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AN ACADEMIC EXPECTS DEMAND FOR NEW WORKERS AND SALARY LEVELS IN THE GAMING INDUSTRY ARE LIKELY TO REMAIN LOW

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THE TALIBAN'S TAKEOVER COULD PRESENT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHINA, INCLUDING DEVELOPING AFGHANISTAN'S VAST MINERAL RICHES

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AP PHOTO



Malaysia's new Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob struck a conciliatory tone in his first national address yesterday, saying he would embrace the opposition in an effort to tackle the runaway pandemic and revive a slumping economy. A day after being sworn in, Ismail said the political battles that led to a change of government twice since 2018 elections had been detrimental to the country and distressed the public.

AP PHOTO



Australia More than 250 people who were protesting coronavirus lockdowns were arrested Saturday and many faced fines for defying health orders, authorities said. At least seven police officers were treated for injuries after skirmishes broke out at some of the protests, which took place in multiple cities nationwide. The largest and most violent protest was in Melbourne. Many were organized by people in encrypted online chat groups.

AP PHOTO



Iranian president met yesterday with Japan's foreign minister in the capital of Tehran and the two discussed de-escalation of tensions in the region, Iranian news agencies reported. The president's official website, president.ir, said that Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi (pictured) discussed bilateral, regional and international issues with President Ebrahim Raisi.

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AP PHOTO

LYNZY VALLES



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MACAU NEIGHBORHOOD IN HENGQIN MOVING FORWARD, COMPLETION IN 2023

RENATO MARQUES

THE plan to establish a pilot project of a Macau neighborhood in Hengqin that would link the two sides in terms of livelihood and other aspects of daily life is moving forward. Contractors expect to have all the facilities completed in 2023, the Macau Urban Renewal Limited (MUR) company said in a statement.

According to the local government-owned private entity, the construction of Macau New Neighborhood (MNN) project was fully underway in early 2021.

"Its pile foundation is expected to be finished within this year. The construction of the basement, main body, fitted-out residential units, roads, and greening facilities will be gradually carried out. The whole project is expected to be completed in 2023," the firm said.

Late last week, another step was taken towards the development of the project with the building contractor, China Construction Engineering (Macau) Company Limited, inaugurating two

training bases that aim to present to local university students (and others) the methods of construction for most of the facilities to be built in the MNN.

The two bases are titled "Constructional Practicum Base for University Students in Macau" and "Training Base for Pre-fabricated Construction" respectively and are aimed at attracting Macau's university students and graduates majoring in construction, to help them participate in activities to learn about the standards of the construction industry in the Greater Bay Area.

The bases also aim to provide both practical training and employment opportunities to build new talent for the development of the prefabricated construction industry in Macau.

In recent interventions in the Legislative Assembly, several lawmakers linked to the construction sector, as well as the Secretary for Transport and Public Works, have pushed for the adoption of this construction system, claiming that it can be a faster, more economical and environmentally-friendly way to build



both public and private buildings.

The MNN is the first livelihood project developed for Macau residents that aims to fully integrate the people living in the Hengqin area. It integrates living spaces, education, health, and social services, and plays a role in promoting and implementing the deve-

lopment of the Guangdong-Macau in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin.

The project includes approximately 4,000 residential units for sale and a further 200 housing units planned to be rented to skilled workers.

The MUR also added that futu-

re construction projects in Macau will adopt similar pre-fabrication techniques, with the company announcing that it has plans to make use of the MNN construction period to organize trips and visits for the local construction industry to learn more about these methods.

Inflation rate rises for the first time since August 2020

THE composite consumer price index (CPI) in July rose by 0.38% year-on-year, the first year-on-year growth seen since August 2020, according to data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

The bureau indicated that the CPI for July stood at 102.53, attributing the slight increase to dearer charges for eating out and electricity, as well as higher prices of gasoline, Liquefied Petroleum Gas and fruit.

However, the rise was partially offset by lower rental costs for dwellings, the falling prices of pork, clothing and footwear, as well as decreasing charges for telecommunications services.

Local economist Albano Martins forecasted that August's inflation rate will be



PHOTO ARCHIVE

-0.54%, adding, "if it doesn't materialize, I believe it will be in the range -0.55% and -0.51%."

"The problem is that we have had deflation since March last year and if we continue like this, we can [be expected to] continue in deflation (on average in the last 12 months) until

November," he told the Times.

