly in favor of a tax on tourists, a feasibility study conducted by the Macau Government Tourism Office has revealed.

The study showed that 95% of local residents asked about the feasibility of the proposal said they support

the imposition of a visitor tax, whereas just 5% opposed the measure.

The ratio of supporters and opponents was reversed for industry operators, where just one in five supported the measure.

The view among tourists was equally conclusive, with about three-quarters of those surveyed admitting the tax would affect their willingness to visit the SAR. About

half of the respondents said their intention to visit Macau would be affected by the tax, while a further 25% said it would “depend on the actual situation,” according to the MGTO.

The finding follows earlier reports from tourism officials who had suggested that the wide range of views in the study had been inconclusive. The MGTO had said last

year that “preliminary results show that there are different opinions among residents, tourism operators and visitors, meaning that opinions are not one-sided.”

Macau received 39.4 million tourists last year, falling just short of the milestone 40-million figure deemed to be the “maximum carrying capacity”. The rapid rise in the number of visitors has become

a source of concern for the Macau public, especially as gaming receipts and other tourism spending are growing at a much slower pace or not at all.

The situation prompted discussion over whether a tourism tax could prevent overcrowding on the city's streets.

MGTO collected approximately 149,000 questionnaires in the study. In a statement yesterday, the government body said the results would serve to inform policy formulation.

However, the office warned that the imposition of a tax could affect a range of factors in the SAR including the health of the city's economy and its “destination image.” It also said that the tax would prove an administrative challenge to collect.

Moreover, the MGTO said that case studies included in the feasibility study had suggested the tax might only lead to a slight slowdown in the growth of visitors in the short-term. In so saying, the tourism authority implied that the tax might not serve to achieve its purpose of moderating the number of visitors to Macau.

MGTO director Helena de Sena Fernandes has previously hinted that the purpose of the tourist tax, if levied, would not be to reduce the number of visitors. Instead it would be used as a fund for urban development matters. The tourism chief has also said on several occasions that she opposes the introduction of a visitor tax.

The report has been submitted to other departments in the government for further analysis.

Sands China to continue responsible gaming initiatives into 2020

LYNZY VALLES

SANDS China Ltd. has pledged to conduct more training sessions and workshops for its employees this year as part of the company's responsible gaming initiatives.

In a statement to the Times, the gaming operator said that it is also planning to enhance its community and ongoing outreach efforts, as well as enshrine best practices by maintaining a “sophisticated set of procedures and practices.”

In February last year, the Times reported that the gaming operator had established a new leadership position in the company – the Chief Responsible Gaming Officer – to demonstrate the company's dedication to building a culture of responsible gaming in the SAR.

A new Special Gaming Projects department was also established to encourage responsible gaming behaviour and increase employees' awareness of problem gambling.

Last year, as part of its responsible gaming 2019 promotions, the Sheng Kung Hui Macau Social Services Coordination Office, YMCA Macau, the Macao Association for Juvenile Volunteers and the Gaming Employees' Home held roadshows at various times between August and November across the firm's properties in the SAR.

The roadshows were intended to help employees learn more about the local organizations' responsible gaming services, including Sheng Kung Hui's 24-hour gambling counselling

hotline and its online gambling counselling services.

Roadshows such as these seek to increase awareness among employees of gaming operators and to encourage those dealing with gambling disorders to seek help as soon as possible.

Games and activities relating to responsible gaming were also part of the roadshows, which reached a total of nearly 10,000 employees, according to data provided by the gaming operator.

The company cooperated with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas to train “Responsible Gaming Ambassadors”, who are equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify and intervene in problem gambling cases. Nearly 650 Responsible Gaming Ambassadors have been trained since

the start of the initiative.

Aside from the program conducted in coordination with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, the company also conducted monthly responsible gaming training sessions last year in order to educate employees about gambling risks, develop positive money management habits, and aid customers in need.

In a statement issued by the operator, Sands China also donated over half a million patacas to three local responsible gaming centres in December 2019 to support their responsible gaming efforts.

According to the company's statement, it is essential for local gaming operators to safeguard the wellbeing of Macau's residents and visitors by promoting responsible gaming.

FUTURE BRIGHT TO RUN FOOD COURT AT LISBOA PALACE

LOCAL catering enterprise Future Bright Group has signed an agreement with casino operator Sociedade de Jogos de Macau (SJM) to operate a food court, reported Hong Kong media the Economic Times.

According to the report, the food court is located in SJM's upcoming property, the Grand Lisboa Palace, located in Cotai, next to the government-owned multi-purpose venue of the Macao Dome.

The agreement was signed by the Group's subsidiary, Bright Noble, and will entitle the company to use shops “243-1” to “243-9” in the property's food court.

Bright Noble aims

to have operations at the food court for three years, as the Hong Kong media reported.

Future Bright is a publicly listed company on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. It runs middle to upper level restaurants in Macau, as well as the food courts of The International School of Macau, the Macau University of Science and Technology and the University of Macau.

The opening date of the property has been delayed several times. The latest indication from the gaming operator is that it will open by the end of this year. It will also house two hotels by fashion brands Versace and Karl Lagerfeld. **AL**

CNY PARADE TO RETURN JAN. 27

THE annual Chinese New Year Parade is returning to the city on two occasions this coming holiday season.

As with previous iterations, the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is taking the lead in organizing the event, in association with other public and private entities.

Events will be held on the nights of January 27 and February 1, including a float parade and live stage performances. On January 27, a special fireworks display will be staged off the coast from the Macau Tower.

Starting from 5:30 p.m., warm-up performances will take place at intervals, featuring entertainers from Macau and Hong Kong. An aerial acrobatics show will then kick off the show at 8 p.m.

The main event will feature 34 local and international performance groups. Eighteen floats will then set off from Sai Van Lake Square across the Macau Tower, and march along Avenida



Dr. Sun Yat-Sen on the Macau Peninsula until they reach their final destination at the Macao Science Center.

On the second night, the floats will march down the road from Fai Chi Kei to Iao Hon Garden with live entertainment from local performers.

The public is encouraged to vote for their favorite float to enter a lucky draw, where they may win prizes such as air and ferry tickets, as well as hotel accommodation.

The organizers are also inviting attendees to experience augmented reality technology, with which they can also win souvenirs. De-

tails can be found on the MGTO website.

Attendees can also experience close encounters with the floats at two different spots: the Macao Science Center between January 27 and February 1, followed by Tap Seac Square between February 1 and 8. **AL**

VIETNAMESE MIGRANTS CELEBRATE SPRING FESTIVAL

VIETNAMESE migrant workers in Macau held an early celebration for the upcoming the Tet Festival last Sunday – the country's most important annual festival heralding the arrival of spring.

Held on the same date as the Chinese Lunar New Year, the Tet Festival will be celebrated on January 25 this year.

Last Sunday's celebrations were organized by the Association for Mutual Support of Vietnamese Fellow-Countrymen in Macau. The celebrations featured art performances lauding Vietnam and its people, while also offering traditional dishes on Tet such as spring rolls and "chung" cakes prepared by association members.

Speaking at the event, Le Thanh Hung, a representative from the Vietnamese Consulate General in Hong Kong and Macau, called on the migrant workers to comply with

the SAR's regulations and laws while promoting patriotism and their traditions in the city.

The official also expressed his appreciation for their active operation, including the launch of charity activities to support vulnerable families within the community and disadvantaged people back home.

In 2019, the association raised nearly 260,000 patacas to support underprivileged families in Vietnam.

Meanwhile, speaking about the association's role in assisting migrant workers, chairman of the association Tran Thi Thu said that in 2019, the association assisted several Vietnamese women to resolve administrative issues to facilitate their work in Macau.

At the end of 2018, local government data showed that were 15,100 non-resident workers of Vietnamese nationality in Macau. **LV**

AD



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A woman takes a photograph of plush toys of Pepe the Frog and LIHKG Pig, two symbols which have been used by youth protesters in Hong Kong

ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT SYMBOLS UNITE, DIVIDE HK PROTESTERS

DAKE KANG, HONG KONG

TRUMP signs, Pepe the Frog graffiti and British and American flags have become a common sight at Hong Kong's anti-government protests — and an unsettling one to longtime democracy activists on the left.

Beijing has seized on the images to portray the movement as a coddled, westernized middle class incited by foreign organizations and governments to rebel against the world's largest communist country, China.

"Why does the American flag appear at every violent scene in Hong Kong?" state broadcaster CCTV asked.

