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Fire kills 19 people at spa hotel in north-eastern



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China rebuffs Philippines president's South China Sea rebuke

BEIJING (Reuters) - China rebuffed Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's call for Beijing to rethink its conduct in the South China Sea on Thursday, saying China had the right to react to foreign ships or aircraft that get close to its islands. Duterte said China has no right to repel foreign aircraft and boats passing by its artificial islands in the disputed waterway, and that he hoped China would "temper" its behavior and stop restricting movements.

In a statement sent to Reuters, China's Foreign Ministry said the Spratly Islands are China's inherent territory and that China respects the right to freedom of navigation and overflight that all countries enjoy in the South China Sea under international law.

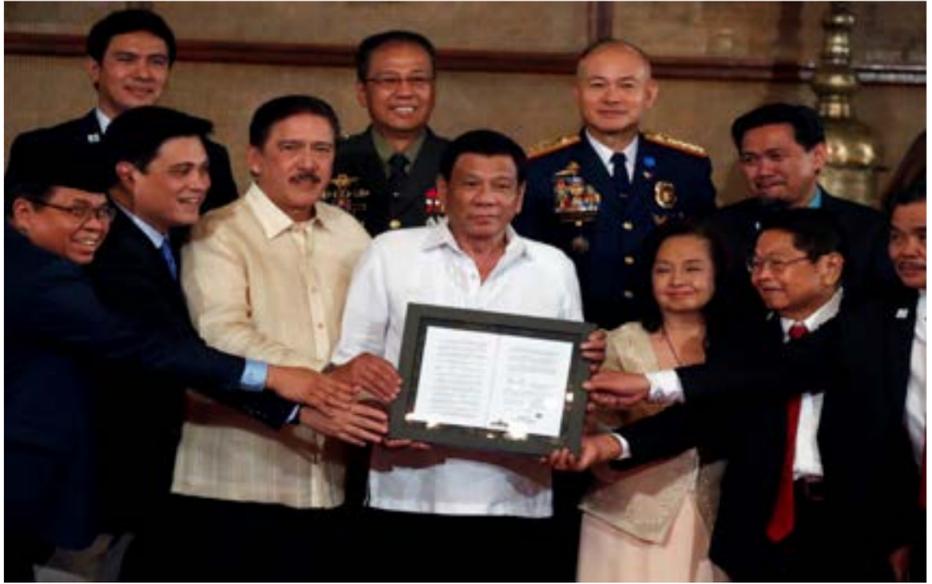
"But China has a right to take necessary steps to respond to foreign aircraft and ships that deliberately get close to or make incursions into the air and waters near China's relevant islands, and provocative actions that threaten the security of Chinese personnel stationed there," it said.

"China urges the relevant party to meet China halfway, and jointly protect the present good situation that has not come easily in the South China Sea," the ministry added, without elaborating.

China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei have competing claims to the Spratly archipelago, where China has rapidly turned reefs into artificial islands that appear to be military installations, from which its personnel routinely instruct foreign vessels to leave.

Duterte has a policy of engagement with Beijing, in the hope of securing billions of dollars in grants, loans and investments, and has rejected criticism that he is acquiescing to Chinese pressure or surrendering Philippines sovereignty.

Trump calls off Pompeo's planned trip to North Korea However, instead of blaming China for building and militarizing islands in disputed waters, he has said the United States was at fault for not blocking the construction when it started. China has been angered by the United States in particular sending military ships and aircraft close to Chinese-occupied islands in the South China Sea in the name of freedom of navigation, saying the operations are highly provocative and potentially dangerous.



President Rodrigo Duterte and other officials show a document containing a signed autonomy law during a ceremony at the presidential palace in Manila



FILE PHOTO: Chinese structures are pictured at the disputed Spratlys in South China Sea

'Amazon effect' could have impact on inflation dynamics: paper

(Reuters) - More frequent price changes for goods and a rise in the consistency of pricing due to the growth of online retailers may be affecting inflation, according to an academic paper presented on Saturday to some of the world's top central bankers.

