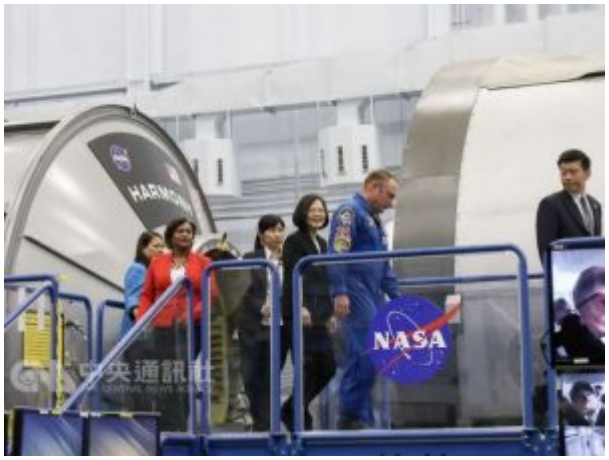
Over 54 percent think Tsai's overseas visit beneficial: poll



President Tsai Ing-wen (□□□, third right) visits the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) space center in Houston, Texas / CNA file photo

Taipei, Aug. 23 (CNA) Over 54 percent of the respondents to a survey conducted by the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) felt President Tsai Ing-wen's (□□□) recent visit to Taiwan's allies Paraguay and Belize as well as the United States was beneficial, according to the DPP on Thursday.
The poll was conducted during Tsai's nine-day state visit to Paraguay and Belize, with stopovers in the United States, said DPP Deputy Secretary-General Hsu Chia-ching (□□□) at a press conference held on Thursday.

The poll showed that 54.2 percent of the respondents felt Tsai's Aug. 12-20 visit was beneficial to Taiwan's relationship with the diplomatic allies as well as the U.S., while 36.8 percent felt it did not help.

Tsai's trip showed that she had consolidated Taiwan's foreign relations, which led the public to feel a certain level of satisfaction, Hsu said.

He added that under China's suppression of Taiwan, it was commendable that Tsai maintained such a degree of recognition.

Up to 46.9 percent of the respondents expressed support for Tsai while 46.7 percent did not, the poll also showed.

Despite relatively strong support, a slightly lower percentage of respondents – 43.4 percent – approved of Tsai's performance, while 48.7 percent expressed they were dissatisfied with her, according to the poll.

The survey was conducted between Aug. 16-18 among citizens over 20 years of age with the right of vote, collecting 1,098 valid samples. It has a confidence level of 95 percent, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

(By Lu Hsin-hui and William Yen)
Enditem/cs

Taiwan records stronger than expected economic growth for 2017



Taipei, Jan. 31 (CNA) Taiwan's economy grew 2.84 percent last year, slightly above the government's forecast of 2.58 percent, according to an advance estimate released by the Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (DGBAS) on Wednesday.

In the fourth quarter of 2017, Taiwan registered a real gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 3.28 percent year-on-year, beating the DGBAS's forecast in November of 2.3 percent growth, according to the data.

The GDP growth for the October-December period largely reflected stronger than expected private consumption and export growth, the DGBAS said.

After seasonal adjustments, the Q4 GDP growth rate was 1.03 percent from the previous quarter, the data showed.

Private consumption in the fourth quarter grew an estimated 2.92 percent, beating the November forecast of 2.02 percent and lifting the GDP growth by 1.47 percent, according to the DGBAS.

It said that after inflationary adjustment, real exports of products and services in the fourth quarter showed year-on-year growth of 6.01 percent, beating the forecast 2.74 percent growth.

Meanwhile, real imports of products and services registered 1.80 percent growth in the fourth quarter, higher than the earlier forecast of 1.68 percent.

Taiwan's GDP grew in the first three quarters of 2017 by 2.64 percent, 2.28 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively, while the whole year growth was 2.84 percent, the data showed.