Many of Hong Kong's hardcore protesters are working-class construction workers and hairstylists battling an establishment government dominated by business interests and real estate tycoons. Some wave U.S. and other flags to appeal to the rest of the world for support.

But a small group of followers of far-right activist Horace Chin regularly join the long-running protests, drawing the glare of television cameras with big banners reading "President Trump, Please Liberate Hong Kong".

For liberals, Chin is a pariah hijacking the demonstrations.

"It's really disappointing to see people try to drive a wedge between Hong Kong people and the

Chinese people in this way," said Wilfred Chan, founder of Lausan, a leftist collective that seeks to build international solidarity with the Hong Kong protests. "This is a mistake."

There is little, though, that they can do about it. Protesters have vowed to avoid the internal divisions of the pro-democracy "umbrella movement" in 2014. Demonstrators refrain from criticizing each other's tactics or politics to stay focused on what unites them: opposition to the communist government in Beijing and the ruling establishment in Hong Kong.

The protests are "not your traditional left or right movement," said Avery Ng, chairman of the League of Social Democrats, a left-wing political party. "This is a broad-spectrum movement against a totalitarian government."

But basic disagreements bubble beneath the surface: What do the protests stand for? Who are they for, and who are they against? How do you save a city caught in a growing confrontation between the U.S. and China?

When four far-right Ukrainian activists flew into Hong Kong and posed for pictures with protesters, some Chinese state media played up what they said was the protest movement's true colors.

"Ukrainian neo-Nazis exposed colluding with Hong Kong riot-

ters," trumpeted a headline in the Global Times, a nationalistic state-owned newspaper.

Hong Kong's left-leaning activists feel caught in the middle. The right-wing imagery is misleading, they said, fearing it feeds into Beijing's narrative and harms the movement.

The protests started in June to oppose a bill that would have allowed the city to extradite suspected criminals to China and rapidly snowballed into a full-blown defense of the city's semi-autonomy under Beijing's rule.

Chan, founder of Lausan, treks the world to seek support from grassroots organizers. He sees a common struggle between demonstrators in Chile, Kashmir, Bolivia and Puerto Rico, saying their struggles stem from the same root: governments that lie to their own people.

"We have to think beyond trying to appease elites far away," he said, "When it comes to the question of Hong Kong's autonomy, I think that neither China nor the United States desires Hong Kong to truly be free."

Many of the most overt displays of support for President Donald Trump are led by Chin, the far-right activist and a former professor.

"Dear President Trump, communism is AIDS," he said in a December tweet. "Where's your cocktail therapy & shock therapies

for communist China?"

In 2011, Chin published an influential book, "On the Hong Kong City-State." His supporters admire him for being one of the first to outline a concrete strategy to preserve the city's identity and traditional Chinese heritage from China's all-controlling Communist Party.

His language, though, veers into the bombastic, angering many with anti-China rhetoric that some call racist.

The expressions of people like Chin and attacks by bands of hardcore protesters targeting mainland Chinese-connected businesses and shoppers allow Beijing to tar the whole movement as being bigoted, critics say.

Cedric, a 30-year-old former construction worker turned front-liner, is somewhat indifferent towards Trump, whom he calls "just a businessman." Nor does he think the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, passed by Congress as a rebuke to Beijing and Hong Kong's leadership, has had much impact so far.

Cedric, who like most protesters didn't give his last name out of fear of arrest, rejects political labels, calling himself "just a Hong Kong citizen." Like many in the movement, he embraces Pepe the Frog as a protest symbol, unaware of its association with far-right extremists in the U.S.

Some of his friends have been

arrested and he now lives in hiding, nursing a shoulder injured in clashes with riot police. As the protests march on, Cedric hopes that more people across the globe will support the Hong Kong cause, including Chinese on the mainland.

"We won't reject support from people of any country or race, because we know those people value freedom and democracy," he said.

Ng, the head of the far-left party, sees the Chinese government as the common enemy of both Hong Kong and ordinary Chinese.

His left-wing yet anti-Beijing views were shaped by his years as a consultant helping multinational corporations buy stakes in Chinese companies. On visits to factories in distant corners of the country, he found that the lion's share of profits went to officials and business people, not the workers.

The trips jarred Ng, who struggled to square the Communist Party's socialist slogans with the exploitation and lack of basic worker rights he saw on the ground.

"The Chinese Communist Party is the most anti-communist party in the world," he said. "What they are operating is authoritarian state capitalism."

Ng sees the appeals of Hong Kong protesters to the U.S. as a distress signal, more a desperate cry for help than a sign of any ideological inclination.

"Hong Kong people are traditionally very utilitarian," Ng says. "They will try whatever path that they may think to help the cause." AP

BLOOMBERG



Hong Kong's Financial Secretary Paul Chan

HONG KONG

Finance minister pledges bold spending to boost growth

ENDA CURRAN, ERIC LAM & YVONNE MAN

HONG Kong's government is preparing to spend "boldly" to shore up the finance hub's tumbling economy, Financial Secretary Paul Chan said in an exclusive interview.

Warning that unemployment is set to edge higher, Chan pledged the annual budget due on Feb. 26 will maintain spending on infrastructure and public services even as it includes additional stimulus.

"We will continue to spend boldly to help those disadvantaged," Chan told Bloomberg Television's Yvonne Man.

"Given the large amount of fiscal surplus we've accumulated over the years I do think we have the capability and financial resources to help us come through this economic recession," he said.

That largess may not extend to cash handouts. While the government hasn't made

a decision on whether to pursue such a policy, Chan said such a move could trigger a deficit of more than HKD100 billion (\$13 billion).

The finance official also had a message for currency speculators by ruling out any change in the Hong Kong dollar's peg to the greenback, a favorite guessing game during periods of economic stress.

"We have no intention to review it," Chan said. There are "no circumstances" in which it would be reviewed, he said.

The comments come as Hong Kong remains mired in recession after seven months of political unrest. Visitor arrivals from mainland China have more than halved, organizers have canceled conferences and consumer spending has tumbled. Unemployment is rising and expected to climb further.

The International Monetary Fund has urged the city's government to ramp up spending to support the economy.

Business owners have called for more support amid little sign of a circuit breaker in the political dispute.

The IMF has said the city's economy likely shrank 1.2% last year and forecasts 1% growth in 2020. Chan expects the economy to have contracted 1.3% in 2019.

Since the unrest began, the government has announced a series of stimulus measures worth about HKD25 billion. The stimulus has been targeted to businesses and various social groups, and includes some tax breaks, one-time fuel and utilities subsidies, as well as support for children and the elderly.

Economists have criticized the response as "peanuts." The announced stimulus spending amounts to just less than 1% of Hong Kong's GDP while the city's fiscal reserve stood at HKD1.05 trillion as of October.

Chan provided no signals about government plans to break the political impasse, other than saying he is confi-

dent a resolution will be found.

Playing down concerns around capital outflows and worries about an exodus of talent from Hong Kong, Chan said the hub's banking system and markets remain stable.

In his budget last year, which came before the protests, Chan outlined a series of relief measures costing about HKD42.9 billion that included tax breaks, investment in tech industries and other social spending. A budget deficit is currently forecast for the year.

At least some of the fresh stimulus will again be targeted at small and medium-sized enterprises. However, in response to calls from business owners for lower rent, Chan said the market will correct itself.

"We have done our part and we encourage the private sector to work together and take a long-term view in terms of their business relations," Chan said. "But at the end of the day this is a market economy." **BLOOMBERG**

GUANGZHOU REPORTS BETTER AIR QUALITY

Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province, saw better air quality last year, the city's ecology and environment bureau said this week. The average concentration of PM2.5 was 30 micrograms per cubic meter last year, meeting the country's air quality standard for three consecutive years, the bureau said. The PM2.5 reading is a gauge monitoring airborne particles of 2.5 microns or less in diameter, which can penetrate deep in people's lungs. The city had reported no heavily or severely polluted days for two consecutive years, according to the bureau. To tackle air pollution, the city has reduced the number of coal-fired boilers to 30 from 1,400 around 2011 and also slashed the coal consumption for major industrial companies. The city also eliminated polluting vehicles and replaced more gasoline-powered buses with electric buses. Guangzhou's average PM2.5 readings were 35 micrograms per cubic meter in both 2017 and 2018.