"The year-on-year variation started to be positive in July, which is expected to continue to [be the case] if we don't sink into recession. [A recession] is not to be expected given the very low values of gross domestic product as of

the second quarter of last year," he added.

The composite CPI for July rose by 0.03% month-on-month, while the average composite CPI for the first seven months of 2021 dropped by 0.57% year-on-year.

The average CPI-A and CPI-B fell by 0.59% and

0.54% respectively. CPI-A relates to about 50% of households: those which have an average monthly expenditure of MOP12,000 to MOP35,999. The CPI-B relates to about 30% of households, namely those having an average monthly expenditure of MOP36,000 to MOP62,999.

MUST SCHOLAR EXPECTS RISING CPI

A positive increase in the CPI for the remaining four months of the year will hopefully eventuate, Chair Prof. Jacky So Yuk Chow, vice president and dean of the School of Business at the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST), estimated.

The rise of the July CPI, in So's estimation, was mainly caused by the smaller price decrease

of certain commodities. However, the academic noted that prices of food products should not see significant hikes as fresh products sold in Macau are mainly imported from mainland China with relatively stable supply.

On future prospects, he pointed to several major festivals in the coming months, such as the National Day holidays and Christmas, which are traditionally high consumption dates. He believes people will still have shopping sprees as a result.

In addition, "[there] is a lot of money in the market," he said. The business studies academic reminds the government to issue financial support in accordance with the recovery of the economy to keep inflation in check. **LV/AL**

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Academic expects gambling industry hires, salary to remain low

ANTHONY LAM

An academic expects demand for new workers and salary levels in the gambling industry are likely to remain low, with the recovery and transformation of the industry set to take some time.

According to the government's Statistics and Census Service, at the end of the second quarter of 2021, there were 55,768 full-time employees in the gambling sector, a decrease of 1,691 from the same period last year. Among them, croupiers totaled 24,643, down 701 year-on-year.

In June 2021, average earnings (excluding bonuses) of full-time employees in the gambling sector were MOP23,690, up by 2.1% year-on-year. Average earnings of croupiers rose by 3.5% in the same period to MOP19,950.

At the end of the second quarter, there were 56 job vacancies in the gambling sector, an increase of 31 vacancies year-on-year.

The employee recruitment rate (0.8%) and the employee turnover rate (1.8%) increased by 0.6 and 1.2 percentage points respectively, while the job vacancy rate



was only 0.1%. These indicators reflect the ongoing relatively low level of labor demand in the gambling sector.

The academic, who refused to be identified, says that the city's gambling industry is undergoing a structural transformation. He attributed this to mainland legal amendments on external gambling activities, as well as tightened supervision over funds, as cited in Macao Daily. Casinos in

Macau are now seeing a shift from junkets to the main casino floor as their main source of income.

It is expected that this transformation will not be rapid, possibly taking more than a year. Junkets are therefore likely to see great pressure on their operations, and mass layoffs might be inevitable.

Some laid-off staff released to the market may be picked up by the six gambling concessionaires, but the remainder may face

a long period of unemployment if they do not want to change careers.

These factors also mean that salary increases will be under downward pressure as well, the academic said.

Gambling concessionaires have been expressing their confidence in the city's resilience, but are reducing budgets and lowering costs, especially in non-critical areas such as advertising, ad-

ministration or even the hiring of non-resident workers.

Analysis by the academic on retaining a local workforce shows that this factor is considered a critical element in future concession renewal. Speculation exists that the concession renewal may be postponed, which the academic suggests may assist with stabilizing the employment market.

The academic emphasized that workers from the gambling industry may have difficulty shifting to different industries. Although the government offers remunerated training, it is only a temporary strategy.

Meanwhile, the city relies heavily on the service industry, which has also been hit hard by the economic downturn, meaning that it may not provide enough employment opportunities to absorb all the laid-off workers from the gambling industry.

As many small and medium sized enterprises are experiencing tight cashflow and mounting debt, the academic suggests that the government prepare a fourth round of financial support, or a further rise in the unemployment rate may eventuate.



ELECTIONS 2021

NAT OR VACCINE MANDATORY FOR LIST SPEAKERS

RENATO MARQUES

The Legislative Assembly Electoral Affairs Commission (CAEAL) has issued the final guidelines for the election campaign, taking into account the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 prevention and control measures.