"In the past 10 years online competition has raised both the frequency of price changes and the degree of uniform pricing across locations," said Alberto Cavallo, an associate professor at Harvard Business School, who analyzed how so-called multi-channel retailers - those with brick-and-mortar and online outlets - such as Walmart Inc (WMT.N) have reacted to the rise of Amazon.com Inc (AMZN.O). Algorithmic pricing technologies are widespread among both types of retailers and the transparency of the internet has also reduced pricing disparities, he said in the paper delivered to the annual conference of central bankers in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Federal Reserve Chairman Je-

rome Powell is among those attending.

A number of Fed policymakers have raised the prospect that relatively low levels of U.S. inflation in recent years in the face of a strong economy may be due to the ability of companies like Amazon to keep a lid on overall prices.

The Fed's preferred measure of inflation - the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index excluding food and energy components - hit the central bank's 2 percent target in March for the first time in six years.

But there are no signs it will accelerate sharply, as many economists have come to expect in periods of low unemployment.

The U.S. unemployment rate currently stands at 3.9 percent while the economy is experiencing robust growth in what is the second-longest expansion on record.

This environment has meant retailers have had to become more nimble, leading to lower margins. For example, Cavallo found that Walmart more frequently changed the prices on its website between 2016 and 2018 for products also easily found on Amazon.

Last week, Walmart reported second-quarter sales that topped estimates as more shoppers visited its stores and a revamped website drove online purchases. Walmart's e-commerce sales grew 40 percent, up from 33 percent growth in the previous quarter, but gross margins fell for the fifth consecutive quarter. Cavallo also found retailers more responsive to changes in other factors as well.

"Fuel prices, exchange-rate fluctuations, or any other force affecting costs that may enter the pricing algorithms used by these firms are more likely to have a faster and larger impact on retail prices than in the past," he concluded.

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Fire kills 19 people at spa hotel in north-eastern China

BEIJING (Reuters) - Fire tore through a hot springs hotel in the northeastern Chinese city of Harbin before dawn on Saturday, killing 19 people and causing 23 others to be taken to hospital, city officials said.

Authorities are investigating the cause of the blaze at the four-storey Bailong Hot Springs Leisure Hotel, an inexpensive spa resort visited mainly by domestic tourists, which broke out just after 4:30 a.m. (4.30 p.m ET Friday).

The People's Daily newspaper cited fire officials as saying the blaze had started in a kitchen on the second floor.

Flames swept through an area of about 400 square metres (4,300 square feet) before being extinguished after three hours as more than 30 fire engines and 100 firefighters rushed to the scene, Chinese state media reported.

Firemen rescued 20 people who were trapped in the hotel and another 80 were evacuated from the building, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

Television footage showed rescue workers picking through the charred building.

Casualties treated in hospital were in the 40s to 70s age range,

the newspaper said, citing the Harbin First Hospital. Further details about those who were killed were not immediately available.

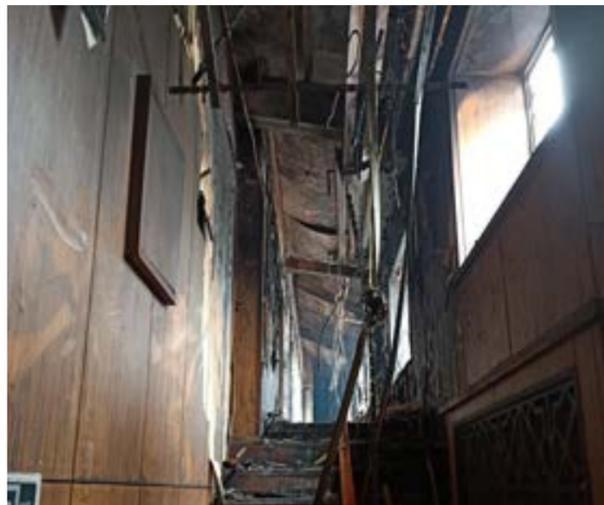
An earlier death toll of 18 rose by one after a victim died in hospital, officials said.

