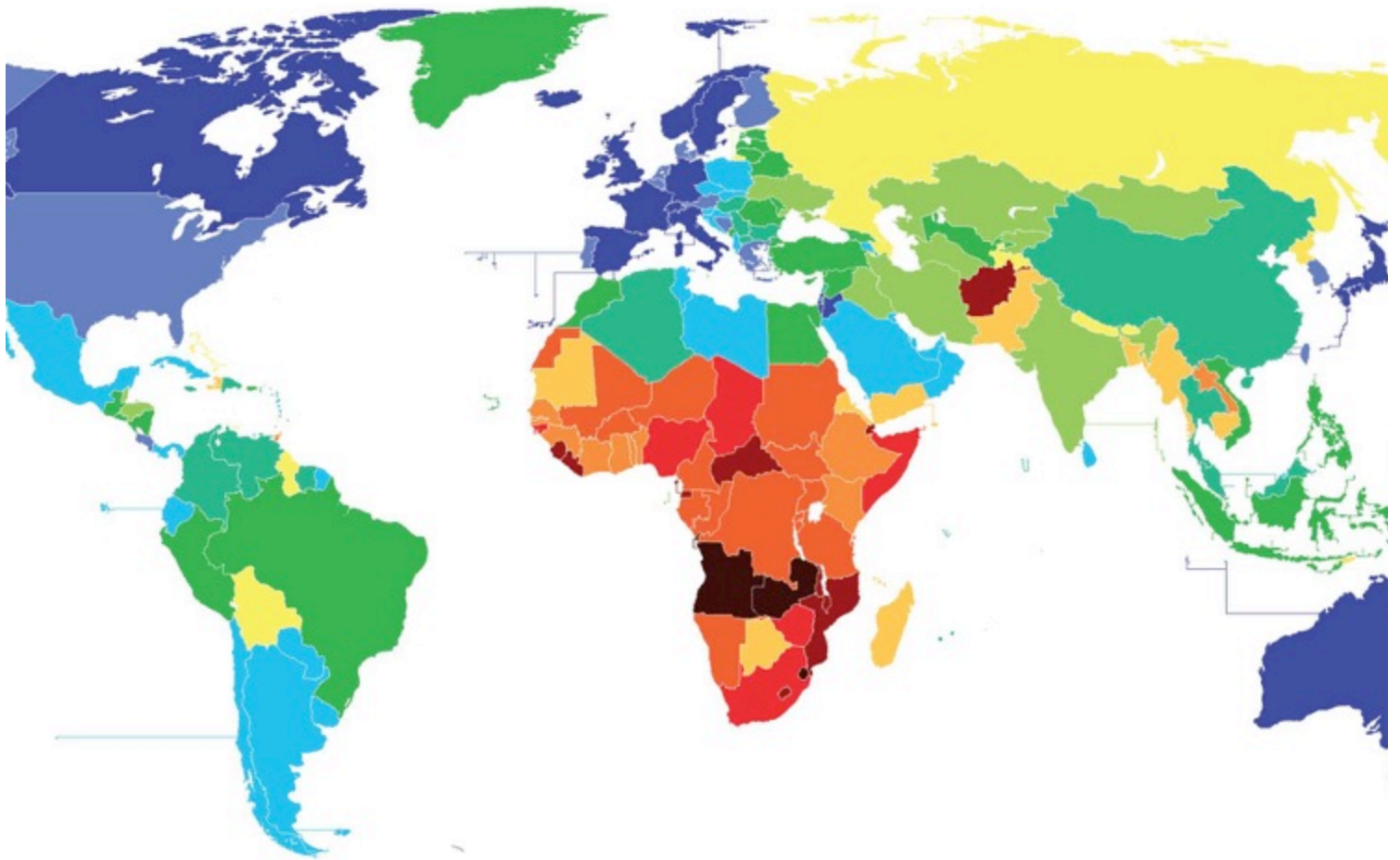


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**PANAMA PAPERS TIE MORE OF
CHINA'S ELITE TO SECRET ACCOUNTS**

**RECORD HIGH ARCTIC TEMPERATURES
IN 2015 HAVING "PROFOUND
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Headlines

PANAMA PAPERS TIE MORE OF CHINA'S ELITE TO SECRET ACCOUNTS

At least three of the seven people on the Chinese Communist Party's most powerful committee, including President Xi Jinping, have relatives who have controlled secretive offshore companies, the organization that has publicized a trove of leaked documents about hidden wealth reported on Wednesday.