Campaign activities will take place from midnight, August 28

until midnight, September 10, in 18 designated locations around Macau.

According to CAEAL information, such venues will be fenced with metal barriers to physically isolate them from public space and have specific entry and exit places so that prevention and control measures can be enforced.

The CAEAL remarked that in

addition to ensuring body temperature measurements are taken, social distancing must be maintained with at least one meter between participants and at least two meters from the stage.

Access to the venues will be limited. For the members of the list to give speeches without the use of a facemask, they must have evidence of a valid negative nucleic acid test (NAT) result or have received two doses of a Covid-19 vaccine at least 14 days before the date they enter the venue.

These requirements will be verified by staff from the lists campaigning, who will require participants to present a green health code and have their temperature checked.

To ensure that social distancing is effectively implemented, the 18 venues will also have a capacity limit.

Campaigning lists are also responsible for the cleaning and disinfection of all equipment after the activity, ensuring that all participants wear masks and providing backup supplies of protective equipment along with liquid soap and other cleaning products as required.

The CAEAL also noted that if it detects any failures to comply with the guidelines, it may suspend the lists' use of the campaign venues.

IC CANCELS PERFORMANCES DUE TO COVID-19 PREVENTION MEASURES

RENATO MARQUES

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced in a statement that it has canceled a series of events planned to take place at the end of the month and in September.

In the statement, the IC explained the decision was necessary due to the "Guidelines on Conducting Visits Abroad and Crowd Gathering Activities," issued by the Health Bureau.

Canceled performances include the "ARTmusing Film Carnival," scheduled for August 28 to 29; the Youth Cantonese Opera Course Excerpts Presentation Performance "Summer," scheduled for August 28; and "ARTmusing Fun," scheduled for August 29. Also shelved were several performances by the Macao Orchestra and some outreach activities, including the "Artist Salon" scheduled for September 3; "Violin Master Class

with Ning Feng," scheduled for September 4; "2021-22 Season Opening Concert - Ning Feng meets Brahms" and the associated pre-concert talk, scheduled for September 5; "Along with the musical joy - Annual gala and gathering," scheduled for September 9; and "Dialogue in the Piano Trio" and "Music Hour with Musicians," both scheduled for September 18.

The IC said that ticket-holders for any of the canceled events can arrange a refund by contacting the Macau Ticketing Network before September 30.

Special arrangements have also been made for both the Macao Orchestra and the Macao Chinese Orchestra to have their September performances live-streamed on the internet.

The bureau added that it will continue to closely monitor the development of the pandemic and make further announcements as necessary.

COVID-19

UK APPROVES MONOCLONAL ANTIBODY COCKTAILS, SAR AWAITS SAFETY DATA

LYNZY VALLES

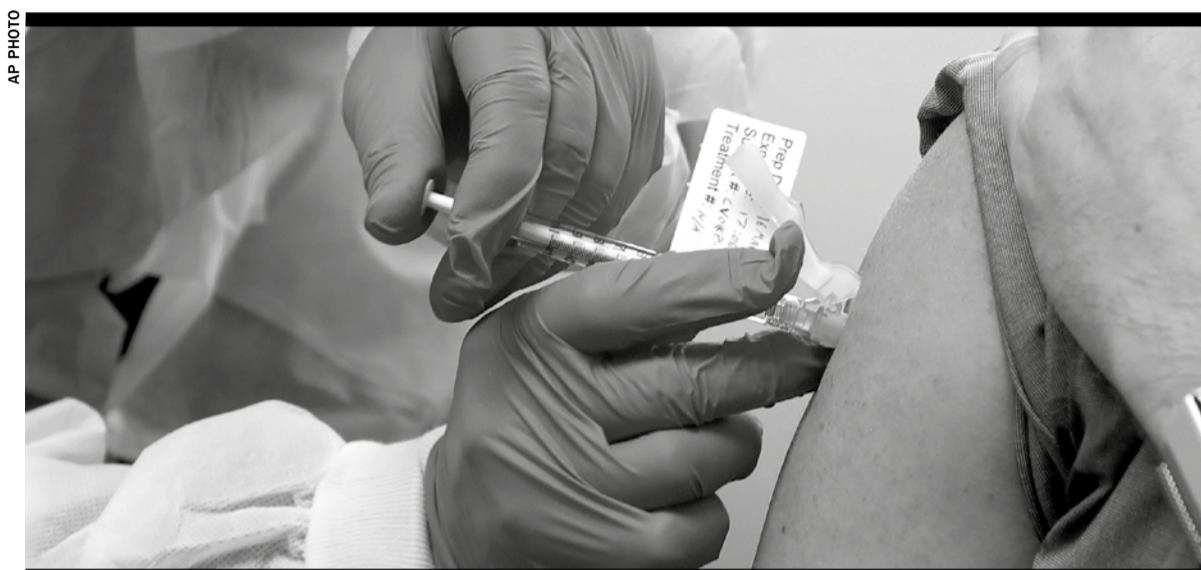
FOLLOWING attempts to prevent the rapid spread of Covid-19 and variants, and after global discussions on booster shots, the United Kingdom (UK) has approved an antibody cocktail Covid-19 jab developed by Regeneron/Roche in light of the continued rise in infections across the country.

