

# Young democracy activist among Macau election winners

By Kelvin Chan  
The Associated Press

**H**ONG KONG — Macau voters have elected a young pro-democracy activist to the Chinese casino capital's legislature, as opposition lawmakers expanded their presence at the expense of candidates linked to the gambling industry.

The released results are a surprising sign of faith in young people with progressive ideas among Macau's notoriously apathetic electorate.

Official results showed 26-year-old Sulu Sou won a seat in the election for the city's semi-democratic legislature, making him the city's youngest-ever lawmaker, according to local news reports.

Sou's party, the New Macau Association, favors full democracy for the 33-seat legislature, where only 14 seats are directly elected and the rest are filled by pro-establishment labor unions and special interest groups or appointed by the city's Beijing-backed top leader. The party also aims to reinvigorate interest in politics among the former Portuguese colony's younger generation.

Sou, who could not be reached for comment, joined three incumbent pro-democracy candidates who won re-election. Another surprise winner was newcomer Agnes Lam, a university professor seen as a centrist. There were few other changes to the rest of the directly elected seats,



which remain dominated by pro-Beijing representatives.

Sou has done well in "projecting an image of freshness and youthfulness in Macau's political landscape," said Sonny Lo, a politics professor at HKU Space. Over the past five years, Sou "has been working very hard to raise all sorts of issues which were traditionally regarded as sensitive in Macau," such as political reform. In 2014, he also helped lead the city's biggest protest since its 1999

**PRO-DEMOCRACY VICTORY.** Pro-democracy activist Sulu Sou, 26, center, celebrates with his supporters after winning a seat in voting for the city's semi-democratic legislature in Macau, China. Macau voters elected Sou to the Chinese casino capital's legislature, as opposition lawmakers expanded their presence at the expense of candidates linked to the gambling industry. (Apple Daily via AP)

handover to China, which saw 20,000 people take to the streets to rally against a government plan to give civil servants lavish retirement benefits.

The vote also highlighted some lingering public discontent over the government's hapless response to a powerful typhoon that battered Macau weeks earlier, flooding its old town, killing 10, and leaving hundreds more injured.

Macau's economy has boomed over the past decade as supercharged growth in the casino industry transformed the enclave from a seedy and corrupt backwater into a glitzy gambling powerhouse.

But Lo, who calculated that gambling industry-related candidates lost two seats in direct voting, said the results indicate "many younger voters believe that the legislative assembly should not be dominated by the casino-related forces."

Results showed 57.2 percent of registered voters cast ballots in Macau, a semiautonomous Chinese city with a population of 636,000 that is an hour by ferry from Hong Kong.

## Malaysia police arrest seven boys linked to deadly fire

By Eileen Ng  
The Associated Press

**K**UALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Police in Malaysia have arrested seven boys suspected of starting a fire at an Islamic boarding school that killed 23 people because students there had allegedly teased them.

Speaking at a televised press conference in Kuala Lumpur, police chief Amar Singh said the boys, between 11 and 18 years old, were detained after investigators obtained CCTV footage from a neighboring building.

The blaze happened at a three-story *tahfiz* school, where Muslim boys study and memorize the Quran. The accused boys blocked the lone exit to the dormitory,

trapping students behind barred windows. Two adults and 21 teenage students were killed.

Singh said six of the seven boys tested positive for drugs. Two of the boys had been detained before, one on charges of vehicle theft, another for rioting, he said.

Singh gave no details on how the suspects had allegedly been mocked by students at the dormitory.

Officials said the school was operating without a fire safety permit and license, and that a dividing wall was illegally built on the top floor, blocking the victims from reaching a second exit.

The fire renewed calls for better regulation of religious schools.

Religious schools, mostly privately run, are not supervised by the Education Ministry because they come under the purview of state religious authorities. Local media reported there are more than 500 registered *tahfiz* schools nationwide, but many more are believed to be unregistered.

Data from the fire department showed that 1,083 fires struck religious schools in the past two years, of which 211 were burned to the ground. The worst disaster occurred in



**ARSONISTS ARRESTED.** Men prepare graves during a mass funeral for some of the victims of a fire at a private Islamic boarding school outside Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Officials said the school was operating without a fire safety permit and license, and that a dividing wall was illegally built on the top floor, blocking the victims from reaching a second exit. (AP Photo/Daniel Chan)

1989 when 27 female students at an Islamic school in Kedah state died when fire gutted the school and eight wooden hostels.

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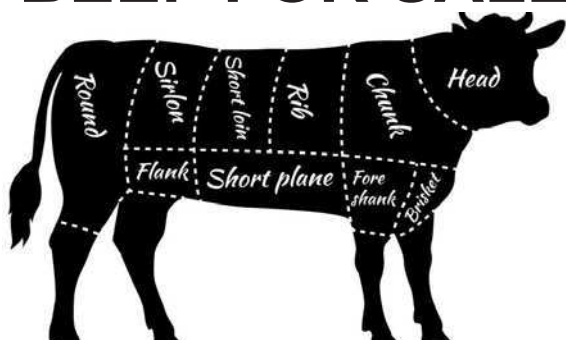
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