MAN JAILED FOR STEALING OVER 1,000 SHARED BIKES

A man was recently sentenced to three and a half years in jail for stealing more than 1,000 shared bikes in Guangdong Province, according to a local court. The man, surnamed Huang, was ordered to pay 200,000 yuan (about 28,803 U.S. dollars) to compensate the bike-sharing company and was also fined 5,000 yuan, according to the People's Court of Baiyun District in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong. A bike-sharing company reported to the local public security department in early June 2019, after a citizen found a large number of shared bike parts at a recycling plant. Following the clue, local police launched an investigation and arrested the suspect. Huang was taken into custody on June 28, and the court verdict was made in late December 2019. Police noted that shared bicycles are property of service providers. Acts of making marks or drawings, dismantling bicycle parts or maliciously destroying bicycles may be regarded as embezzling or damaging other people's property. Offenders will face punishment from fines to detentions.

GONGBEI CUSTOMS SEIZES SMUGGLED FOOD WORTH \$72 MILLION

Gongbei customs in neighboring Zhuhai said it busted 12 smuggling gangs, captured 30 suspects and seized food and beverages worth 500 million yuan (about \$72 million). Another 3.3 million yuan involved in the case was also frozen, the customs said. The smugglers set up an office near Gongbei Port in January 2017. They hired individuals to bring in small amounts of food and drinks illegally through the port before delivering them to buyers across China. In addition, they printed false invoices with artificially low prices to smuggle food and beverages via other ports in the province at lower tax rates. After a thorough investigation, over 300 police officers were dispatched to carry out operations in the cities of Zhuhai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Quanzhou on Nov. 18, detaining more than 3,000 cases of food and drinks.

AS WORLD LEADERS SHUN TIKTOK, IMPERSONATORS AND FAKE ACCOUNTS CREEP IN

MARIA JOSE VALERO
& YUEQI YANG

AS TikTok catches fire among the younger set, world leaders and politicians have kept their distance amid national security concerns about the Chinese-owned app.

The vacuum is leaving room for impersonators to roam free. And TikTok's efforts to dissuade such fake or misleading accounts are lacking, some social media experts say.

TikTok doesn't yet have a robust verification system to certify accounts as authentic. Unlike Twitter Inc., TikTok's previous community guidelines didn't require parody accounts to clearly indicate they are not affiliated with the subject. A spokesperson said in practice TikTok does remove parody accounts not marked as such when they are flagged.

In updated community guidelines released today, TikTok bans users from posting as "another person or organization by using someone else's name, biographical details, or profile picture in a misleading manner."

Multiple TikTok accounts have claimed to be those of President Donald Trump. One popular one, with more than 13,000 followers, went by the handle "@donald.trump.officiall" (two Ls) and used the same profile picture as Trump's very real Twitter account.

After Bloomberg News contacted TikTok about that account and others for this story, the handle disappeared from the platform. TikTok says it didn't remove the account, and the user has changed its handle independently. Trump doesn't have an official TikTok account.

Trump isn't the only big name



targeted by spoofers. There's also a "Bernie Sanders Team" account with more than 13,900 followers that posts regularly. A spokeswoman for the Sanders campaign said the account was fake, not associated with the Vermont senator, who doesn't have an account on TikTok.

The accounts speak to TikTok's immature account-verification efforts. ByteDance Inc., which owns TikTok, has emerged as the world's most valuable startup - pegged at \$75 billion by its investors, including SoftBank, in 2018 - on the explosive popularity of TikTok, now with more than a billion, largely young, users around the world.

Even as TikTok's user base has grown, the company hasn't shown signs of rigorous efforts to enforce rules on content, including the policing of fake or misleading accounts, according to Storyful, a social media intelligence company that seeks to verify content as authentic. Bloomberg is a customer of Storyful.

DJ Kang, chief executive of consumer research firm Value-Champion, described the platform's lack of robust verification efforts as a "ticking time bomb."

Moderating fake accounts and other types of false claims is a common issue for social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook Inc. Over the years,

Facebook has increased its number of content reviewers globally, with about 150,000 staff now monitoring content 24 hours a day. TikTok declined to give a number of staffers who work on such issues in the U.S. or in China when asked by Bloomberg News.

TikTok has been seeking to ramp up its U.S. safety team, hiring staff from Twitter, Facebook, Snap Inc. and other social media platforms. That team is led out of California and has no moderators based in China, a TikTok spokesperson said.

The spokesperson said the @berniesandersteam handle was only a group supporting Sanders and that it was not imper-

sonating the senator. The service doesn't, for instance, comb through the app to proactively remove fake accounts. It says it removes them when it's alerted to them.

Some users had apparently assumed @donald.trump.officiall was the real Donald Trump, leaving comments such as "Welcome Mr. President. A lot of us are new here, also." To people casting doubts on its authenticity, the account relies, "sir, this is 100 percent me."

Other world leaders have their own impersonators on TikTok, some clearly satirical and some ambiguous. The account under the handle of @boris_johnson, which has more than 15,800 followers, frequently posts goofy videos under the mask of the U.K. prime minister. Its bio page says "Prime Minister Of The United Kingdom" and "Avid Brexiteer." Boris Johnson's office confirmed that the prime minister is not a TikTok user.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi also has impersonators. One of Modi's fake accounts says in its bio that it is the "Narendra Modi Official Account." It has a fake blue "verification" check mark watermarked onto its profile photo, with a link to the official website of Narendra Modi in its bio page. TikTok is not one of the nine social media platforms listed on Modi's website.

For the accounts that TikTok has verified - mostly celebrities like Will Smith - the service adds a blue check mark to the right of the profile photo, and marks them as a "verified account." The check mark has become the standard indicator across social media of account verification. **BLOOMBERG**

Uniqlo sees worst overseas sales drop in decade amid Asia unrest

POLITICAL flare-ups in Asia are putting the brakes on Fast Retailing Co.'s overseas momentum, as the Uniqlo operator reported the worst quarterly revenue decline in a decade for its international segment.

Asia's largest retailer has long counted on overseas expansion to power growth in the face of a weak Japanese market. Now that strategy is coming up against the political protests in Hong Kong as well as

a trade spat between Japan and South Korea.

Fast Retailing yesterday reported a 3.6% drop in first-quarter sales for Uniqlo's international segment, citing "significant declines" in those two trouble spots. Except for a minuscule decrease of 0.2% in 2017, it's the first quarterly drop for the segment in 10 years, according to Bloomberg data. Operating profit for the international business fell 28%, for the first quarterly earnings decline since 2016.

Fast Retailing, which also suffered from weak sales in Japan during the quarter, lowered its full-year outlook for operating profit by 11%. For the guidance change, it pointed to the unrest overseas as well as depreciation in the yuan.

The months-long pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, which have at times turned violent, have left the area's economy on the verge of its first annual contraction in a decade

and caused retail sales to plunge 24% in November. The unrest has rattled international brands from Levi Strauss & Co. to Tiffany & Co.

While the situation in Hong Kong has had a broad impact on retailers, the damage Uniqlo is seeing from a trade spat between Tokyo and Seoul has been, well, more unique. Fast Retailing has become one of the biggest targets of a South Korean consumer boycott of Japa-

nese products that began in July.

"The Korean business has continued to decline and there has been a bigger impact on sales," said Chief Financial Officer Takeshi Okazaki at a briefing in Tokyo Thursday. "Korea is a very important segment for us, and it's not clear how long this situation will continue."

The country has the second-largest number of Uniqlo stores overseas after China.

Other overseas markets are holding up. Mainland China - a key driver of growth in the past - performed well, as did Southeast Asia, the company said.

Billionaire Chairman Tadashi Yanai has focused expansion on Uniqlo's overseas locations as an aging population in Japan provides fewer opportunities for fast growth. In the last year, the company expanded to new markets including India, Vietnam and Italy. **BLOOMBERG**

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Report says illnesses may be from new coronavirus

YANAN WANG
& MIKE STOBBE, BEIJING

A preliminary investigation into viral pneumonia illnesses sickening dozens of people in and around China has identified the possible cause as a new type of coronavirus, state media said yesterday.

Chinese health authorities did not immediately confirm the report from state broadcaster CCTV.

Coronaviruses are spread through coughing or sneezing or by touching an infected person. Some cause the common cold and others can lead to more severe respiratory diseases, such as SARS and MERS. Such viruses are common in people but more exotic versions from bats, camels and other animals have caused severe illness.

The novel coronavirus is different from those that have previously been identified, CCTV said. Health authorities ruled out SARS and MERS as possible causes over the weekend.