Several countries and regions have already launched a three-shot regimen, with Macau health authorities also considering the practicability of such a plan to determine when the third dose, or a booster shot, should be administered.

However, Macau health authorities recently clarified that no consensus has been reached yet concerning the possible effects of mixing doses of different Covid-19 vaccines.

Authorities pledged that such a move would only be considered once the government had evidence proving the safety and efficiency of vaccines when administered in ways that differ from current practice.

Meanwhile, on Friday, the UK



drug regulator approved a first-of-its-kind cocktail shot as the first monoclonal antibody combination product indicated for use in the prevention and treatment of acute Covid-19 infection in Britain.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) announced that the drug is administered either by injection or infusion, and acts in the lining of the respiratory system where it binds tightly to the coronavirus and prevents it from gaining access to the respiratory

system's cells.

Clinical trial data assessed by MHRA scientists and clinicians has shown that Ronapreve may prevent infection, promote resolution of symptoms of acute Covid-19 infection and reduce the likelihood of being admitted to hospital due to Covid-19, the regulator said in a statement.

"Ronapreve is the first of its kind for the treatment of Covid-19, and after a meticulous assessment of the data by our expert scientists and clinicians, we are satisfied that

this treatment is safe and effective," said Dr Samantha Atkinson, Interim Chief Quality & Access Officer at the MHRA.

England lifted almost all remaining Covid-19 restrictions on July 19. More than 87% of people aged 16 and over in Britain have had their first dose of a vaccine and more than 76% have received both doses, according to the latest figures.

In Macau, the vaccination rate is deemed insufficient for the government to follow suit, as only

about 40% of the population has been vaccinated. This has led authorities to be more rigid on border closures, as there is a long way to go until herd immunity is achieved.

In June, a study conducted by Oxford researchers found that using antibody cocktails can indeed boost immunity against the virus.

On July 1, Russia was the first country to announce the launch of a booster vaccine campaign for people vaccinated more than six months ago, in a bid to control the spread of the Delta variant.

AstraZeneca is also seeking approval for an antibody cocktail after a clinical trial showed that the drug significantly reduced the risk of developing Covid-19 symptoms.

A vaccine cocktail combining the Sputnik V and AstraZeneca vaccines also shows a high "immunity profile," according to reports.

Last month, Pfizer-BioNTech released study results showing that people receiving a third vaccine dose six months after their second dose showed antibody responses five to 10 times higher than the levels after two doses.

New rules require online takeaway food stores to register

A new Executive Regulation requires takeaway food sellers operating fully online to move out of non-commercial venues and register with the relevant authority, the Executive Council announced recently.

The regulation will be enacted on November 15.

Currently operating takeaway food establishments should be registered with the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) before mid-May, 2022. New operations commencing after the enactment date must follow the new rules.

According to the government, the Executive Regulation was made to govern sellers who are not currently under the supervision of any local laws governing the sale of takeaway food items.

In addition, the regulation also requires takeaway food sellers to operate their businesses in venues registered or built for the preparation



of food for sale. "The establishment for the operation of takeaway [food] activities cannot be installed in a property whose physical environment is obviously incompatible with the operation of

such businesses," the Executive Regulation states.

After registration with the IAM, operators must display their registration in an easily visible location in their establishment. When they run

business campaigns online, they will be required to show their registration as well.

Failure to comply with the rules will result in a fine of MOP5,000 to MOP35,000 for business owners.