Local authorities said a legal representative of the hotel was in criminal custody for suspected fire safety negligence.

China has a patchy record for building safety regulations, and the country's Ministry of Emergency Management said it would launch nationwide fire safety inspections in buildings such as hotels, sauna, hospitals, schools and shopping malls, CCTV reported on Saturday.

Beijing's municipal government launched a 40-day "special operation" targeting fire code and building safety violations after an apartment fire in the Chinese capital in November killed 19 people.

Harbin, in the far northeast of China and home to a large Russian population during the early 20th century, is famous for buildings dating from that era as well as a popular winter snow and ice festival.



Interior of a hot springs hotel which caught fire early in the morning is pictured in Harbin

Didi woman passenger killed amid China ride-hailing safety concerns

BEIJING (Reuters) - A ride-sharing passenger in the eastern Chinese city of Wenzhou was raped and killed by a driver for China's largest ride-hailing firm, local police said on Saturday, the latest violent crime to fuel safety concerns about the service.

Didi Chuxing, the biggest ride-sharing firm globally by number of trips, was "immensely saddened by the tragedy," it said in a statement.

"We are deeply sorry. We fell short of your expectations. We can't and we won't shirk from our responsibilities," it said.

Following the incident, Zhejiang province, where Wenzhou is located, ordered Didi to suspend its carpooling service there while the company addressed safety issues, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

Didi has been stepping up safety measures including for its carpooling service, Didi Hitch, after the murder of a flight attendant in May sparked wider community outrage.

The steps include limiting Didi Hitch drivers to picking up passengers of the same sex during early morning and late evening hours.

Police in Yueqing city, which is part of Wenzhou, said in their official microblog that the 20-year-old woman, surnamed Zhao, got into a Didi carpool vehicle at 1 p.m. on Friday, and sent a message to a friend at around 2 p.m. seeking help before losing contact.

Police said they found the suspect, a 27-year-old driver called Zhong, at about 4 a.m. on Saturday. They said Zhong confessed to raping and killing the

passenger, and that the victim's body had been recovered and an investigation was continuing.

Didi said the driver had passed background checks and had logged in with his authentic ID and had been confirmed by facial recognition on the day. However, the driver had altered the car's licence plate before the trip, the company said.

A day earlier, a passenger had complained to Didi that the same driver had repeatedly requested that she sit in the front seat, drove to a remote area, and followed her "for a distance" after she got out of the car, Didi said. It said the customer service representative who took the complaint had not followed up with

an investigation within two hours, as the firm promises.

Didi Chuxing - which has been valued at \$50 billion and counts SoftBank Group Corp as a major investor - is aggressively expanding overseas, targeting new markets in Mexico, Brazil and Australia, going head-to-head with Uber. In 2016, Didi acquired Uber's China business.

"The fact that Didi has a driver safety and security issue is a real problem for Didi ... and an opportunity for new service providers who can better serve the mobility demand," said Bill Russo, CEO of Automobility Limited, a Shanghai-based consultancy.

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Editor's Choice



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks during the commemoration of victims and award ceremony of the Righteous Among the Nations at the Paneriai Memorial in Vilnius



A Maasai boy wears a traditional costume during an initiation into an age group ceremony near the town of Bisil, Kajiado county



Sailing - 2018 Asian Games - Race 1 470 Women - GBK Aquatics Center - Jakarta, Indonesia - August 24, 2018 - Kit Fong Tong and Anna Lee Fisher of Hong Kong, Narisara Satta and Sutida Poonpat of Thailand, Yoshida Ai and Yoshioka Miho of Japan, Nuraisyah Jamil and Norashikin Mohamad Sayed of Malaysia compete. REUTERS/Darren Whiteside TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



Former Australian PM Malcolm Turnbull kisses his wife Lucy, while standing with daughter Daisy, and grandchildren Alice and Jack after a news conference in Canberra



Policemen walk towards the home of former Argentine President and senator Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner for a raid ordered by a judge in Buenos Aires



Swimming - 2018 Asian Games - Women's 4 x 100m Medley Relay - GBK Aquatic Center, Jakarta, Indonesia - August 23, 2018. Silver medalists Stephanie Au, Jamie Zhen Mei Yeung, Kin Lok Chan and Camille Lily Mei Cheng of Hong Kong.