As of Sunday, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission said 59 people in the central Chinese city were being treated for the respiratory illness. Seven were in critical condition, while the rest were stable.

Eight patients were discharged Wednesday, Xinhua state news agency reported. They had not exhibited any pneumonia symptoms for several days.

Chinese researchers used a sample from one patient to conduct gene sequencing of the virus, said Gauden Galea, a World Health Organization representative to China.

"Preliminary identification of a novel virus in a short period of time is a notable achievement," Galea said in a statement, adding that it "demonstrates China's increased capacity to manage new outbreaks."

Possible cases of the same illness have been reported in Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan involving recent travelers to Wuhan.

Since the end of 2019, Hong Kong public hospitals have reported 38 patients who presented with fever, respiratory infection or pneumonia

symptoms after recent visits to Wuhan. Twenty-one of those patients have since been discharged, Hong Kong's Hospital Authority said Wednesday.

No serious cases have been found to be related to those in Wuhan, said Hong Kong health chief Sophia Chan.

None of the Hong Kong patients had visited the seafood market in Wuhan where some of the mainland Chinese patients worked. The South China Seafood City food market will be suspended and investigated, Wuhan's health commission said.

A Chinese woman who works for a South Korean company was diagnosed Tuesday with pneumonia, according to the Korea Centers of Disease Control and Prevention said. Meanwhile, Taiwan authorities said Wednesday that they were quarantining a patient who fell ill with flu symptoms on Jan. 6, more than two weeks after the individual returned from a trip to Wuhan.

The new illnesses had raised fears of a recurrence of SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome. The disease first infected people in southern China in late 2002, and spread to more than two dozen countries. More than 8,000 people were sickened and nearly 800 died, but no cases have been reported since 2004.

Another coronavirus causes MERS, or Middle East respiratory syndrome, which started in Jordan and Saudi Arabia in 2012 and spread into about two dozen other countries. About 2,500 lab-confirmed cases have been reported, including more than 800 deaths, with cases continuing to be seen in recent years.

On Wednesday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention put out a health alert advising physicians who treat patients with pneumonia-like illness to consider a possible link to the Chinese outbreak and to wear masks and take other precautions in treating patients who recently traveled to Wuhan.

The CDC this week also advised U.S. travelers going to Wuhan to avoid animals and sick people and wash their hands often. AP

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TAIWAN LEADER GETS ELECTION BOOST FROM UNLIKELY PLACE: CHINA

KEN MORITSUGU & RALPH JENNINGS, TAIPEI

AP PHOTO



A year ago, Taiwan's leader was on the ropes. Then she got a boost from an unexpected corner: Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Polls indicate that President Tsai Ing-wen is poised to win a second four-year term on Saturday, a remarkable turnaround for a leader whose future was in doubt after voters dealt her Democratic Progressive Party a major loss in November 2018 local elections.

Since then, Tsai has capitalized on three developments: the fears generated by China's tough words on Taiwan, protests in Hong Kong that have reinforced those fears and U.S. government actions that reassure voters that America will have Taiwan's back if the going gets tough.

"All the factors that help Tsai Ing-wen are happening: the China factor, the U.S. factor and the Hong Kong protests," pollster You Ying-lung, chairman of the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation, said at a news conference late last month.

A victory for Tsai and her inde-

pendence-leaning party would likely herald continued tensions and a further souring of relations with China, which considers self-governing Taiwan a renegade province.

Tsai began chipping away at his lead in the spring and pulled ahead for good in August. She was the clear leader by the end of the year, according to an aggregation of polls by The News Lens, an independent youth-oriented media outlet.

A Tsai victory is the last thing that Xi wants; yet it was his major policy speech on Taiwan at the start of 2019 that many analysts point to as the starting point for her political recovery.

The Chinese leader upped the pressure on Taiwan to join China under the "one country, two systems" framework that governs Hong Kong. He called for talks on the issue, while saying that China would not rule out the use of for-

ce to achieve unification.

Tsai responded immediately, saying Taiwan's 23 million people would never accept "one country, two systems" and launching a four-day media blitz. Three weeks later, her support rating was 10 percentage points higher than after the November 2018 election setback.

She also benefited from a revamp of her public image that used memes, animation and social media to reach young voters. Campaign spokeswoman Lien Yi-ting credited the strategy with playing an important role in boosting Tsai's approval ratings.

Then came the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests, which erupted in June. Tsai has repeatedly pointed to the unrest as proof that the "one country, two systems" approach pushed by China doesn't work.

Taiwan's presidential elections generally revolve around the island's relationship with China. Voters have gone back and forth between the tough line that the Democratic Progressive Party says is best to defend Taiwan's sovereignty and the cooperation

with China that the Nationalist Party says will foster economic growth.

"I think, because of the recent months of the Hong Kong protests and Tsai's successful strategy of playing the anti-China card, these practical issues are played down and voters are swayed into this scare mentality," said Jason Hsu, a Nationalist Party lawmaker who is a member of Han's policy advisory team.

The economic argument has lost some of its potency as Taiwanese companies move manufacturing out of China because of rising labor costs and the U.S.-China trade war, which has led to tariffs on Chinese goods. China has made it more difficult for Chinese tourists to visit Taiwan.

The U.S., which does not recognize Taiwan but sells it military equipment for defense, has passed laws and taken other steps that while largely symbolic have demonstrated support for the island. That emboldens voters to stand up to China, despite the risks.

"These make people believe that the U.S. is a factor that Taiwan can rely on," said Wong Ming-hsien, a professor at Tamkang University's Graduate Institute of International Affairs and Strategic Studies. "And if Taiwan can rely on that, it can sustain pressure from China." AP

AD



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TSUYOSHI INAJIMA
& ISABEL REYNOLDS

Japan fires back at Ghosn, stoking war of words over trial

JAPAN battled to restore its image yesterday after former auto executive Carlos Ghosn blasted the country's legal system in a marathon press conference following his escape to Lebanon.

Justice Minister Masako Mori held an unusual briefing in the early morning hours in Tokyo, and then gave a second press conference later on to rebut what she said were mostly "abstract, unclear or baseless" criticisms of the country's legal system. She was scathing in her descriptions of Ghosn's behavior after he told the world he skipped bail and fled Japan because he didn't think he would get a fair trial.

"He has been propagating both within Japan and internationally false information on Japan's legal system and its practice," Mori said in her first briefing. "That is absolutely intolerable."

Ghosn, the former head of Nissan Motor Co. and Renault SA, used the first press conference since his dramatic escape to blast what he called "hostage justice." Speaking in four languages, he offered a point-by-point rebuttal of the charges against him and accused Japanese prosecutors, government officials and Nissan executives of conspiring to topple him to prevent a further integration of the Japanese carmaker with Renault.

In response to Ghosn's assertion that Japan breached his human rights by preventing him from seeing his wife, Mori said such measures were only used in cases of a flight risk or when there was a danger of evidence being concealed or destroyed. Mori also lauded Japan's police, judges and prosecutors for building what she



Carlos Ghosn (center)

said was the "safest country in the world."

Mori said she was aware of criticism of Japan's criminal justice system, and said authorities are taking steps to improve it. "It is my strong hope that he engage in all possible efforts to make his case within Japan's fair criminal justice proceedings, and that he seek justice rendered by a Japanese court," Mori said.

The Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office, which rarely makes any public comment, posted an English statement on its website saying Ghosn had only

himself to blame for his strict bail conditions. It vowed to try to bring him to justice in Japan. At a regular scheduled briefing yesterday, Tokyo Deputy Chief Prosecutor Takahiro Saito pushed back against many of Ghosn's complaints about the "inhuman" conditions of his confinement.

"Ghosn gave the impression he was questioned for a total of eight hours a day, but that's not true," Saito said. The former CEO was questioned on 70 of the days he spent in jail, about half the total, with each session lasting an

average of four hours, he said. He met with his legal counsel "almost every day" he was there, altogether more than 120 times, Saito said.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga also piled in, calling Ghosn's comments one-sided and not persuasive.

Striking Back

At his news conference in Beirut, Ghosn refrained from accusing specific people in the Japanese government of any wrongdoing, citing the need to avoid creating friction between Lebanon and Japan. He also said he di-

dn't think Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was involved.

Abe has avoided making any public comments about Ghosn. Kyodo News reported on Wednesday that he told a party lawmaker at a dinner in Tokyo ahead of Ghosn's news conference that he had wanted the situation "to be sorted out within Nissan in the first place."

