



CHINA REFORM MONITOR

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November 14, 2019 Joshua Eisenman

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SHANGHAI APARTMENT DWELLERS SUBJECTED TO FACIAL RECOGNITION

Residents of an apartment building in Changning, Shanghai were angry to learn that local police had installed facial recognition technology in their elevator without notifying them. The facial recognition device is capable of transmitting data in real time. Chinese state security is also earning income from the projector displaying ads in the elevator. One building resident said the measure is "excessive" and described the building elevator as a "semi-private space" for residents. The installation of facial recognition is in line with general trends in the neighborhood, where many buildings have had similar surveillance systems installed. (Caixin, October 16, 2019)

MAHJONG HOUSES FALL SILENT AS CHINA PURIFIES SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The mahjong houses and poker rooms in Yushan and Shangrao, Jiangxi have been closed as part of a nationwide campaign against the "dark and evil forces" of organized crime and to "purify the social environment" and "improve the image of citizens." Failure to comply could mean up to three years in jail. Police statements said the closures were because "mahjong houses are noisy and often involve gambling." Last month, at least two cities in Hubei and one in Anhui made similar closures, claiming the venues harm people's lives and corrupt their morals. But the orders have been controversial. Mahjong is an important pastime for many retirees, and mahjong houses provide an important social venue for them. Some netizens linked the closures to the tighter business environment in China. (South China Morning Post, October 21, 2019)

39 CHINESE NATIONALS FOUND DEAD IN REFRIGERATED TRUCK IN ENGLAND

Police in Essex, England have confirmed more than three dozen Chinese nationals, 8 women and 31 men, were found dead in a refrigerated trailer truck container. A man from Northern Ireland has been detained on suspicion of murder in connection with the incident. In a statement, China's embassy in London said: "We read with a heavy heart the reports about the death of 39 people in Essex, England. We are in close contact with the British police to seek clarification and confirmation of the relevant reports." The prosecutor said preliminary investigations showed the container had arrived in the Zeebrugge port in Belgium and departed for England' he same day. Belgian federal prosecutors have opened an inquiry into the deaths focusing on all parties involved in the transport. "Up till now, we have a lot of questions and not a lot of answers," said one prosecutor. (The Guardian, October 24, 2019)

SOLOMON ISLANDS' GOV'T SAYS CHINA'S ISLAND IS "UNLAWFUL"

The government of the Solomon Islands has declared a deal one of its provinces signed last month to lease Tulagi island to China's Sam Enterprise Group to be unlawful, and terminated it. Details of the long-term lease were made public last month after the Pacific nation switched diplomatic ties from Taipei to Beijing. "The agreement was not vetted by the Attorney General's chambers before signing" and was found to be "unlawful, unenforceable and must be terminated with immediate effect," the country's Attorney General, John Muria, said in a statement. The agreement, dated September 22nd, purportedly offers wide-ranging powers to the Chinese conglomerate to develop infrastructure on Tulagi and surrounding islands. Headquartered in Beijing, Sam Group is a technology, investment and energy conglomerate founded in 1985 as a state-owned enterprise. Representatives from the company met Solomons Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare in early October during his state visit to China. (Reuters, October 24, 2019)

CHINA OFFERS SOLOMONS A STADIUM AND HUAWEI INFRASTRUCTURE

The deputy chief of mission at China's embassy in Papua New Guinea, Yao Ming, said at a briefing in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, that Beijing will build some infrastructure projects, including a sports stadium, for the country as a "state gifts." China will also support Huawei to build more infrastructure in the Solomons, Yao said. "China is not a country to make so-called debt traps. You can see which country has been embroiled in debt traps, not China, but United States and Britain," Yao told local journalists. Last year, Australia agreed to fund the construction of an undersea cable to bring high-speed internet access to the island nation, undercutting a commercial deal between the Solomons and Huawei, over fears the cables would jeopardize Australia's networks. (Reuters, October 24, 2019)