(By Chiu Po-sheng and Evelyn Kao)
Enditem/pc

SEF offers tips on how to get home from China for Lunar New Year



Taipei, Jan. 31 (CNA) In the wake of Chinese carriers China Eastern Airlines Corp. and Xiamen Air canceling planned extra cross-Taiwan Strait flights for the Lunar New Year holiday, the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) on Wednesday suggested a number of ways for those wanting to return to Taiwan for the festivities.

Both China Eastern Airlines and Xiamen Air announced a day earlier that they have been “forced” to cancel plans for 176 additional flights for the Feb. 15-20 holiday because of Taiwan’s delays in approving them in protest over China’s launch of several new routes without consulting Taiwan.

The Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) denied requests from the two Chinese airlines for additional flights to Taiwan that would have used the north-south M503 flight route, as well as the W121, W122 and W123 extension routes, in protest over China’s unilateral decision to launch the routes without first negotiating with Taiwan.

According to the Commercial Times, the canceled additional flights will affect up to 50,000 passengers.

According to the SEF, the canceled flights will affect eight airports, but seats are currently still available on scheduled flights and approved extra flights.

The eight affected airports were named as Shanghai Pudong, Wuxi, Nanjing, Hefei, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Hangzhou and Changsha.

If no bookings are available for the eight airports, then passengers can consider traveling to nearby airports to seek alternative flights, the SEF added.

Meanwhile, the CAA is seeking to coordinate with Taiwanese carriers to apply for extra services or to increase seating capacity, according to the SEF.

China Airlines, Taiwan’s biggest carrier, has applied to the CAA for an additional nine flights and is awaiting approval from the relevant authorities in China, according to the SEF, which added that EVA Air, another major Taiwanese carrier, also plans to use larger planes for some flights during the period.

At the same time, the SEF has also encouraged Chinese carriers to apply for extra services in order to transport more passengers.

There are about 80 regularly scheduled flights daily between Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, and the CAA is hoping for increased services for these destinations. The carriers have said they will evaluate demand and make the necessary adjustments.

The CAA is also coordinating to increase ferry services on the mini-three links and plane services between Taiwan and the outlying islands of Kinmen and Matsu, according to the SEF.

Apart from Feb. 15-16, ferry services are available daily from

Pingtan to Taipei and Taichung, according to the SEF, adding that on Feb. 13, 750 ferry seats will be available.

The SEF, which is controlled by the Mainland Affairs Council, is a semi-official organization set up by Taiwan to handle affairs relating to China.

(By Miao Zong-han and William Yen)
Enditem/J

Google plans to make Taipei its largest R&D center in Asia Pacific



Taipei, Jan. 30 (CNA) Taipei will become the biggest research and development center of Google Inc., which completed a deal on Tuesday to acquire a large part of Taiwan's HTC Corp.'s smartphone assets, a Google executive said Tuesday.

"With the official close of this deal, we're expanding our footprint in the Asia Pacific region," Rick Osterloh, senior vice president of Google's hardware operations, said in his

blog. “Taiwan is a key innovation and engineering hub for Google, and Taipei will now become the largest Google engineering site in APAC.”

In a filing with the Taiwan Stock Exchange, HTC said it had completed the deal to sell its smartphone ODM assets to the American company for US$1.1 billion, following the announcement of the acquisition last September and the regulatory approval three months later.

Under the deal, about 2,000 HTC engineers will go to work for Google, an American technology company that specializes in Internet-related services and products.

“(We) are welcoming an incredibly talented team to work on even better and more innovative products in the years to come.” Osterloh said. “These new colleagues bring decades of experience achieving a series of ‘firsts’ particularly in the smartphone industry – including bringing to market the first 3G smartphone in 2005, the first touch-centric phone in 2007, and the first all-metal unibody phone in 2013.”

He said it was the same HTC team that had been working closely with Goggle on the development of its Pixel and Pixel 2 smartphones.

Google, which is entering its third year in the hardware business, will get to work immediately with its new teammates, combining the best of its artificial intelligence, software and hardware resources, Osterloh said.

HTC, meanwhile, said it has retained a team of about 2,000 smartphone engineers that will continue to develop new models under the HTC brand.