The head of a foreign policy panel in Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party accused Ghosn of spreading "fake news."

"We have our dignity as a country, and we need to have people understand that we have a proper legal system that doesn't ignore human rights at all," said Yasuhide Nakayama, who is also a former vice foreign minister.

Abe's government has sought cooperation from Lebanon to bring Ghosn back but Japan doesn't have an extradition treaty with the country. Lebanese President Michel Aoun pledged to work on the issue in a meeting Tuesday with Japan's ambassador in Beirut, the Japanese foreign ministry said in a statement.

Lebanon prosecutor Ghassan Oueidat will listen to Ghosn's testimony on yesterday after Japan asked Interpol, the international police organization, to issue a Red Notice, Lebanese state-run National News Agency said. Ghosn said at the briefing that he wanted to clear his name and would stand trial "in any country where I believe I can receive a fair trial." **BLOOMBERG**

PHILIPPINES

Catholics pray for Mideast peace in huge gathering

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

A mammoth crowd of mostly barefoot Filipino Catholics prayed for peace in the Middle East yesterday at the start of an annual procession of a centuries-old black statue of Jesus Christ in one of Asia's biggest religious events.

The daylong procession of the wooden Black Nazarene draws massive numbers of largely poor devotees who pray for the sick and a better life. This year, widespread fears over the conflict between the United States and Iran were highlighted in a predawn Mass.

"Let us remember that in other parts of the world, the



threat of violence is brewing and, hopefully, this will not lead to war," Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle told the crowd at a Manila seaside park.

The popular Manila church leader asked the

tens of thousands of devotees clad in maroon shirts — the color associated with the Black Nazarene — to briefly pause in silence and pray for peace in the Middle East and the safety of

its people, including many Filipino expatriate workers.

"Let us pray [...] that the desire to retaliate eases," Tagle said.

One of the world's leading labor providers, the Philippines would face a gargantuan crisis if hostilities between the U.S. and Iran escalate and embroil other countries that host many Filipinos, such as Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The Philippine government on Wednesday ordered Filipino workers to leave Iraq and Iran. The military prepared to deploy navy ships, three cargo planes and one battalion each of marines and army troops to help the evacuations in case

hostilities worsen.

Organizers of the Black Nazarene procession expect up to 4 million people to join the procession, which usually ends late at night when the life-size statue of Christ is returned to a church in downtown Manila.

More than 12,000 police, including bomb squads, snipers and helicopter-borne teams, were deployed to secure the procession, though authorities said they have not monitored any specific threat.

Aside from ensuring safety and order, police worked to clear the streets in front of the carriage bearing the statue. Guns and liquor were banned and cell-

phone signals were jammed in parts of Manila.

Devotees who were pushed back when they tried to touch the statue complained, but despite the security and the tropical heat, mobs of people dangerously squeezed into a tight pack of humanity around the carriage. They threw small towels at volunteers on the carriage for them to wipe parts of the statue and toss the towels back, believing the Nazarene's powers can cure ailments and do other miracles.

Dozens of people fainted or sustained injuries and were carried away on stretchers by Red Cross volunteers. **AP**

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Iran sends mixed signals as tensions with US ease

AMIR VAHDAT
& JOSEPH KRAUSS, TEHRAN

IRAN sent mixed signals yesterday as tensions with the U.S. appeared to ease, with President Hassan Rouhani warning of a “very dangerous response” if the U.S. makes “another

mistake” and a senior commander vowing “harsher revenge” for the killing of a top Iranian general.

Both sides appeared to step back on Wednesday after Iran launched a series of ballistic missiles at two military bases housing American troops in Iraq without

causing any casualties. Iran said the attack was retaliation for the U.S. strike that killed Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the architect of its regional security strategy, in Iraq earlier this week.

Rouhani said the strike on the bases was a legitimate act of self-defense under the U.N. Charter,

but he warned that “if the U.S. makes another mistake, it will receive a very dangerous response.”

In addition to launching the missile attack, Iran also abandoned its remaining commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal, which President Donald Trump had walked away from in May 2018. But Rouhani said Thursday that Iran would continue to cooperate with U.N. inspectors.

Senior Iranian military commanders struck a more defiant tone.

Abdollah Araghi, a member of Iran’s joint chiefs of staff, said the country’s Revolutionary Guard

“will impose a more severe revenge on the enemy in the near future,” according to the semi-official Tasnim news agency.

Tasnim also quoted Gen. Ali Fadavi, the acting commander of the Guard, as saying the missile attack was “just one of the manifestations of our abilities.”

“We sent dozens of missiles into the heart of the U.S. bases in Iraq and they couldn’t do a damned thing,” he was quoted as saying.

On Wednesday, Trump signalled that he would not retaliate militarily for the strike on the bases. That raised hopes that the current standoff, which brought the two countries to the brink of an all-out war, may be winding down.

Rouhani spoke by phone Thursday with Prime Minister Boris Johnson, urging Britain to denounce the killing of Soleimani.

As head of Iran’s elite Quds Force, Soleimani had mobilized armed proxies across the region and was blamed for deadly attacks against Americans going back to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. In Iran, he is seen by many as a national hero who played a key role in defeating the Islamic State group and resisting Western hegemony.

Without Soleimani’s efforts leading forces in Syria and Iraq against IS, “you would not have peace and security in London today,” Rouhani was quoted as saying by Vice President Alireza Moezi, who tweeted about the call with Johnson.

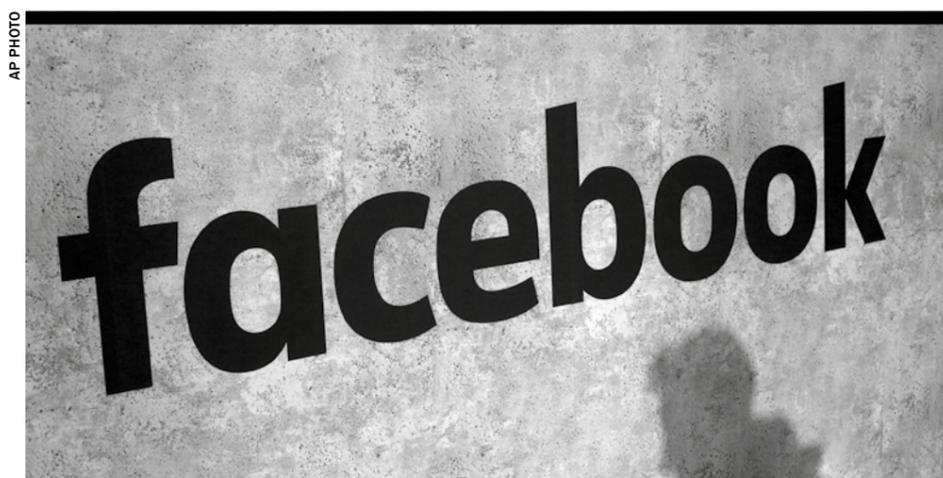
Downing Street confirmed the call, saying Johnson called for “an end to hostilities” in the Gulf. It said the U.K. stands by the nuclear deal and is urging Iran to return to full compliance. AP

Facebook again declines to limit political ad targeting

FACEBOOK has decided not to limit how political ads can be targeted to specific groups of people, as its main digital-ad rival Google did in November to fight misinformation. Neither will it ban political ads outright, as Twitter did last October. And it still won’t fact check them, as it’s faced pressure to do.

Instead, it is announcing much more limited “transparency features” that aim to give users slightly more control over how many political ads they see and to make its online library of political ads easier to use.

These steps appear unlikely to assuage critics — including some of the company’s rank and file employees — who say Facebook has too much power



and not enough limits when it comes to its effects on elections and democracy itself.

Since last fall, Facebook has insisted that it won’t fact-check political ads, a move that critics say gives politicians license to lie in

ads that can’t be easily monitored by outsiders. CEO Mark Zuckerberg has repeatedly argued that “political speech is important” and that Facebook doesn’t want to interfere with it.

Google, the digital ads leader, is limiting political-

-ad targeting to broad categories such as sex, age and postal code.

Facebook said in a blog post yesterday that it considered limiting the targeting of political ads. But the social network said it learned about their importance for

“reaching key audiences” after conducting outreach with political campaigns from both U.S. parties and nonprofits.

The company said it was guided by the principle that “people should be able to hear from those who wish to lead them, warts and all, and that what they say should be scrutinized and debated in public.”

