

World's largest amphibious plane takes off in China

BEIJING: China's home-grown AG600, the world's largest amphibious aircraft in production, took to the skies yesterday for its maiden flight. The plane, codenamed "Kunlong" according to state news agency Xinhua, took off from the southern city of Zhuhai and landed after roughly an hour-long flight. With a wingspan of 38.8 m and powered by four turboprop engines, the aircraft is capable of carrying 50 people and can stay airborne for 12 hours. "Its successful maiden flight makes China among the world's few countries capable of developing a large amphibious aircraft," chief designer Huang Lingcai told Xinhua.

The amphibious aircraft has military applications but will be used for firefighting and marine rescue, with at least 17 orders placed so far with state-owned manufacturer Aviation Industry Corp of China, state media reported. While it is around the size of a Boeing 737, the AG600 is considerably smaller than billionaire Howard Hughes' flying boat, better known as the Spruce Goose, which had a wingspan of 97 m and a length of 67 m but only made one brief flight, in 1947.

The AG600's flight capabilities put all of China's island-building projects in the South China Sea well within range. "Its 4,500-km operational range and ability to land and take off from water makes it well-suited for deployment over China's artificial

islands," said James Char, a military analyst at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University. The aircraft can fly to the southernmost edge of China's territorial claims - the James Shoal - in just four hours from the southern city of Sanya, state-owned GlobalTimes reported.

The shoal is also claimed by Taiwan and Malaysia, and is currently administered by Malaysia. The collection of submerged rocks lies roughly 80 km from Malaysia's coastline and about 1,800 km from the Chinese mainland. "The plane's capacity and maneuverability makes it ideal for transporting materiel to those maritime features that are too structurally fragile to support runways," Char said. Beijing's buildup in the South China Sea, through which some \$5 trillion in annual trade passes, is hotly contested by other nations.

The Philippines for many years was one of the region's strongest opponents of Chinese expansionism, and brought a complaint to a United Nations-backed tribunal. The panel ruled last year that China's territorial claims in the sea were without legal basis, but the Philippines has backed away from the dispute under its new president Rodrigo Duterte. The launch of the new amphibious aircraft further strengthens China's rapidly modernizing military.

Earlier this year, it launched its first domestically built aircraft carrier, the Type 001A. This complemented the



ZHUHAI, China: China's homegrown AG600, the world's largest amphibious aircraft in production, is seen at Jinwan Airport in this city in southern Guangdong province yesterday. —AFP

Liaoning, a second-hand Soviet carrier commissioned in 2012 after extensive refits. China's military expenditure in 2016 was an estimated \$215 billion, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, putting it in first place in Asia, well ahead of India (\$56 billion), Japan (\$46 billion) and South Korea (\$37 billion). — AFP

MoI mulls fee hikes to plug...

Continued from Page 1

He said this project will improve performance and make it easy for companies, while boosting economic activity and reducing the number of people in offices. He revealed there will be a new security card instead of the sticker on the passport.

He said new fees will not be implemented on visit and residency permits without the approval of Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Khalid Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and the National Assembly. Maarafi said there are 2.753 million residents with valid residencies in the country, representing nearly 205 nationalities from around the world. He said Indians are on top with 925,000 residents, followed by 605,000 Egyptians, 257,000 Filipinos, 241,000 Bangladeshis, 144,000 Syrians, 107,000 Pakistanis and 93,000 Sri Lankans.

Maarafi said a new penalty for harboring iqama violators of KD 1,000 will have to be paid instantly if a joint committee of the interior, social affairs, municipality and commerce ministries catch an employer with a residency law violator working for him. He said that a meeting was held with the health and social affairs committee at the Assembly with regards to imposing health insurance on visitors. He said visit visa holders are not allowed to work, especially those on business visas, adding that

many such cases have been discovered and deported. About the decision to increase the salary ceiling of those who want to bring their wives, children or other relatives on visit visas, he said strict measures are being implemented to prevent marginal laborers, beggars and those seeking treatment from arriving in the country, by studying the cases and ability of the applicants. He said parents' visits are linked to age and the maximum age limit is 60. As for ages above this, the cases are considered according to status and salary.

Maarafi said the salary ceiling for family visas will be raised from KD 250 to KD 450, while recommendations are made to the manpower authority to decide the maximum period of residency. He said no family visas will be granted to children without the presence of the father. He said the mother cannot sponsor her children except for rare specialties the country needs.

Meanwhile, Social Affairs and Labor Minister and State Minister for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh told Al-Rai daily a plan to deal with the population imbalance has been in place for a while, and coordination is ongoing with ministries and government departments to implement it, adding "the response of government departments was positive, and soon results will be clearer".

She said the social affairs ministry is following the matter with government entities, which expressed strong belief that the imbalance exists and must be dealt with. Sabeeh said some departments have started to reduce the number of cleaning and security workers by 25 percent, adding other contracts must be waited out so to prevent any legal action.

Ad firms using tools to help them...

Continued from Page 1

Johnson & Johnson has tested thousands of consumers about Tylenol pain relief and other over-the-counter products, showing them quick-fire images or words that connote a particular emotion. Responses are tracked to the tens of milliseconds, said Eric Dolan, associate director for global strategic insights at Johnson & Johnson. The insights can help determine "whether we want to dig in and reinforce those emotional spaces," or rethink the marketing to convey a different message, he said.

Tivity Health turned to many of these techniques for its "Silver Sneakers" fitness program for seniors, hiring Isobar to help it devise a marketing strategy based on a psycho-

logical profile of potential members. Isobar had more than 1,000 seniors review a series of rapidly presented images and words about exercise. Based on their clicks, the report showed the population most valued exercise because it made them feel empowered or "ready to go".

The finding was important as Tivity weighed potential marketing campaigns, including "Living Life Well," which featured images of age-defying seniors, such as a grandfatherly figure balancing a toddler on his back while doing push-ups. These ads performed better than an alternative campaign showing groups of smiling seniors together in swim class and in a gym which emphasized the social aspect of Silver Sneakers.

That campaign appeared to fall flat with seniors who view exercise as a means of staying independent, or who may be intimidated at the thought of immediately exercising in a group. The results countered Tivity's assumption that the social aspect of the program was the "key motivating driver for members," said Elizabeth Rula, who directs research for Tivity Health. "We were a bit surprised." — AFP

Dozens dead in Philippine...

Continued from Page 1

When our firemen tried to enter they were pushed back by smoke and fire."

Mayor Duterte said she told the firefighters to retrieve all the dead, stressing: "you do not stop until you find 37". She also said the circumstances surrounding the fire would be investigated but added that it was too early to say who was at fault. Deadly blazes occur regularly in the Philippines, particularly in slum areas where there are virtually no fire safety standards. "It's possible that while they were working, they did not immediately notice the fire spreading," Davao police officer Ralph Canoy told AFP, referring to the call cen-

ter workers. Davao, with a population of about 1.5 million people, is the biggest city in the southern Philippines. It is about 1,000 km south of Manila, the nation's capital. President Duterte served as mayor of the city for more than two decades and continues to visit on weekends. His daughter succeeded him when he ran for president, with one of his sons winning the vice mayoralty post. Most of those killed by the recent tropical storm were also in the southern region of Mindanao.

There have also been horrific fires in bigger buildings and factories, where corruption and exploitation mean supposedly strict standards are often not enforced. In 2015, a fire tore through a footwear factory in Manila, killing 72. Survivors of that blaze blamed barred windows and other sweatshop conditions for trapping people inside the factory. In the deadliest fire in the Philippines in recent times, 162 people were killed in a huge blaze that gutted a Manila disco in 1996. — AFP

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