The Taiwanese company is expected to use the proceeds from the deal with Google to strengthen its virtual reality business and cushion the losses in its smartphone operations, according to market analysts.

However, because HTC’s hardware business has been one of its major revenue sources, the disposal of a chunk of those assets is likely to shrink its bottom line in the long run, analysts said.

The company’s relatively new virtual reality operations, an attempt at product diversification, account for only a fraction of its overall sales, according to analysts.

In the third quarter of 2017, HTC posted a loss per share of NT$3.8 (US$0.13), registering a net loss for the 10th straight quarter

After the announcement of the completion of the deal with Google on Tuesday, HTC shares rose 1.71 percent to close at NT$71.40 on the Taiwan stock market, which ended 1.29 percent lower at 11,076.78.

(By Jeffrey Wu and Frances Huang)
Enditem/pc

President calls for unity on diplomatic front



Taipei, Jan. 31 (CNA) President Tsai Ing-wen (□□□) on Wednesday called on Taiwan's political parties to work together for diplomatic purposes despite vigorous disagreements on domestic policy issues.

Tsai made the remarks while meeting with a delegation from the Solomon Islands led by Ajilon Nasiu, speaker of the country's National Parliament.

Tsai said that when she delivered a speech to the National Parliament during her visit to the Pacific ally in November 2017, she was impressed by the way leaders of both the ruling and opposition political parties attended even though then Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare was facing a vote of no confidence.

At that time, despite fierce competition over domestic issues, they still worked together on the diplomatic front, the president said, adding that more than 80 percent of parliamentarians attended the speech.

Tsai said that although it is common to see fierce arguments on domestic issues or conflicts between political parties in democratic Taiwan, people expect the parties to work together in the promotion of diplomatic work.

The unity demonstrated by the Solomon Islands Parliament and Nasiu's outstanding leadership made a deep impression on her, Tsai added.

Turning to bilateral cooperation, Tsai said the two countries have achieved much cooperating in the areas of medicine and healthcare, agricultural technology, talent cultivation and clean energy development.

Meanwhile, the two countries have signed memorandums of understanding (MOU) on aviation, police cooperation, weather forecasting and harbor-to-harbor cooperation.

Noting that Taiwan's Legislative Yuan established a Taiwan-Solomon Islands legislative friendship group in June last year, Tsai said she looks forward to seeing closer engagement between parliamentarians from the two countries.

She also expressed hope that the Solomon Islands will continue to support Taiwan and help expand its international space.

(By Yeh Su-ping and Evelyn Kao)
Enditem/AW

Chinese airlines 'forced to cancel' extra Lunar New Year flights



Taipei, Jan. 30 (CNA) Two Chinese airlines have been "forced to cancel" plans to operate extra cross-Taiwan Strait flights during the Lunar New Year holiday that were still pending approval from Taiwan to avoid inconveniencing travelers, the airlines said Tuesday.

Both China Eastern Airlines and Xiamen Air released statements

saying they had to cancel their extra flights because they could not afford to keep waiting for Taiwan's response on those flights out of consideration for their customers.

Taiwan's Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) announced on Jan. 19 that it was withholding approval for the two airlines' applications to operate extra flights across the Taiwan Strait over the Lunar New Year period because of safety concerns.

The CAA's move was made in response to China's unilateral decision to launch four new commercial air routes in the Taiwan Strait, including a northbound M503 route, on Jan. 4, and the two Chinese airlines' use of those new routes in the following weeks.

According to their statements, China Eastern's cancellation of its 106 additional flights has affected nearly 40,000 travelers, while Xiamen Air's cancellation of 70 flights has affected over 10,000 people.

Both airlines are in the process of reimbursing or rescheduling flights for those who booked tickets with them.

In its statement, China Eastern expressed disapproval of the Taiwan government's decision to withhold approval, and said many experts had been consulted and found no existing safety issues with the new routes.

Xiamen Air said, meanwhile, that Taiwan's actions ignored the needs of the people of both sides of the strait and had severely damaged relations between people across the Taiwan Strait.