A priest carries incense during mass at the Pastoral Congress at the World Meeting of Families in Dublin

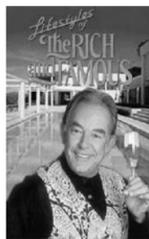


Migrants wait to disembark from the Italian coast guard vessel "Diciotti" at the port of Catania



Robin Leach in Las Vegas in 2014. With his distinctive, British-accented voice and exuberant, exclamation-point delivery, he was widely recognized and just as widely parodied. Alex Federowicz for The New York Times

Robin Leach, who became a symbol of unapologetic opulence as host of the popular syndicated television show "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" in the 1980s and '90s, died on Friday in Las Vegas. He was 76. John Katsilometes, a columnist at The Las Vegas Review-Journal, where Mr. Leach was also a columnist, announced the death on Twitter. He said Mr. Leach had had a stroke in November and another on Monday. With his distinctive, British-accented voice and exuberant, exclamation-point delivery, Mr. Leach was widely recognized and just as widely parodied during the initial run of the show, from 1984 to 1995, and long after. But he rebelled at the perception that he himself was as rich as the people whose lavish homes and lives he was bringing to his audiences. "Everyone thinks I make what Oprah does, or Cosby," he told The New York Times in 1990, "but I don't, because we're in syndication."



"Lifestyles" seemed omnipresent on television for years, on at all hours of the day or night on one station or another. The show featured celebrities, business moguls and others with extreme wealth, and its success resulted in spinoff shows like "Runaway With the Rich and Famous."

Mr. Leach was often criticized, especially during economic downturns, for glorifying extravagance and serving up softball questions to his interview subjects. But he was unapologetic.

"Everybody makes a mistake thinking America resents wealth and resents what I'm doing," he told The Boston Globe in 1987.

Robin Leach, 76, 'Lifestyles Of The Rich And Famous' Host, Dies

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

He viewed the show as embodying the values of a capitalist society. "No one would watch 'Lifestyles of the Poor and Unknown,'" he said. (Courtesy <https://www.nytimes.com>)

Related

Robin Leach, Engaging Host Of TV's 'Lifestyles Of The Rich and Famous,' Lived The High Life



Robin Leach, a British-born TV personality and unapologetic practitioner of "Jacuzzi journalism" whose long-running show "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" ogled the world's most conspicuous consumers consuming conspicuously, died Aug. 23 in Las Vegas. He was 76.

His family announced the death in a statement. He had two strokes in the past year. With his thinning hair, paunch, elfin grin and tendency to speak in a quasi-Cockney tongue at carnival-barker volume, Leach was few people's idea of an urbane sophisticate or a blow-dried television host. He called himself "the most unlikely star in the world." Yet as a veteran gossip writer and son of a London vacuum company manager, he understood better than most the success-obsessed middle class and, in his exclamatory catchphrase, their "champagne wishes and caviar dreams!" He offered voyeuristic access to the decadent playgrounds of the 1 percent, from Hollywood to the Riviera, and he packaged it as a veneration of free-market, up-by-your-bootstraps capitalism.



"What Robin Leach presented is an incredibly seductive batch of cultural catnip," said television

and pop-culture scholar Robert Thompson. "However much you may think it's terrible to feature people with way more than their share of the resources of the Earth, it is really fun to watch how incredibly luxuriously it is possible to live as a human being."

"Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" began its 11-year run in syndication in 1984. It was picked up by more than 200 stations, and such was its penetration that, in some markets, it was broadcast seven days a week, often multiple times a day, beaming garish displays of Croesus-like wealth into millions of living rooms. Leach spent his early career as a tabloid scoop artist and flourished as a cheeky guest on TV entertainment programs. He joined the nascent celebrity-interview show "Entertainment Tonight" in 1981 but, after a few years, complained to producer Al Masini that the focus was too much on actors bloviating about their latest work and not enough on beautiful people enjoying their trappings.

"I became frustrated," Leach told the Chicago Tribune. "We'd go into these houses and we'd talk to these blond-headed bimbos who'd talk about how they wanted to stretch by doing Shakespeare-in-the-park. They were nothing more than jiggle queens and I'd say to myself, 'I don't want to see anything more than you taking your clothes off and stepping into the bubble bath.' From that gem of facetiousness came a TV show."



Over 60 minutes - later reduced to 30 - Leach interviewed actors, models, industrialists and anyone else with a net worth above \$50 million (the minimum cutoff).

He delivered bromides in breathless tones, promising "Lifestyles" viewers "another journey with the most envied people in the world" and admission to "the homes of the world's elite . . . where winning at the top is the ultimate victory." He repeated "glamorous," "exclusive" and "success" loudly and ad nauseam.

"I believe in talking in 96-point," he told the New York Times, referring to the font size

of banner tabloid headlines. ". . . I love cliches. I love alliteration. On television, you can wrap your tongue around cliches and aggressive verbs."

Cameras lingered worshipfully over the rococo and the vulgar. In the \$10 million home of the Vegas animal-act duo Siegfried and Roy, Leach marveled at their replica of a section of the Sistine Chapel over the bar. One Australian business magnate had a dining room with a wall that opened to reveal a private bullring. Another episode featured a 120-foot-long limousine modified to fit a hot tub and a helicopter landing pad.

The show traded skin-deep access for celebrity brand-building, letting supermodels present themselves as relatable homebodies and showcasing the profanely rich as humble. A segment on Adnan Khashoggi, the checkered Saudi arms merchant and notorious playboy, described him as "a pure monetary force, the golden artery feeding the world's biggest deals" and "a surprisingly private family man."



In addition to the flagship program, Leach served as commentator on spinoffs including "Runaway With the Rich and Famous" and "Fame, Fortune and Romance." His distinctive voice was used to move merchandise: He did voice-over narration for TV ads featuring Bud Light pitch dog Spuds MacKenzie, as well as commercials for Honda, the California Lottery and Meineke discount muffler shops.



Robin Douglas Leach was born in London on Aug. 29, 1941. In his teens, he wrote feature stories for the Harrow Observer in his northwest London neighborhood and discovered that readers responded to hyperbole. Covering a garden show, he told the Tribune, "I'd go to find the largest cabbage or the biggest squash or the yellowest yellow corn. I knew everybody loved to read about the largest, the biggest, the best, no matter what it was."

He became one of the youngest reporters on Fleet Street, then moved to New York in 1963 and sold shoes at Lord & Taylor while trying to break into American journalism. He started a short-lived rock-and-roll magazine called Go, spent years as show-business editor at Rupert Murdoch's tabloid Star, and did freelance gossip and entertainment writing. Survivors include three sons from a marriage that ended in divorce. A complete list of survivors could not immediately be confirmed. After "Lifestyles" went off the air, Leach parlayed his association with the luxe life into work promoting a Florida-based travel service offering "dream vacations": "Bahamas cruises" that in reality were a day-long ferry ride with "Las Vegas-style" bingo. In 2000 Leach settled a lawsuit brought by attorneys general in a dozen states who accused him of participating in deceptive advertising practices.



Leach subsequently became a Vegas Strip habitué. With his ever-present cigar and goblet of white wine, he haunted casino nightclubs, hosted charity auctions, and promoted hotels and restaurants. He appeared on local entertainment TV shows, wrote columns for Vegas papers and became a blogger.