The disclosures by the organization, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, risked new embarrassment for the Chinese authorities, already unnerved and infuriated by the organization's leaks of the documents, known as the Panama Papers.

Chinese government censors have moved aggressively since the first release of leaked documents on Sunday to purge any media's mention of them in China, going so far as to block Internet searches and online discussions that involve the words "Panama Papers."

The documents, which came from Mossack Fonseca, a boutique Panamanian law firm that specializes in creating tax shelters and secretive corporations for wealthy clients, have jolted political leaders and other powerful figures around the world. But they are considered especially sensitive in China, where the Communist Party, under Mr. Xi, has pledged to eradicate corruption within its ranks and seeks to portray itself as a champion of equality, despite some of the world's most glaring income disparities.

The information made public by the consortium on Wednesday included material on the Communist Party Politburo Standing Committee, the seven-member group, all men, that wields ultimate power in the country.

The daughter-in-law of Liu Yunshan, China's propaganda chief, was once a shareholder and director of a company registered in the British Virgin Islands, and the son-in-law of Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli was a shareholder in three companies domiciled in the British tax haven, the consortium reported.

President Xi is the third member of the Politburo committee cited in the report as having a relative who controlled offshore companies. The ties of Mr. Xi's brother-in-law, Deng Jiagui, to offshore companies have been known since 2012, when a Bloomberg News article about Mr. Xi's family wealth detailed the business empire of Mr. Deng and his wife, Qi Qiaoqiao, the president's sister.

The consortium's review of the leaked documents found that Mr. Deng had acquired three additional offshore companies, well before Mr. Xi became China's top leader and made a crackdown on corruption one of the centerpieces of his leadership.

The disclosures provide further insight into how China's political elite has tapped into the global network of lawyers and wealth managers who, for a fee, can set up complex corporate structures that often have the effect of cloaking vast personal wealth.

It is not illegal for Chinese citizens to own companies offshore, and there are legitimate reasons for having one. Thousands of Chinese nationals have set up companies in offshore havens such as the British Virgin Islands and the Seychelles. Mossack Fonseca has more offices in China than in any other country, according to the company's website.

Many of China's most powerful families set up offshore companies during the administration of Hu Jintao, who preceded Mr. Xi as president and as leader of the Communist Party. Family members or close business associates of at least five of the nine men who served on the Politburo Standing Committee from 2007 through 2012 had links to offshore accounts, according to records reviewed by The New York Times.

It was during that period that Jia Liqing, the wife of Mr. Liu's son, Liu Lefei, appears to have become the director and a shareholder of Ultra Time Investments, a company incorporated in the British Virgin Islands in 2009, according to the consortium's report. It is not clear what Ultra Time was used for, if anything. A Google search for the company's name on Wednesday turned up only one result, a list of offshore "shelf companies" stating that Ultra Time had been incorporated on April 20, 2009.

Ms. Jia and her husband represent two of the most potent arms of the Chinese Communist Party. She is the daughter of China's former minister of public security

and chief prosecutor, Jia Chunwang, according to two people who have met the couple and who spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to preserve those relationships. Liu Lefei's father oversees the country's propaganda apparatus.

Liu Lefei heads one of China's leading private equity firms and was until recently avice chairman of Citic Securities, the brokerage arm of the country's biggest financial conglomerate. Ms. Jia was a banker at Merrill Lynch until 2014, according to online records from the Securities and Futures Commission of Hong Kong.

A woman who answered a Chinese cellphone number listed for Ms. Jia on the alumni website of Yale University, where she obtained an M.B.A., hung up after the caller identified himself as a New York Times reporter.

The consortium of journalists also reported that Lee Shing Put, a son-in-law of Mr. Zhang, the seventh-ranking person on the Politburo Standing Committee, was a shareholder in Zennon Capital Management, registered in the British Virgin Islands, and two other companies, Sino Reliance Networks and Glory Top Investments.

Zennon Capital Management is the owner of a Hong Kong company that has the same name as an entity of which Mr. Lee is a director, according to Hong Kong's company registry. No information could be found on Sino Reliance Networks and Glory Top Investments, although a Hong Kong-registered company also is named Glory Top Investments.

The website of the Washington-based Brookings Institution, which tracks China's top leaders, says Mr. Lee is a son of the founding chairman of Xinyi Glass Holdings, which is listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

Lee Shing Put did not respond to an email request for an interview made through Xinyi's public relations company.

Mr. Deng, Mr. Xi's brother-in-law, did not reply to faxed questions about his offshore holdings sent to the family's office in Shenzhen, in southern China.