On Monday, Taiwan's Ministry of Transportation and Communications said military aircraft will be used to transport Taiwanese in China home from Kinmen for the Lunar New Year holiday if no consensus is reached on the controversy over the M503 route.

To board the flights, Taiwanese passengers will have to use the “mini-three links” mechanism established between the two sides in 2001, meaning they will have to travel to Xiamen in Fujian province first in order to take ferries to Kinmen.

(By Yang Sheng-ju, Chen Chia-lun and Kuan-lin Liu)
Enditem/ls

How to buy a Russian SIM card if you are not Russian



Calling home from Russia with your domestic SIM card could make you bankrupt! If you study or work in Russia – or at least visit fairly often – a local SIM card is a good idea.

Providers and tariffs
There are four big telecommunication companies in Russia that provide mobile services.
MTS (Mobile TeleSystems) and Megafon are the most popular, with about 80 million customers each. Beeline provides services to around 60 customers while Tele 2 has over 40 million clients (some people use several numbers). These companies have network coverage across Russia, so you won’t have problems when traveling to other regions. Moreover, they not only offer 3G and 4G cellular network technologies but also LTE.

In some regions, there are local companies which provide telecommunication services.



Companies suggest a wide range of tariffs, mostly through monthly plans and include free access to messengers and social media – what's more, they are becoming cheaper and cheaper.

For example, Tele 2 – the youngest operator – suggests 200 minutes, 50 SMS, 2GB of Internet, and unlimited surfing on social media for only 199 rubles ($3.5) a month. This company also has a per minute tariff without a subscription fee.

Beeline offers 300 minutes and 1GB of internet for 350 rubles ($6) a month, and promises to double your Internet allowance if you pay the entire monthly sum in one go.

Megafon's cheapest tariff costs 400 rubles ($7) a month and includes 2GB of Internet and unlimited chatting on WhatsApp and Viber.

The cheapest tariff from MTS costs 500 rubles ($8.5) a month and includes 7GB of Internet traffic, 200 SMS, free calling to MTS users across Russia, unlimited chatting on any messenger, and social media surfing.

And of course, in Russia you only pay for sending SMS and making calls. More good news – starting in 2018, authorities promise to cancel roaming fees inside Russia's different regions, so you will spend less money on calls and mobile Internet during a trip.



Where and how to buy a SIM card

You can choose your own number (as long as no one else has it) and order a SIM card on the operator’s website. You can then have it delivered or pick up the card at the company’s offices.

Another way is to buy a SIM card at any branch or a shop that sells mobile phones. The seller may advise a tariff more suitable to your needs.

In Russia, you can only buy a SIM card if you have your passport. In some shops, they may even ask to see your registration in Russia.

“I’ve never had any problems purchasing a SIM card in Russia,” said Peggy Lohse from Germany, who lives and travels in the country. “Not in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Smolensk, nor Kursk. They only ever asked to see my passport and registration.”

Do you need to buy a phone in Russia?

Russian cell phones work on the GSM, UMTS and LTE communication standards. If your phone supports such standards, you can use it with a Russian SIM card. If your phone uses only CDMA standard, you need to buy a new one in Russia (and there are no slots for SIM cards in such phones). Fortunately, they are not expensive. Moreover, here you can find the cheapest iPhones in Europe!

Russia Beyond

134 years ago: A cathedral was founded on the place of the Empreror’s murder in St. Petersburg

Alexander II was killed by a terrorist bomb

Alexander II was known as the “Tsar liberator,” having banished serfdom from Russia. Although Alexander was the only emperor in Russia’s history to outlive 5 attempted murders, the 6th one ended in his death.

A member of the revolutionary organization Narodnaya Volya (The People’s Will) threw a bomb under the Tsar’s feet on March 1, 1881. Alexander passed away hours later, having planned to sign a new constitutional reform that very day.



Jacques Schoonjans, Publisher & Editor in Chief with in the background the Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood

Two years later, on Oct. 18 1883, Alexander II’s son and the successor as Russian Emperor, Alexander III (father of Nicholas II), ordered the cathedral (Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood) to be erected around the first stone laid at

the place where the terrorist attack happened – on the Yekaterininsky channel (now Griboyedov channel), not far from the Nevsky Prospect.

