



BLOCKED AT THE BORDER. Anastasia Lin, Canada's Miss World contestant, poses for a photograph in Toronto. Miss World Canada was barred from entering China to take part in this year's pageant in the southern island province of Hainan, a friend of the outspoken Chinese-Canadian contestant said. Lin was prevented from boarding her connecting flight in Hong Kong, Caylan Ford said in an e-mail. (Frank Gunn/The Canadian Press via AP)

Outspoken Miss World Canada denied entry to China

By Kelvin Chan
The Associated Press

HONG KONG — Canada's outspoken Miss World contestant said she was barred from entering China to take part in this year's pageant and accused Beijing of overreach in extending its campaign of censorship even to beauty contests.

China-born Anastasia Lin said she was unable to board her connecting flight from Hong Kong to the southern island province of Hainan after a Chinese official told her by telephone that she would not be granted a visa on arrival.

Lin is an outspoken critic of Chinese religious policy and a follower of the Falun Gong meditation practice, which was outlawed by China's ruling Communist Party in 1999.

"If they start to censor beauty pageants — how pathetic is that?" Lin said in Hong Kong.

Dressed in black leggings and a belted tan trench coat, Lin was approached by several fellow travellers in the Hong Kong airport arrival hall who wanted to take her photo.

Lin, who moved to Canada from China when she was 13 years old, told a U.S. congressional hearing in July that tens of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners have been killed so their organs could be harvested and sold for transplants. The 25-year-old actress also plays an imprisoned Falun Gong practitioner in an upcoming Canadian movie, *The Bleeding Edge*.

Lin said that after she won the Canadian title, Chinese security agents visited her father who still lives in China in an apparent attempt to intimidate her into silence. Although she hadn't received an invitation letter from organizers, and therefore was unable to obtain a Chinese visa, she said she decided to travel to China anyway in hopes of obtaining a visa on arrival.

After landing in Hong Kong on a flight from Toronto, Lin was told by airline staff at check-in that she needed to speak to an official in Hainan's provincial capital of Sanya. She said the official, who identified himself only by his surname, Chen, seemed to be attempting to verify her identity. After telling her she wasn't eligible for a visa, the man refused to give a reason then abruptly hung up the phone, she said.

"To prevent me from even stepping into Chinese territory, I think this is what they're trying to do. I really don't see where this insecurity comes from," Lin told The Associated Press. "I think that's the real harm when people watch this and learn a negative lesson. I hope people see courage and hope in the story, not simply just being denied."

Obama visits Asian refugee center amid raging debate in U.S.

By Josh Lederman
The Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Pushing back against efforts to bar Syrian refugees from resettling in the United States, President Barack Obama vowed his country will be a welcoming place for millions fleeing violence around the world "as long as I'm president."

Obama commented at a learning center in the Malaysian capital that serves the poor, including some refugees. He met with boys and girls wearing crisp white and black uniforms and neckties as they sat at tables and worked on painting and puzzle projects.

Obama said the youngsters "represent the opposite of terror, the opposite of the type of despicable violence we saw in Mali and Paris."

Most of the children the president met with are Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic group. Tens of thousands of Rohingya have fled Myanmar to escape persecution by the country's Buddhist majority, with many ending up in Malaysia, where Obama was attending a regional economic summit.

Obama noted that the world is currently focused on the humanitarian tragedy in Syria, where years of civil war have forced



PRESIDENTIAL VISIT. U.S. President Barack Obama, center, shakes hands with a girl while touring the Dignity for Children Foundation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Obama visited the center in Malaysia that helps lower-income families, including refugees, casting a spotlight on the plight of those fleeing violence and persecution from Myanmar to Syria. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

millions to flee to other countries to escape the bloodshed. But he said the world must not forget about some 60 million people who have been displaced around the globe.

The November Paris attacks have led U.S. lawmakers to seek to halt or delay the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the U.S. out of concern that terrorists could try to slip in with them and carry out similar attacks. Obama has rejected that idea and pledged to veto any bill sent to him to block Syrians from entering.

Speaking of the children he had

just met with, Obama said: "Anybody who had a chance to see those kids, hopefully you understood the degree to which they're just like our kids. They deserve love and stability and protection."

He said more and more countries are recognizing that they need to do more, vowing that "as long as I'm president we are going to keep stepping up."

The refugees Obama met with have all been cleared to come to the U.S. and have been assigned to specific cities, the White House said.

Japan probes mystery boats carrying dead bodies off coast

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — They drift into seas near Japan by the dozens every year, ghostly wrecked ships thought to come from impoverished North Korea.

Japanese authorities say they are investigating nearly a dozen wooden boats carrying decomposing bodies that were found off the country's northwestern coast over the past month.

In most cases, the bodies are in such bad shape after being at sea for weeks that it's been impossible to determine their cause of death, officials say.

On November 20, officials found 10 bodies in three boats off the coast of Ishikawa prefecture. Two days later, another wooden boat was found off nearby Fukui prefecture with six skulls, one nearly intact body with a head, and various other bones and remains, coast guard official Yuka Amao told The Associated Press.

Coast guard officials said at least 11 shoddy fishing boats carrying the bodies have arrived since late October. Most are carrying equipment, nets, and signs written in Korean, including one carrying a sign saying "Korean People's Army," the North Korean army.

The officials said they could not say for certain, but the poor condition and small size of the 33- to 40-foot-long vessels are not typical of South Korea or Japan, said coast guard spokesman Yoshiaki Hiroto. He said evidence suggests the boats are from the Korean Peninsula, though he



GHOST SHIP. A ship of unknown nationality is seen in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, central Japan, after it was found in mid-November off Noto peninsula and was towed to shore. Japanese authorities are investigating nearly a dozen wooden boats carrying decomposing bodies found drifting off the northwestern coast over the past month. Coast Guard officials say they have found at least 11 shoddy boats carrying the bodies of unknown nationalities since late October. They have also found fishing equipment and nets on board, as well as signs written in Korean, suggesting they may have come from North Korea. (Kyodo News via AP)

declined to identify the country.

The recent spate of arrivals has drawn attention, though similar discoveries are not out of the ordinary: dozens of such wrecked boats drift toward Japan every year.

So far this year, 34 mystery boats have drifted over, including the 11 found between late October and November. Last year, Japan found 65 of them. In 2013, there were 80, according to the coast guard.

The number tends to rise during the fall and winter season because of prevailing winds from the northwest, Hiroto said.

In recent years, fishermen from food-short North Korea have increas-

ingly forayed into Japanese waters hunting squid, and some of the boats found adrift have been carrying squid-catching equipment. They are usually ordered away when caught by the Japanese coast guard since the two countries lack a fishing agreement.

Sometimes disabled North Korean vessels are rescued with their crews intact, and repatriated. In other cases, fishermen have used their ships to defect to South Korea.

The history of such drifting arrivals goes back centuries, according to historical accounts.

Associated Press writer Elaine Kurtenbach contributed to this report.



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