By The New York Times

Environment

RECORD HIGH ARCTIC TEMPERATURES IN 2015 HAVING 'PROFOUND EFFECTS' ON REGION

Latest Noaa report reveals 2015 temperatures were in some cases 3C above long-term average and 70% of ice pack in March was made of first-year ice



A skinny polar bear is isolated on fragments of sea ice at the start of the Arctic summer.

The Arctic experienced record air temperatures and a new low in peak ice extent during 2015, with scientists warning that climate change is having “profound effects” on the entire marine ecosystem and the indigenous communities that rely upon it.

The latest National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Noaa) report card on the state of the Arctic revealed the annual average air temperature was 1.3C (2.3F) above the long-term average – the highest since modern records began in 1900. In some parts of the icy region, the temperature exceeded 3C (5.4F) above the average, taken from 1981 to 2010.

This record heat has been accompanied by diminishing ice. The Arctic Ocean reached its peak ice cover on 25 February – a full 15 days earlier than the long-term average and the lowest extent recorded since records began in 1979. The minimum ice cover, which occurred on 11 September, was the fourth smallest in area on record.

More than 50% of Greenland’s huge ice sheet experienced melting in 2015, with 22 of the 45 widest and fastest-flowing glaciers shrinking in comparison to their 2014 extent.

Not only is the ice winnowing away, it is becoming younger – NOAA's analysis of satellite data shows that 70% of the ice pack in March was composed of first-year ice, with just 3% of the ice older than four years. This means the amount of new, thinner ice has doubled since the 1980s and is more vulnerable to melting.

The report card – compiled by 72 scientists from 11 countries – noted sharp variations in conditions in the northern part of the Arctic compared to its southern portion. The melting season was 30-40 days longer than the long-term average in the north but slightly below average in the south, suggesting that changes to the jet stream, causing colder air to whip across the southern part of the Arctic, are having an impact.

NOAA said warming in the Arctic is occurring at twice the rate of anywhere else in the world – a 2.9C (5.2F) average increase over the past century – and that it is certain climate change, driven by the release of greenhouse gases, is the cause.

"There is a close association between air temperature and the amount of sea ice we see, so if we reduce the temperature globally it looks like it will stabilize the Arctic," said Dr James Overland, oceanographer at NOAA.

"The next generation may see an ice-free summer but hopefully their decedents will see more ice layering later on in the century."

Overland said if the world hits the 2C (3.6F) warming limit agreed by nations in the recent Paris climate talks, the Arctic will experience a 4C (7.2F) to 5C (9F) increase in temperature by 2050. The Chukchi Sea, by Alaska, is warming the fastest of any of the Arctic waters while the overall minimum ice extent has slumped by 13.4% a decade, on average.

The changes in the Arctic are also causing "major challenges" for the indigenous communities in the region, according to Rick Spinrad, NOAA's chief scientist. Warmer-water fish such as cod are moving north, displacing Arctic species, while an increase in sunlight reaching the upper layers of the ocean triggered widespread blooms of algae in the Bering Sea, between Alaska and Russia, in 2015.

This altered environment is causing severe problems for walruses, with unprecedented "haul outs" of the animals occurring in 2015. The large marine mammals traditionally use sea ice for mating and nurturing young but in recent years have been forced to congregate on land in north-west Alaska. This behaviour has led to stampedes that have killed calves and hampered walruses' ability to find food.

“Females now have to make 110-mile (177km) treks for food. We just haven’t seen haul outs in these numbers before,” said Kit Kovacs, biodiversity research program leader at the Norwegian Polar Institute. “I don’t think there is much uncertainty here. We have a dramatic situation in the north Pacific with walruses.”

By The Guardian

PARLIAMENT: MPs FOCUS ON PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CHANGING ECONOMY ON DAY 2 OF BUDGET DEBATE



(Left to right) MPs Denise Phua, Kuik Shiao-Yin and K Thanaleetchimi

After an opening day filled with numbers and calculations, Tuesday's (April 5) Parliament session instead resounded with the stories of people hurt and helped by policies.

In the second day of debate on the Government's Budget for the new financial year, many of the 25 MPs who spoke on Tuesday filled their speeches with anecdotes,

focused on the human aspect even when discussing hard policy questions.

ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

After Monday's (April 4) calls for metrics by which to evaluate Singapore's economic transformation, Tuesday's Parliament debate instead saw suggestions that focused more on mindsets. Ms Denise Phua (Jalan Besar GRC) suggested that firms and workers could be profiled by their ability, attitude and vision, so suitable forms of support could be given to each group.