Russia Beyond – Stepan Ivanov

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5 Russian operas that every cultured person should know and see

by ANNA GALAYDA – Russia Beyond



Mezzo-soprano Maria Maksakova performs Tchaikovsky's opera 'The Queen of Spades' at the Mariinsky Theater – Ruslan Shamukov/TASS

While the Russian ballet has for more than a century enthralled audiences around the globe, the country's opera heritage has only recently achieved worldwide acclaim.
Russian operas have always been difficult to perform – they require not only command of a difficult language but also powerful voices, nonstandard vocalization and a strong dramatic performance. Nevertheless, in the past two decades they have established themselves on the world stage and their

popularity is growing. Russia Beyond chose five operas that are currently performed, or will soon be performed, in different theaters of the world.

1. ‘Ruslan and Lyudmila’ – Mikhail Glinka

In the history of Russian music Glinka is regarded as the first national composer and creator of the first Russian operas. Of course, there is a certain exaggeration in this claim. In the 18th century, music by Dmitry Bortniansky and Yevstigney Fomin were performed even in Italy. But the first Russian composers sought to master foreign traditions. Glinka appropriated it and used it to express the Russian spirit. Poet Alexander Pushkin gave Glinka the idea to write an opera based on his popular poem, *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. But Pushkin died soon afterwards, and the writing of the libretto took much effort and a lot of time.

Despite the fact that the opera was much awaited, its premiere on the stage of the Bolshoi Kamenny Theater in St. Petersburg in 1842 failed to impress. Only gradually did the public come to appreciate this fairytale about life in Ancient Rus, as well as the elegance and inexhaustible variety of the melodies, the beauty of the orchestral instrumentation and the ingenuity of a large ensemble of soloists.

For more than a century *Ruslan and Lyudmila*was one of the most popular titles in the repertoire of Russian theaters. Nowadays, it’s not only difficult to mount a production of a five-act opera, but it’s not easy to spend five hours sitting and listening to it. Nevertheless, a full house was guaranteed when Valery Gergiev was in charge of the production at the Mariinsky Theater and Anna Netrebko sang the part of Lyudmila, or when Dmitri Tcherniakov’s staging of the opera was performed at the gala premier of the original stage of the

Bolshoi Theater after years of renovations.

2. ‘Boris Godunov’ – Modest Mussorgsky

This opera has had six editions, and many various orchestrations. It reflects the complex fate of *Godunov* and its creator, composer Modest Mussorgsky, who was inspired by Alexander Pushkin’s eponymous poem and passages from *History of the Russian State* by Nikolay Karamzin. That famous book is devoted to Russia’s first elected tsar who ruled in the late 16th century and early 17th.

Mussorgsky needed a year to compose the four-act opera in 1869, and he was devastated when the Directorate of Imperial Theaters rejected it. Five years later, after numerous changes, *Boris Godunov* premiered at the Bolshoi Kamenny Theater in St. Petersburg, where it also failed to garner much success.

Godunov had its triumph in 1898 when it was staged at the Solodovnikov private theater in Moscow with legendary singer Feodor Chaliapin in the main role. There was an exceptional harmony between the powerful opera and the brilliant performer. Chaliapin also triumphed in the production of *Boris Godunov* in Paris when Sergei Diaghilev introduced the Russian theater to Europe for the first time. Since then, Mussorgsky’s opera has become a phenomenon not only in Russian music but also in world music.

In June and July 2018, it will again appear on the stage of Opéra Garnier in Paris under the baton of Russian conductor Vladimir Jurowski in a production by Belgian director Ivo van Hove.

3. ‘The Queen of Spades’ – Pyotr

Tchaikovsky

The Queen of Spades is an astonishing opera primarily because just 11 months passed from the moment when the composer penned the first notes to its premiere on stage. The 50-year-old Tchaikovsky wrote it in Florence in a villa rented for him by his benefactor, Nadezhda von Meck, on a wave of general appreciation and love. The source of his inspiration is tangible almost a century and a half later.