Facebook does plan to let users choose to see “fewer” political and social-issue ads, although it won’t let people exclude them entirely. It’s also going to let people choose whether or not to see ads, political or otherwise, from advertisers targeting them using their contact details such as email address or phone number.

The company is also tweaking its ad library so people can search for exact phrases and to limit their search results using filters such as ad-audience size, dates and regions reached.

Facebook’s ad library currently lets anyone find out how much was spent on an ad, how many times it was seen, and the age, gender and location of the people who saw it.

The transparency changes will go into effect over the next three months in the U.S. and other countries where Facebook puts the “paid for by” disclaimers on political ads. The political-ad controls won’t roll out in the U.S. until early summer; the company will “eventually” expand them to other regions. AP

TV canal macau

13:00	TDM News (Repetição)
13:30	Telejornal RTPi (Diferido)
15:00	Água de Mar
15:30	Bing
15:40	Os Ursos Boonie na Neve
15:55	Reformas Internas da China
16:50	Portugueses Pelo Mundo Sr.1
17:45	Império (Repetição)
18:35	José Fonseca e Costa - Realizador
19:30	Ouro Verde Sr.1
20:30	Telejornal
21:15	Volta ao Mundo
21:30	Viagens em Série
21:50	Solteira e Boa Rapariga
22:20	Império
23:15	TDM News
23:55	4 Copas
01:40	Telejornal (Repetição)
02:25	RTPi Directo

cinema

CINETEATRO

09 - 15 Jan



UNDERWATER

ROOM 1

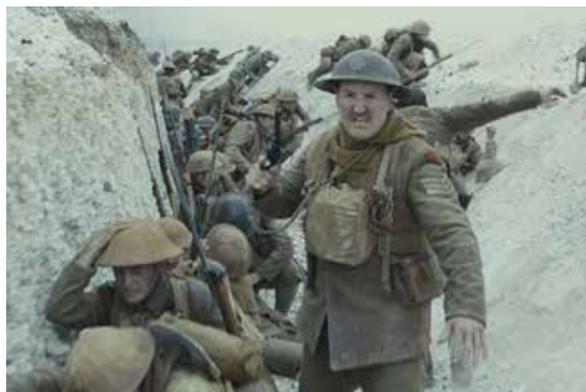
2:30, 4:30, 7:30, 9:30pm

Director: William Eubank

Starring: Kristen Stewart, T.J. Miller, Jessica Henwick

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 95min



1917

ROOM 2

2:30, 4:45, 7:15

Director: Sam Mendes

Starring: Dean-Charles Chapman, George MacKay, Daniel Mays

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 119min



ASHFALL

ROOM 2

9:30pm

Director: Byung-seo Kim, Hae-jun Lee

Language: Korean (English & Chinese)

Duration: 130min



LITTLE WOMEN

ROOM 3

2:44, 4:45, 7:15, 9:45pm

Director: Greta Gerwig

Starring: Saoirse Ronan, Emma Watson, Florence Pugh

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 135min

this day in history



1991 LAST DITCH EFFORTS TO AVOID GULF WAR

The United Nations Secretary General will leave shortly for Baghdad in a final diplomatic effort to avoid war against Iraq.

Javier Perez de Cuellar is expected to raise the possibility of sending a UN peacekeeping force to Kuwait to oversee the peaceful withdrawal of Iraqi troops.

Saddam Hussein is under UN orders to pull his soldiers out of Kuwait within five days. A Security Council resolution authorises the use of force against Iraq if he fails to comply.

Talks in Geneva between the Iraqi Foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, and the American Secretary of State, James Baker, broke down yesterday.

After more than six hours of negotiations, Mr Baker said he had heard nothing from the Iraqis to suggest they were preparing to meet the UN deadline.

An official statement from Iraq today said the army was longing for a showdown.

Mr Perez de Cuellar will meet Saddam Hussein in two days' time. UN officials have denied there are any specific peace plans on offer, but a spokesman confirmed there had been some discussion about a peacekeeping force.

The UK Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, said the time for diplomacy was past: "If Saddam Hussein does stay in Kuwait then he will be attacked... It's not going to be altered one way or the other by little bits and pieces of gestures."

Mr Baker is on his way to Saudi Arabia where he will be discussing plans for war rather than peace. He said: "I think there is still a path for peace, that path leads from Baghdad now and the choice is with the government of Iraq."

Britain's ambassador to Iraq, Harold Walker, has been recalled from Baghdad following the breakdown of yesterday's talks in Geneva.

Courtesy BBC News

Offbeat

MAN GETS ARRESTED IN ATTEMPT TO SUPPORT JAILED LOVER

Authorities in Kentucky say they've arrested a man who wanted to go to jail to support his jailed girlfriend.

Raymond Pace, 47, was charged with offenses including possession of methamphetamine, heroin and drug paraphernalia, news outlets report.

Pace called authorities Saturday to report a stolen laptop, according to a statement by Garrard County police. Officer Steven Debord arrived to find an intoxicated Pace requesting to be jailed for several months to support his girlfriend, who Pace said was serving five months in jail, according to the statement. Pace explained that he needed to be jailed with her so she would not be stressed, police said.

Pace shoved the officer in an attempt to be arrested, but the officer demurred until Pace pulled out a bundle of drug paraphernalia, police said.

It's unclear if Pace has a lawyer or if he has been able to see his girlfriend. The woman's identity was not immediately made public.

IN CONTEXT

Iraq refused to comply with the UN ultimatum for its troops to withdraw from Kuwait and at 2330 GMT on 16 January 1991, Operation Desert Storm began.

The Allies launched a devastating and sustained aerial bombardment involving cruise missiles launched from US warships and US, British and Saudi Arabian fighter planes, bombers and helicopters.

After more than a month of intensive air attacks, the Allies launched a land offensive, on 24 February. One day later, the Iraqis began retreating.

On 28 February, President George Bush declared victory. Kuwait was liberated but Saddam Hussein remained in power in Baghdad until the second war against Iraq in 2003.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Don't be surprised when someone has to jump up and down or squirt you with a water pistol to get your attention today. You will be (blissfully) lost in thought throughout most of the day.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
You have a powerful ability to calm distressed people right now, and you shouldn't be afraid to offer your shoulder to weepy folks who need some support.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
That would create a huge tangle of vague logic. You need to face facts and admit to problems as early as you can. That's the only way you can move past them.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
If you feel like busting out in song while standing in line at the market, sing! And if dancing or skipping along the sidewalk feels like the right thing to do, who's going to stop you?

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
You know what you're doing, so don't hesitate to take control and push things in the right direction. Any more time spent wandering around wondering what to do is silly.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Not everyone is as picture-perfect as they seem at first glance today. There are interesting nuances that only someone with a skeptical eye (like you) can see.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Today, if you open your eyes and close your mouth, the world will show something wonderful to you. You know an awful lot, but you don't know everything.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Even if you need to raise your hand in a meeting full of important folks, do it. Chances are you aren't the only person who is clueless at that moment.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Anything is possible, so pick your jaw up off the floor and carry on. Don't mock them or make a big deal out of it. They're only human! We all make mistakes sometimes.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Are you lagging in the discipline department? A messy car or bedroom isn't the end of the world, but when the dishes in your sink are super stinky, there might be a problem.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
If you're getting a little bit bored with your life, it's probably because you have too much control over every aspect. There's no unpredictability! Today, give up some control.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Someone flighty who doesn't really know the definition of the word "preparation" could throw a wrench into your carefully laid plans. But not to worry.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-2	9	clear
Harbin	-17	-4	clear
Tianjin	2	11	clear
Urumqi	-3	7	clear
Xi'an	5	17	clear
Lhasa	0	19	cloudy
Chengdu	10	16	clear
Chongqing	12	20	cloudy
Kunming	9	21	clear
Nanjing	7	23	cloudy
Shanghai	12	20	cloudy
Wuhan	8	24	clear
Hangzhou	9	22	clear
Taipei	17	21	cloudy
Guangzhou	14	27	clear
Hong Kong	20	25	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-1	4	clear
Frankfurt	0	6	drizzle
Paris	2	9	moderate rain
London	7	9	drizzle
New York	-3	1	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1-Frozen treats; 5- Thor's father; 9- It's owed; 13- Female horses; 15- Game played on horseback; 16- Rains of film; 17- Shrimp; 18- Electric fish; 19- Arrest; 20- Draft org.; 21- Seemingly forever; 23- African fly; 25- In this place; 26- Examines searchingly; 27- Refrigerator; 30- Help; 31- Flat contract; 32- Illegal; 37- Farm dwellers; 38- Lots of lots; 40- Detest; 41- Greek god of the sea; 43- Loudness units; 44- Actress Gardner; 45- Naive; 47- Recluse; 50- Payment for travel; 51- Negligent; 52- Soprano Gluck; 53- Where some vets served; 56- Some Ivy Leaguers; 57- Emilia's husband; 59- Family tree member; 61- Pineapple vendor; 62- Final Four org.; 63- Satan; 64- Anna of "Nana"; 65- Goldfinger portrayer Frobe; 66- Comic Foxx;

