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## IN YOUR WORDS

## Photos said to show Syria torture

As awful as this collection is, I would bet that at least some of the rebel factions have done the same thing to members of Assad's forces. . . . Neither side is in the right and no matter who wins, Syria will not be a stable country after all of this. It would be wise for foreign powers to keep their distance because anyone who agrees to send in troops to help is going to be stuck there for quite some time.

SAM KELLEY, WASHINGTON

While the crimes in these photos are self-explaining, evidence of time and place is in-existent: Where and when were these photos taken? Also, the alleged reason for the photos is strange: Why would torturers take and keep proof of their crimes in such an organized way? And then, the timing and the financiers of this report make me very suspicious.

ZOLKO, PARIS

## U.S. offers Russia security help

An estimated 15,000 Americans are expected to travel to Sochi for the Games. If the administration refuses to cooperate with the Russian authorities, it will get the blame, just like the aftermath of the Benghazi attack on the diplomatic compound in 2012.

J. VON HETTLINGEN, SWITZERLAND

Does anyone else think Russia, Europe, China and the U.S. probably are going to have to figure out a way to get along and work together before the world explodes?

NEAL, MONTANA

## Kiev protesters' phones tracked

We have seen the social media used to bring down oppressive regimes. However, has no one yet thought about the ability of police states to use social media as intimidation and control? The sword slices both ways!

RMARC, ALBANY

See what readers are talking about and leave your own comments at [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com)

## IN OUR PAGES

## 1889 A Parisian 'Jack the Ripper'

The Commissary of Police of the Bréda quarter is actively searching for a man who, within the last three days, has made four attempts to murder women of the same unfortunate class to which the victims of the Whitechapel horrors belonged. His presence was first signaled on Saturday [Jan. 19] evening, when he made two attempts inside of an hour to strangle women who had consented to allow him to accompany them to their lodgings. The police believe that this Parisian imitator of "Jack the Ripper" is an inhabitant of the neighborhood that has been the scene of his exploits.

## 1939 Health Care Plan Backed

WASHINGTON The uncompromising struggle between socialized medicine and the American Medical Association is expected to enter its decisive stage tomorrow [Jan. 23] with a special message to Congress by President Roosevelt urging the passage of the Administration's "comprehensive, long-range" health program to benefit the huge numbers of Americans who at present are too poor to obtain adequate medical attention. The program calls for the development of health facilities over a ten-year period at an annual cost to the Federal and state governments of \$850,000,000.

Find a retrospective of news from 1887 to 2013 in *The International Herald Tribune* at [iht-retrospective.blogs.nytimes.com](http://iht-retrospective.blogs.nytimes.com)

## John Dobson, 98, evangelist for sidewalk astronomers

BY DOUGLAS MARTIN

Hour after hour, night after night, decade after decade all over planet Earth, John Dobson rolled his homemade telescopes to street corners and national parks to show people the heavens. "Look at Saturn," he would say. "No charge."

He gave hundreds of thousands of people a fresh view of the stars, promptly

## OBITUARY

ing Smithsonian magazine to describe him as a "carny barker for the cosmos." A lanky figure with a ponytail, he toured with his road show in a creaky former school bus, which he called Starship Centaurus A, after a galaxy. It towed one of his bulkier creations, a telescope as large as a midsize automobile.

Mr. Dobson, who died on Jan. 15, at the age of 98 — or, as he might have put it, 123 days into his 99th orbit around the sun — is credited with developing the first high-powered portable telescope that amateur astronomers could build inexpensively, and tens of thousands have done so. Dobsonian telescopes, as they are known generically, are still a popular item on the market, though Mr. Dobson chose not to

## The life of a skyscraper



**STURDY SURVIVOR** A 54-story skyscraper known as Ponte City has dominated Johannesburg's skyline in successive eras of apartheid, urban decay and multiethnic renewal. The South African photographer Mikhael Subotzky and the British artist Patrick Waterhouse have spent years studying the building and its inhabitants. Their work is being shown at Le Bal, an exhibition space in Paris, through April 20.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIKHAEL SUBOTZKY AND PATRICK WATERHOUSE/MAGNUM PHOTOS



**LITANY OF LIVES** Clockwise from top: a tenant of the building riding an elevator; debris that has accumu-

lated at the base of the curved structure over the years; one of the parking areas in the building complex.



## Birth policy puts Chinese in a dilemma



## Didi Kirsten Tatlow

## LETTER FROM CHINA

**BEIJING** At 39, Xiao Cai knows time is not on her side if she's to fulfill her yearning and have a sibling for her 3-year-old son.

Her dreams are modest; she wants only two children.

Yet two months after the Chinese government announced a change to the one-child policy to permit some families a second child (the change will apply to couples where one partner is an only child), hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of women like Xiao Cai who are pushing the limit of their

**Some women can't wait for policy to become law because of their fertility limits.**

fertility find themselves in a bizarre and painful situation: Their dream of having two could be defeated at the finish line by the slow-turning wheels of state bureaucracy.

After decades of the one-child policy, many Chinese still feel that two children is a more normal number than one.

Xiao Cai, who asked to be identified only by her nickname to maintain her privacy, hopes deeply for a girl. A family of one girl and one boy — known in the West as a millionaire's family — is the ideal here, too, like the two vases that make up the pair in traditional Chinese aesthetics.

She knows that her biological clock is ticking fast. But only in Zhejiang Province has the policy become law. In mid-January, the provincial People's Congress revised the law to permit qualifying couples to apply to have a second child. On Jan. 17 the Congress announced the law "has been born," according to Xinhua, the state-run news agency. In Beijing, Liu Zhi, the city's head of family planning, said officials "hope" to implement the change on March 1, The Beijing News reported.

"The authorities have said they will change the law, but no one knows for sure when," said Xiao Cai, a Beijinger and a health care worker. For now, she can only wait, as she has done since November.

"I really want another baby," she said. "But if we try now, what if I get pregnant and the law doesn't change in time?"

"I'd like to just go ahead. But if it doesn't happen soon and I have a child, it could have really severe consequences for us," she said. "If I don't do it now, I may never be able to. I really don't know what to do."

The financial consequences of breaking the law, even in its dying days, would be heavy. She has done her math: the couple could be fined 300,000 renminbi, about \$50,000. It would financially ruin them. Her husband left his "iron rice bowl" state job some years ago to work independently. Their income is adequate, but they're not rich.

In a later text message, she wrote: "I've read in the newspapers that the whole country is researching this, when and how to bring it in. And I've read other stories that say the government is saying, don't rush to have a second child, you must wait for the central government to announce it's for real, or you will have problems getting all the papers you need."

So for now, she anxiously waits. Xiao Cai is luckier than many of her friends who she said are battling infertility, a condition she believes is growing in China, based on anecdotal evidence. She already has her son. Yet she also has an older sister with whom she is extremely close, and she cherishes that sibling love. What mostly drives her, she said, was the fear that her son would feel alone.

"Only one child, isn't it lonely for him? He's so clingy. I think it would be really good for him to have a sibling," she said.

So, as has been the case since 1979, when the one-child policy began, Chinese remain dependent on the will of the state for that most intimate of things: procreation. Only now, for many, it's a race against time.

The government expects between one million and two million additional births per year after the law takes effect countrywide, said Mao Qun'an, a spokesperson for the National Health and Family Planning Commission. In Beijing, officials expect between 30,000 and 50,000 more births per year, The Beijing News wrote.

Xiao Cai is hoping her dreamed-of daughter will be one of them — if the law changes before her fertility runs out.

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