MPs such as Ms Lee Bee Wah (Nee Soon GRC) and Mr Lim Biow Chuan (Mountbatten) zeroed in on human barriers to economic transformation. Both called for small and medium-sized firms to be given more help in navigating the complexities of government grants, so that they do not need to approach consultants.

HELPING WORKERS

Even in suggesting concrete measures to help workers, MPs stressed the importance of mindsets. Labour MP Zainal Sapari (Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC) noted that service buyers in contract-based, low-income industries such as cleaning and security must have the right mindset if workers are to benefit.

For instance, service buyers should adopt performance-based rather than headcount-based contracts, to give service providers an incentive to improve productivity, he said.

Workers' Party MP Faisal Manap (Aljunied GRC) was concerned about the potential human impact of economic Budget initiatives such as incentives for automation and mergers and acquisitions. Warning that they could lead to job losses, he said: "We don't want a situation where automation leads to sectors of society to feel that they are left behind by progress, being discarded after they are no longer useful."

Nominated MP K Thanaletchimi, a National Trades Union Congress central committee member, noted the need for a support network for workers who are changing careers: "A hands-on approach from the agency to offer not just training grants but also psychological support and guidance can help acclimatise workers quicker in different workplace environments."

THE ROLE OF CULTURE

Not all MPs focused on specific policies. NMP Kuik Shiao-Yin's speech took a big-picture approach, looking at two "cultural roadblocks to transformation": fear, and scarcity thinking.

Fear-based kiasu culture does not motivate people to create real value in society, and scarcity thinking encourages selfishness rather than care, she said.

Many MPs also picked up the theme of resilience from Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat's Budget speech on March 24.

WP Non-Constituency MP Dennis Tan suggested encouraging young people to join co-curricular activities such as uniformed groups or long-distance running to foster resilience, while Mr Darryl David (Ang Mo Kio GRC) applauded the focus on outdoor adventure education, sharing his own experience with taking his children to a tree-top adventure course at Bedok Reservoir.

And even the Budget process itself could make more room for ordinary people, suggested Mr Louis Ng (Nee Soon GRC). He suggested starting public consultation on the Budget in November, rather than February, thus allowing more time to incorporate feedback.

By The Straits Times

FOR THE LOVE OF BAD ART

It's a #fail, captured in paint.



The original, unrestored, and botched restoration of Ecce Homo, colloquially known as "Beast Jesus"

The Spanish village of Borja, population 4,931, has experienced an unexpected tourist boom of late. But the estimated 30,000 annual visitors aren't there to seek out the town's medieval architecture, or its archeological museum, or even the region's emerging local wines. Instead, they're in Borja to see *Ecce homo*, a fresco in the town's Sanctuary of Mercy church that was famously botched in a 2012 restoration.

In an unexpected turn of events, one of the most notable failures in art history has revitalized Borja's economy by turning it into a tourist destination. *Ecce homo* (*Behold the man*), a 1930 fresco depicting Jesus wearing a crown of thorns, became a global phenomenon four years ago when it was discovered that one of the church's parishioners, the octogenarian Cecilia Giménez, had attempted to repair the aging artwork by touching up the paint. The result of her work, the BBC correspondent Christian Fraser reported, was that the painting now resembled not the son of God, but a "crayon sketch of a very hairy monkey." *Ecce homo* was soon dubbed *Ecce mono* (*Behold the monkey*), and became known colloquially as "Beast Jesus."

Initial responses to Giménez's handiwork were confused at best. The descendants of the artist who painted the original work, Elias Garcia Martinez, were unhappy that his painting had been destroyed. The Center for Borja Studies first reported the news as an act of vandalism, describing it as an "unspeakable deed." Giménez, threatened with legal action by the city council, had an anxiety attack and took to her bed. But inevitably, as *Ecce homo* evolved from local news into a viral Internet meme, both the artist and the town have seen the upside of embracing their unlikely mascot. An

image of the work now appears on the city's lottery tickets. Borja has recently opened a cultural center dedicated to the painting. Giménez has struck a deal allotting her a share of the profits. And visitors have flocked to the town from all over the world in order to see one of the most epic art fails of all time.

Only a few years ago, *Ecce homo* might have merited a listing or two in regional guidebooks at most. But its appearance coincided with a cultural moment wherein extraordinary failures have become victories on their own terms, thanks to the Internet. #Fail is no longer the pejorative it might once have been—if anything, it's a kind of hallmark of success. Failed works of art, in particular, subvert notions of what art should or shouldn't be, offering humor in the form of painterly mishap and exposing the human fascination with screwing up.