Leach said that his defining legacy - "Lifestyles" - was meant as a paean to the rewards of hard work, although it opened the door to even gaudier displays of opulence, including on MTV's mansion-touring show "Cribs" and anything starring the Kardashians. On reflection, he told the Times in 2014, his show seemed almost quaint and restrained. "Now you have Kim Kardashian having her private area waxed on camera," he said. (Courtesy seattlepi.com)

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-Beth Yip, M.D., co-managing physician, Pearland Clinic

Dr. Yip is a board-certified pediatrician who completed her medical degree, internship and residency at Baylor College of Medicine. She is a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics and member of the American Medical Association, Texas Medical Association, Harris County Medical Society and Texas Pediatric Society.

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Counties across the U.S. are seeing boosted jobs numbers and higher wages due in large part to policies put into effect under the Trump administration. Americans are finding work and getting paid more across the country.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics released a new report on Wednesday for March 2017 — just two months after President Trump's inauguration — to March 2018. It shows 314 counties out of 349 of the largest counties had a boost in job growth.

While the national average was 1.6-percent, Midland County in western Texas had the biggest boost at more than 12-percent. Many of those jobs were in natural resources and mining.

Midland County, plus the other seven top counties, all chose President Trump in 2016.

On the other side — Charleston, West Virginia's county had the biggest drop at nearly 1.5-percent, with most of the jobs lost at the state level in government.

As far as income, workers across the nation saw a nearly four-percent increase on average.

The biggest wage jump was in Illinois, with a more than 23-percent increase in pay.

Other top counties supporting President Trump are in Utah, where the home of Brigham Young University is located, and in the southern part of New Hampshire.

Summary



Bureau Of Labor Statistics: Largest Counties See Boost In Job Growth Under Trump Administration

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



In the time Donald Trump has been in the White House:

The economy added 3.2 million jobs, unemployment fell to the lowest level in 18 years, and the number of job openings grew larger than the number of job-seekers for the first time on record.

- Economic growth picked up, but remains below what Trump promised, and

even below the best years under Barack Obama.

- The murder rate declined — at least in the 30 largest cities.
- The decade-long downward trend in carbon dioxide emissions from energy slowed — and has most recently turned upward.
- Illegal border crossings from Mexico slowed, but Trump's promised border wall is still not funded.
- Inflation-adjusted weekly wages rose 1.2 percent.
- Home prices rose 17 percent, to a record level.
- The U.S. trade deficit continued rising — up 13.6 percent.
- The Federal Debt Rose By More Than \$1 Trillion, And Projected Annual Defi-

But the most recent 2.0 percent rate is lower than the four best years under Obama: 2.9 percent real growth in 2015, 2.6 percent in 2014, 2.2 percent in 2012 and 2.5 percent in 2010.

And it's far below the annual growth of 4 percent to 6 percent that Trump promised repeatedly, both when he was a candidate and as president.

The first official estimate for the second quarter of 2018 won't be released until July 27. However, the "GDP Now" forecast produced by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta projected on July 6 that the second-quarter growth rate will come in at 3.8 percent — almost within the range that Trump promised.



But few if any economists expect sustained growth at anywhere close to what Trump has pledged.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projects real GDP to grow 3.3 percent this year, and 2.4 percent in 2019, then settle to an average of 1.9 percent for decades to come.

The National Association for Business Economists June survey produced a median forecast of 2.8 percent growth this year and 2.5 percent next year.

The most recent median forecast of the Federal Reserve Board members and Federal Reserve Bank presidents, released June 13, is for 2.8 percent in 2018, 2.4 percent in 2019 and 2.0 percent in 2020.

And of the business and university economists who offered an annual GDP forecast to the Wall Street Journal's monthly economic survey in June, the average prediction was for 2.9 percent growth this year, 2.4 percent next year and 1.9 percent in 2020. (Courtesy <https://www.factcheck.org>)



The economy grew at an annual rate of 2.0 percent during the first three months of this year, according to the most recent official estimate by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. That's the "real" rate of growth in gross domestic product after accounting for price inflation. The most recent quarter's growth is down from the 2.3 percent increase during Trump's first full year, but still better than the 1.5 percent real GDP growth posted in 2016.

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