

Letters

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China's legal system fails basic tests

Hong Liang, the Chinese embassy's deputy head of mission, repeats the line that Australians should respect (and, presumably, therefore not criticise) the Chinese legal system as it is applied to Stern Hu because China respects Australia's legal system ("Rio Tinto executive admits to China bribes", March 23).

But to recognise that a foreign country has a legal system different from one's own is not the same as to respect that system. Respect and recognition of the Chinese legal system are words and worlds apart, as chalk is to cheese.

How can one respect a legal system (Chinese or otherwise) in which: A person is arrested, kept in

jail and denied access to his family until his trial (Stern Hu was arrested in July 2009 and has been kept in jail ever since).

The person is not presumed to be innocent. The person is not provided with proper particulars of what he is meant to have done wrong and the evidence on which it is based. A person is not given a fair opportunity to prepare his defence.

The person is denied proper legal representation. The evidence against the person is not made publicly available.

Independence of the judiciary cannot be assumed. The trial is held in secret (if a court is closed to the media as in the case of Stern Hu, it

cannot be called "open" by being by invitation only).

Australians have a right to criticise China's legal system as it is applied to an Australian. But by criticising it one can expect a crescendo of criticisms of, and alleged comparisons to, Australia's legal system.

So let it first be said that while Australia was ranked in the top 10 per cent in the latest World Bank Institution Rule of Law Survey, its own system is not perfect. This association was formed to point out defects and seek improvements to the operation of the rule of law in Australia.

But it is no response to objective

criticism (whether at home or abroad) to shoot the messenger.

The fact that Stern Hu may have made an admission of guilt is not necessarily a recognition that he was guilty, or more importantly, that he has received a fair trial. Those who believe they would not make a confession, while languishing in an overseas jail should look to those who, safe and smug in Australia, are too intimidated to make any public criticism of China (no matter how justified).

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Games begin for plucking Arrow

A slip of the pen redefinition of 3P reserves as "proud, probable and possible" (Street Talk, March 23) is timely and prophetic in the sense it highlights the lack of pride shown by the Arrow Energy board in offering its coal seam gas reserves, which it has recommended be sold to the Shell-PetroChina consortium at a true to form, lowball second round offer tabled by that consortium.

But perhaps some good may come from this. Other potential bidders now have the luxury of knowing that Arrow is a willing seller at a price that still undervalues the target. How often do such clear opportunities like this arise, particularly for gas reserves? Surely there is now an attractive opening for one or more of the other large consortiums proposing Gladstone-based liquefied natural gas projects to pounce, not only to acquire more reserves but, more importantly at this stage, to simplify the much needed consolidation of Gladstone LNG interests, which Chanticleer (March 23) rightly notes is the real game that has yet to start.

While the capital requirements of world scale LNG projects are daunting even for the world's major companies to assume alone, the introduction of too many large players brings yet another complexity through competing ambitions and their natural

Students need to brave the waters

The engineering sector is not the only industry to face critical skills shortages in the future ("Fears of engineer shortage", March 22).

The water sector is also facing critical skills gaps that are expected to worsen over the next decade.

Factors such as an ageing workforce, advancing and complex changes in technology and fewer students taking up studies in engineering, science and trades are expected to have a significant impact