DOWN: 1- Little devils; 2- Bugs, clunkers, and rides, e.g.; 3- Historical chapters; 4- Attach by stitches; 5- Kitchen utensil; 6- Female rabbits; 7- Not in the pink; 8- Nares; 9- Brightest star in Cygnus; 10- Overjoy; 11- Rapture; 12- Story; 14- Blessed event?; 22- Metal-bearing mineral; 24- Pop; 25- "Siddhartha" author; 26- Sheet of stamps; 27- Flutter; 28- "All The Way To ___", song by REM; 29- Breaks bread; 32- Caterer's coffeepot; 33- Entire; 34- Temple; 35- Salt Lake City hoopsters; 36- Minus; 38- Notifying; 39- Cover; 42- Alpo alternative; 43- Maroon; 45- Financially solvent; 46- Male sheep; 47- Serf; 48- "South Pacific" hero; 49- Up; 51- Beatty Oscar film; 52- Petri dish gelatin; 53- Campbell of "Scream"; 54- Sour; 55- Blend; 58- Top pitcher; 60- Occupational suffix;



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TEXAS CITY PAID ENRIQUE IGLESIAS \$485,000 FOR 2015 CONCERT

A South Texas city used \$485,000 in taxpayer money to pay singer Enrique Iglesias to perform at a holiday concert in 2015, according to contract details made public this week.

McAllen officials have been concealing Iglesias' contract terms, citing exceptions in the Texas Public Information Act. But a broad transparency measure that went into effect this week closed some of what critics called gaping holes in the state's open-records laws.

City Attorney Kevin Pagan said the law "no longer excepts from disclosure" Iglesias' contract.

A bill Democratic state Sen. Kirk Watson, of Austin, penned made many details of a contract between a private entity or person and government agency public, including cost, certain communications and bids, while also protecting trade secrets and proprietary information.

Iglesias' contract revealed



led that McAllen provided the artist with a chartered flight from Guadalajara, Mexico, purchased 24 hotel rooms for two nights, and offered him a variety of sushi and sashimi.

"Residents finally are getting to see how their taxpayer money was spent on this entertainment event," said Kelley Shannon, executive director of the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas.

The 32-page contract guaranteed Iglesias \$485,000 for his one-hour performance at the McAllen Veterans Memo-

rial Stadium on Dec. 5, 2015, with half that sum paid in advance. The terms also call for Iglesias' crew to be provided a juicer with a "huge, plentiful selection of fruits and vegetables" including, beets, kale, watermelon and mint.

The city also paid for sound, lighting, special effects and a runway at the concert, the contract shows.

Two rulings from the Texas Supreme Court in 2015 significantly limited public access to certain government documents,

including lucrative government contracts with businesses or performers such as Iglesias.

One of the court's rulings was in the Boeing Co. v. Paxton case, which made it easier for governments to conceal information about their business with private companies. It allowed governments to withhold information that could put the companies at a competitive disadvantage. The Texas Attorney General's Office has repeatedly used that provision to justify withholding information.

BRAZIL JUDGE ORDERS NETFLIX TO REMOVE FILM WITH GAY JESUS

A Brazilian judge on Wednesday ordered Netflix to stop showing a Christmas special that some called blasphemous for depicting Jesus as a gay man and which prompted a gasoline bomb attack on the satirists behind the program.

The ruling by Rio de Janeiro judge Benedicto Abicair responded to a petition by a Brazilian Catholic organization that argued the "honor of millions of Catholics" was hurt by the airing of "The First Temptation of Christ." The special was produced by the Rio-based film company Porta dos Fundos, whose headquarters was targeted in the Christmas Eve attack.

Netflix told The Associated Press it would not comment on the ruling.

Porta dos Fundos also declined to comment on the judge's decision, which contradicted an earlier decision rejecting censorship of the program. The ruling is valid until another court orders otherwise.

Abicair said the program's withdrawal "is beneficial not only to the Christian community, but to Brazilian society which is mostly Christian."

The ruling comes at a time when some civil groups say far-right Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is waging a "cultural war," cutting funding for arts projects that challenge "Christian values" and inveighing against flamboyant carnival celebrations.

Early on the day before Christmas, a group of hooded men attacked the headquarters of Porta dos Fundos with Molotov cocktails. No one was hurt. A video circulating days later on social media showed three men claiming responsibility for the attack.

The First Temptation of Christ depicts Jesus returning home on his 30th birthday and insinuates he is gay. Religious groups bristled at the depiction. Creators of the film have defended it as legitimate freedom of expression.

AD



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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

FOOTBALL

Zidane's experiment with five midfielders pays off for Madrid

TALES AZZONI

WITHOUT some of his best forwards, Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane trusted his midfielders to get the job done.

Zidane used five players in the midfield to make up for the absence of forwards Karim Benzema, Gareth Bale and Eden Hazard in the semifinals of the Spanish Super Cup against Valencia on Wednesday in Saudi Arabia, and it paid off handsomely.

Madrid had one of its best games of the season, cruising to a 3-1 victory and advancing to Sunday's final against either Barcelona or Atlético Madrid.

Zidane used newly arrived Luka Jovic as the lone striker up front. Instead of adding forwards Lucas Vázquez, Rodrygo or Vinícius Júnior on the flanks, he packed the midfield with Francisco "Isco" Alarcón, Luka Modric, Toni Kroos, Federico Valverde and Casemiro.



Real Madrid's Luka Modric celebrates after scoring his side's third goal

Kroos, Isco and Modric each scored to give Madrid the comfortable victory at King Abdullah Sports City.

"We always like to try new things," Zidane said. "We could

have used two forwards, but we decided to bring Isco and Modric toward the middle and give more space to the fullbacks. It's an attacking-minded lineup. The important thing is that we pressured our

opponent on its field. We wanted to make things difficult for them from the start."

The tight midfield kept Madrid in control throughout the match, dominating Valencia by cons-

tantly threatening in attack while not conceding much ground defensively. Madrid ended with more than 60% of ball possession and exchanged a team season-high 798 passes.

"We were in control," Casemiro said. "It was an experiment to play with five midfielders and we showed that it can be done."

Zidane said the good performance against Valencia does not guarantee he will use the same formation again.

"It was the choice today, but we may change things again for the next match," Zidane said. "We need to get some rest before we start preparing for the final."

Benzema, Madrid's leading scorer with 16 goals in all competitions, didn't make the trip to Saudi Arabia because of a left hamstring injury, while Bale stayed home because of a throat infection. Hazard has been nursing an ankle injury since last year.

The Spanish Super Cup is being played in a "Final Four" format for the first time. Previously, only the Spanish league winner and the Copa del Rey champion participated. Madrid made it this year as the third-place finisher in the league after Spanish champion Barcelona lost to Valencia in the Copa del Rey final.

Madrid is seeking its eighth Spanish Super Cup title. Barcelona is the competition's most successful club with 10. **AP**

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OPINION

Bizcuits

Leanda Lee



RED DURIAN AND HEATED CONFUSION

Holidays away mostly bring with them some sort of clarity. Focus elsewhere usually lends an objectivity that is impossible from within the noise and mess of day to day life. How many of us make life-changing decisions and resolutions on holiday?

Those decisions come after confusion, dissonance and an unknowing. This is where the new year brings me. I have no resolution, there is too much dissonance. The fires in Australia have had a destabilizing effect.

I am travelling in beautiful countries surrounded by beautiful people who seem to be living quiet and relatively content, if not resigned lives. What is there to do in Brunei Bandar, we ask a young chatty Filipino at an empty concept café. "Me? I work, I eat. I sleep. That's all". Simple. Surely there's some turmoil, doubt or searching in his inner existence?