The opera was based on the eponymous story by Pushkin. But as was the case with Tchaikovsky's earlier opera, *Eugene Onegin*, his brother Modest, in writing the libretto, made significant changes to the personalities and motivation of Pushkin's protagonists, and made the conflicts more in line with 19th century melodramatic operatic tradition. From a cold and calculating cynic, Herman, the main character, was transformed into an ardent, amorous personality who falls prey to unbridled passion. Also, the setting of *The Queen of Spades* was transposed from Pushkin's time to the 18th century.

The premiere took place at the Mariinsky Theater in 1890. Almost from the beginning it was acclaimed as a jewel of the Russian repertoire, and its arias and other pieces were played at musical evenings in concert halls and domestic salons. In 1902, Gustav Mahler staged it at the Vienna Court Opera, and in 1904 the young Sergei Rachmaninoff conducted *The Queen of Spades* at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. Since then the opera has scarcely been absent from the playbills of leading Russian theaters, and abroad it has become the most successful and widely-recognized Russian opera.

4. 'Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District' / 'Katerina Izmailova' – Dmitri

Shostakovich

The fate of this opera became a symbol of the relationship between art and authority in the Soviet years. The premiere of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which is based on themes from a novel by Nikolai Leskov, was a triumph for the 26-year-old composer. Performances were staged almost simultaneously by Leningrad's Maly Opera Theater (today the Mikhailovsky Theater) and Moscow's Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theater, with the final tally running to 200 performances.

In 1935, *Lady Macbeth* was staged in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Zurich, Buenos Aires, New York, London, Prague and Stockholm. The year ended with a premiere at the Bolshoi Theater, which was visited by Joseph Stalin. In January 1936 the country's main party newspaper, *Pravda*, published an article titled "Muddle Instead of Music," which excoriated Shostakovich's "naturalism." The article was unsigned, but many people detected the style of Stalin.

Although the composer was not arrested or shot, *Lady Macbeth* disappeared from the Soviet stage for a long time. While performances were held in Venice, Zagreb, Dusseldorf and Poznan, in the USSR even Stalin's death could not change anything. Only in 1962 could the Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theater stage a second, toned-down and less audacious version. It was renamed *Katerina Izmailova*.

The original version of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* returned to Russia in 1996 when it was staged by the Mariinsky Theater in St Petersburg. In 2004 the Bolshoi followed suit, catching up with the rest of the world, and today Shostakovich's opera remains one of the most popular in the Russian repertoire and is performed on the most prestigious stages.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=14&v=UI63TYQeU0Q

5. ‘War and Peace’ – Sergei Prokofiev

The Russian stage has always preferred epic historical drama to lyrical intimacy. The inspiration for Sergei Prokofiev’s masterpiece was the eponymous novel by Leo Tolstoy, although it also uses other sources, and the libretto incorporates verses by Russian poets of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The composer, who was always noted for his rapid work style, conceived *War and Peace* in the spring of 1941. In April 1942, the piano score was ready, and in the autumn, as the Second World War raged, work began to stage the mammoth opera at the Bolshoi Theater in 13 scenes.

The topical significance of the subject and the sheer scale of the score led to numerous revisions. The composer suggested to theaters that it be staged over two evenings, and in 1946 the first part premiered at Leningrad’s Maly Opera Theater, which was known as the “laboratory of Soviet opera.” But a government decree relating to Vano Muradeli’s opera, *The Great Friendship*, blocked the staging of the second part of *War and Peace*. Although 1947 saw the European premiere of the original version in Prague, the composer himself did not live to see a full-scale stage performance of *War and Peace*.

The opera was finally staged by the Maly Opera Theater in 1955, by the Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theater in Moscow in 1957, and the Bolshoi in 1959. Although Prokofiev’s epic requires dozens of solo performers and enormous choirs for the battle scenes, it is staged today the world over – from Florence and Paris, to Sydney and Buenos Aires.

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