Seeing *Ecce homo* in person is an act of witnessing a singular piece of Internet culture in its native, spiritual habitat.

Lea Boecker, a researcher at the University of Cologne who studies social cognition, has examined why people love to watch other people fail. In a 2015 study, she found that German test subjects smiled more when watching videos of unsuccessful penalty shots by Dutch soccer players than successful shots from German players. "You feel better. You feel lifted up in comparison to the other person," she told *Nautilus*.

Giménez's work conjures the same emotional response—this combination of empathy and schadenfreude—that brings hundreds of millions of visitors to videos of people attempting to charge their phones in the microwave, or accidentally burning off their hair, or falling off a segway. But it also taps into a popular Internet tradition of approaching art—particularly holy art—with something less than total reverence.

Ecce homo is more than just an ugly face. The painting, and its subsequent memification, fall within a broader category of Jesus-centric memes. According to the scholar Christopher M. Duerringer, putting familiar images in unexpected situations through the "vernacular rhetoric" of memes tends to "extend and subvert the fundamental assumptions and practices associated with iconic images"—in other words, "Beast Jesus" brings the face of Christianity back to his oh-so-human origins. And inasmuch as it embodies the modern preoccupation with #fail, it's only part of a larger tradition of making fun of bad art.

There are countless blogs devoted to poking fun at paintings and sculptures that otherwise would have been forgotten: The Ugly Renaissance Babies Tumblr is an addicting compendium of paintings featuring babies that look like old men, worms, creepy dolls, and Gollum. Other blogs like All This Shitty Art and The Weirdest, Worst Art pay homage to the myriad amateur artists publishing their work on the Internet (to Tumblr users' amusement and dismay). The Delusional Artists reddit is a place to collectively laugh and scratch your head at the confusing ways artists sometimes express themselves: One post earnestly asks, "How do you tell a delusional artist that they are delusional without seriously offending them?" And of course, Beast Jesus is the star of his own Tumblr.

There's even an art gallery dedicated to the subject. The Museum of Bad Art, founded in 1994 in a suburban Boston basement, is a bona fide institution dedicated to "building the finest bad art establishment in the world." Sloppy brushwork usually doesn't merit inclusion in the museum's collection—the curator Michael Frank told me he prefers "pieces that exhibit good technique used to create images of questionable taste or meaning." He points to the aptly named *Spewing Rubik's Cubes* as a prime example. The oil painting depicts the toy emanating from the mouth of a "jester gargoyle" against a backdrop of blue—an image, he writes in the work's description, that "can only be described as puzzling."



Spewing Rubik's Cubes, by K. Koch, was acquired by Michael Frank at a thrift store in Boston, MA.

Bad art doesn't always prompt an amused response, though, especially when it's taxpayer-funded, or when public figures are involved. The \$470,000 "Big Blue Ring" in Calgary was dismissed as "awful" by the city's mayor, and David Batchelor's *Skip* in the U.K., a dumpster rimmed with neon lights commissioned as part of a £95,000 grant, was declared to be proof that "modern art IS rubbish."

Lucian Freud's infamously divisive portrait of Queen Elizabeth II was hailed by some for being boldly honest—*The Guardian's* art critic called it "a painting of experience"—while others were shocked at the portrait's unflattering nature. The

British Art Journal's editor declared that Freud's severe representation of the Queen made her look like "one of the royal corgis who has suffered a stroke."

In 2013, another botched restoration attempt, this time of several frescoes in a 270-year-old Buddhist temple in Chaoyang, China, led to two government officials being fired. The paintings, which once depicted a series of traditionally dressed figures, are now brightly colorful, but not in a good way—"Cartoons drawn by my daughter are better than this," one blogger told NBC.



One of the restored frescoes in China's Yunjie Temple.

But when the stakes are low, bad art is just another amusing reminder of human fallibility. The popularity of the Borja cultural center and the Museum of Bad Art nods to a deeply human quirk: taking pleasure in, and empathizing with, others' mistakes. Seeing *Ecce homo* in person is an act of witnessing a singular piece of Internet culture in its native, spiritual habitat, but it's also, oddly, an act of

faith in the predictable human trait of screwing up. Much of the popularity of bad art stems from this contradiction—and perhaps also points toward the inability of paint to adequately express the nuances of humanity, in all their rich and complex glory.

By The Atlantic



UNDER THE MACROSCOPE

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