Now in Kota Kinabalu, we walk the streets after dinner in search of the red-fleshed durian dahlit. The central market is bustling. It's clean and abundant, and a smelly-fruit haven. An orange "meat" dahlit is found. It's smaller than most durians, cuter, less pungent – the Hello Kitty of the King of the Fruits. We are on a mission for the red one, though. Go under the overpass towards Chinatown, we've been told. There, a red one is found, as well as taraps and cempeduks and kampong durians, D8s and musang; it's a durian connoisseur's heaven. I dislike them, but am on the losing side of a family obsession. It's about the search, the stall choice, the bargaining, the flavor comparison, and the personalities.

We watch the antics of the stall holder. Chinese tourists are given a show. Stall-holders banter in mandarin. They laugh. They tease. A decision is made; the fruit chosen. The knife enters the hull and with "yi, er, san!" it's twisted open with an orchestrated chorus of "Hwaaaah!" as the seeds are revealed. It's a festival of durian flesh.

The boss is different from the others, fairer complexion, outgoing, erudite. "Where're you from, boss?" He smiles, "What do you think?" Part Kadazan? I have my doubts. "Half Chinese, half Tagalog" he laughs as he turns to tease a brazen (given the Muslim sensitivities) Chinese lady with a bare midriff. She looks the sort to be doing a visa U-turn from Macau.

Chinese tourist numbers are down and the durian-seller is a little worried. He shrugs. Who knows why? Our search complete, for now, we eat. Simple.

Yet, the holiday simplicity has not distracted me from unease caused by the fires and the heated divisive arguments. Australia still burns and will continue to burn for weeks more. We need rain, but not too much to erode our precious soil devoid now of vegetative structure.

The blame-game and ideologies are pitting citizens against each other – less to understand, more to vent and win arguments. Extended drought, fuel reduction (mis)management, global warming, population growth in fire-prone areas, conservation policies, government response, funding – there's truth in all arguments. Armchair ideologues do little to help while our 56,000-odd volunteer firefighters get on with it, now finally with defence force backup.

Yet, here I am, guiltily flying away adding to carbon emissions, staying in air-conditional comfort while smoke haze prompts the government to advise vulnerable Australians to stay indoors.

What we are seeing and reading about in Australia is environmental feedback. Take this as a gift of warning from Australia to the world.

This is the precise time to remind people that we are not taking heed of centuries-old indigenous knowledge – that man's role is guardian of, not master of, the natural world – and decades-old scientific evidence – that industrial emissions will precipitate climate-related risks for natural and human systems. In times such as this of heightened confusion, emotion and relevance, we learn best.

Change and adaptation is needed on a global scale. Due to socio-economic, political, institutional, technological, financial and environmental constraints, there is yet to be a consensus on how, but growing consensus that it must be now.

17 UN PEACEKEEPERS, 2 CIVILIANS HURT IN MALI ROCKET ATTACK

Suspected Islamic militants launched a rocket attack that wounded 17 U.N. peacekeepers in northern Mali, authorities said Thursday.

Olivier Salgado, spokesman for the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Mali, said the injured peacekeepers are from Chad and that in addition two civilians were hurt in the attack on the camp in Tessalit in Mali's Kidal region.

While there was no immediate claim of responsibility, suspicion immediately fell on the Islamic extremists who have long been active in the area, targeting U.N. forces and Malian soldiers.

More than 100 U.N. peacekeepers have been killed in Mali since 2013 when the mission began in the aftermath of a French-led military operation to oust Islamic extremists from power in the major towns across northern Mali.

THE BUZZ

AGNES KELETI, THE OLDEST LIVING OLYMPIC CHAMPION, TURNS 99

PABLO GORONDI

ALTHOUGH she turned 99 on yesterday, even a 9-year-old would have a hard time keeping up with Agnes Keleti's irrepressible energy and enthusiasm.

Keleti is the oldest living Olympic champion and a Holocaust survivor. She won 10 medals in gymnastics — including five golds — at the 1952 Helsinki Games and at the 1956 Melbourne Games.

Still, speaking on the eve of her birthday at her elegant apartment in downtown Budapest, Keleti hardly wanted to mention her achievements and her long life, which includes adventures and great accomplishments, but also heartbreak and tragedy.

Keleti's family was decimated during the Holocaust, which she survived thanks in part to assuming a false identity and working as a maid. While her mother and sister also survived, her father and uncles perished at Auschwitz and were among the 550,000 Hungarian Jews killed in Nazi death camps, Hungarian forced labor battalions, ghettos or shot to death into the Danube River.

"The past? Let's talk about the future," Keleti said. "That's what should be beautiful. The past is past but there is still a future."

Even her Olympic memories seem to center not on her athletic prowess — among Jewish athletes, only American swimmers Mark Spitz and Dara Torres have won more Olympic medals — but rather on the travel opportunities her sporting career offered.

"It's not the medals that are significant but the experiences that came with them," Keleti said while holding some of the nine medals she still has (one was reportedly lent to a journalist for a project and never returned). "I loved gymnastics because it was possible to travel for free."

Even standing on the podium to get her medals didn't really appeal to her: "I didn't want to show myself. I loved to do gymnastics."

After winning a gold medal in the floor exercise at the



Agnes Keleti demonstrates her flexibility as she poses for a photo with her son Rafael

Helsinki Games, as well as a silver in the team event and two bronzes, Keleti won three individual golds in Melbourne — balance beam, floor exercise and uneven bars — and another in a team event, while also winning silver in the all-around competition and another team event. She could have won even more but an injury kept her from competing at the 1948 London Olympics.

She doesn't watch sports on television these days, not even the Olympics, which "aren't very interesting. I prefer mountain climbing."

The climbing days may be behind her but she seems most happy taking walks around Budapest, where she returned a few years ago after living for decades in Israel, or traveling to places like Barcelona, which she visited last year.

Keleti, who began her gymnastic career at the age of 4 and won her Olympic medals at the hard-to-believe ages of 31 and 35, was also a talented cello player and, after moving to Israel in 1957, taught gymnastics for years.

"I love children and I also love to teach them," she said.

Asked about the most important thing children should learn, Keleti answered without hesitation: "The joy of life."

Keleti, whose infectious laugh seems always ready to spring into action, has a favorite prank for those expecting to meet a frail, weak lady entering her 100th year.

She extends her hand in greeting, makes sure her grip is good and tight, and suddenly yanks the unsuspecting "victim" toward her with surprising force.

"I'm strong," she says with a big chuckle after the pull. "And silly!"

While she stopped doing full leg splits on the floor not long ago, she still does them standing up while holding her son Rafael's hand, or sitting on a couch.

If there's one issue she continues to have an opinion about, it's the premature pressure and exhausting exercises young gymnasts may be exposed to.

"That's not good," Keleti said. "Tough gymnastics exercises damage their development. It shouldn't be started early."

"Not to mention that, in the first place, it's the children's minds that should be developed, not their bodies."

What did she do to train her mind?: "I studied languages and I saw the world."

Keleti has been given a long series of prestigious awards in Hungary and Israel, including being one of Hungary's 12 "Athletes of the Nation" since 2004 and getting the Israel Prize, considered that state's highest honor, in 2017.

But, as with her Olympic medals, she doesn't seem impressed by the recognition of her successes.

"I excelled?" she asks, almost incredulously. "I did what I could and that's it." AP



India Envoys from 15 countries including the United States arrived in Indian-controlled Kashmir yesterday, the first visit by New Delhi-based diplomats since the government stripped the region of its semi-autonomous status and began a harsh crackdown five months ago. The diplomats were driven by Indian authorities in a motorcade amid tight security from the airport to the military headquarters in Srinagar, where they were briefed on the security situation, an army officer said.

Australia Residents in the path of wildfires razing southeast Australia were urged to evacuate yesterday if they don't intend to defend their homes as hot and windy conditions are forecast to escalate the danger over the next two days. The Rural Fire Service in New South Wales state has told fire-weary community meetings south of Sydney in the coastal towns of Nowra, Narooma and Batemans Bay that northwesterly winds were likely to once again drive blazes toward the coast.



Lebanon Prosecutors issued a travel ban for fugitive ex-Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn and asked him to hand in his French passport yesterday, following an Interpol-issued notice against him, a judicial official said. The travel ban comes after Ghosn was interrogated by prosecutors for nearly two hours over the notice about the charges he faces in Japan over financial misconduct.

Spain's Supreme Court has ruled that an imprisoned Catalan politician will remain behind bars despite a European court ruling that his election to the European Parliament gave him immunity. A lawyer had requested Oriol Junqueras' release so the separatist leader could travel and take his seat in the EU legislature.