Lei Iam Leong, president of the Macau Catering Industry Association, is supportive of the new regulation, adding that the industry has been calling for such a system.

In the long term, he said, the registration system will help improve supervision over food safety and safeguard Macau's name as a Creative City of Gastronomy.

Moreover, the registration system will allow the now-online takeaway establishments to apply for government support funding for small and medium enterprises.

He also recommended the requirement of insurance for food delivery workers to provide more protection for them. **AL**

ANIMA CLOSE TO MOP800,000 GOAL FOLLOWING APPEAL

LYNZY VALLES

ANIMAL rights group Anima Macau has nearly reached its goal of raising MOP800,000 this month. Honorary president of the group, Albano Martins, said that they have raised a total of MOP783,612.26, expressing optimism that the association will reach its goal by the end of the month.

Martins told the Times that the group now has a goal of reaching MOP800,000 per month for the next four months, "otherwise we will not survive or [will have to] enter very complicated debt."

"I am not sure we will be capable but we are working very hard to reach this goal," he added.

Early this month, Anima appealed to the public for financial support, with an urgent need to find "at least MOP4 million." Martins revealed that the budgeted for 2021 was approved to around MOP10.7 million.

However, Anima has only received MOP4.5 million from Macau Foundation and MOP500,000 will only be provided in the beginning of next year. He added that they had already called on the casino operators for support but this has been in vain.

In January this year, the group only received a total of MOP360,000 from the four local casino operators, a significant plunge from the MOP2 million it received each year on average, pre-pandemic.

Chinese team forced to use Plan B in Le Mans 24H

RENATO MARQUES

THE Absolute Racing team for the legendary endurance race Le Mans 24H in France had to change their original team registration from China to Germany to take part in the event, according to the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC).

This caused surprise ahead of the French event but a WEC spokesperson explained that "due to Covid-19, they [the Chinese National Sporting Authority (ASN)] are not encouraging teams to race abroad," it was reported in Sportscar365.

The change resulted in the Absolute team having to register as a German entrant at the last minute, securing a license through the German ASN. Due to the last-minute nature of the change, the team still raced, flying the Chinese flag over its car.

Another team racing in the same event, HubAuto Racing (LMGTE-Pro), had better luck, with their entry unaffected as it had been registered under Chinese Taipei on the entry list.



JURGEN TAP

The team was, however, flying a Taiwanese flag in both the paddock and the car, according to sources verified by the Times.

FOOTBALL MATCH TO BE HOSTED IN DOHA

The football match between China and Japan, part of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Asian Qualifiers – Road to Qatar final round for Group B, will take place at a neutral venue, the AFC

confirmed.

According to the Confederation, this decision is in line with "challenges faced by the Chinese Football Association (CFA) in organizing its home matches in light of the travel restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic."

The match scheduled to take place on September 7 will now be held in Doha, Qatar.

The Confederation's statement adds that after the decision was

taken, the AFC started working in partnership with the CFA, the Japan Football Association and the Qatar Football Association "to ensure the safe passage and wellbeing of all stakeholders."

This reflects the inability of the CFA to allow the Japanese team entry into Chinese territory due to Covid-19 prevention and control measures that impose restrictions on all foreign nationals.

PSP APPREHENDS YOGA INSTRUCTOR WITHOUT VALID VISA

A woman from the mainland has been apprehended by the Public Security Police Force for working illegally in Macau. The woman, who is in her 30s and holds an SAR Travel Endorsement in Macau, was caught over the weekend teaching yoga classes in a beauty parlor owned by a local woman. The teacher was caught in a class by the police, who were told that the two women are friends, and the teacher was invited to teach in July and August. The teacher earned 20,400 Chinese yuan for six days of teaching.

WONG IENG KUAN LIBRARY REOPENS TODAY

The Wong Ieng Kuan Library in Luis de Camões Garden will reopen today after it was closed on August 3 following a visit by one of the members of the Covid-positive family of four. According to the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), the premises underwent thorough cleaning and disinfection in consultation with the Health Bureau. Crowd control measures will also be implemented at the library, with visitor numbers limited to 50% of pre-pandemic capacity.

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CHINA ALLOWS COUPLES THIRD CHILD AMID DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS

CHINA will now allow couples to legally have a third child as it seeks to hold off a demographic crisis that could threaten its hopes of increased prosperity and global influence.

The legislature last week amended the Population and Family Planning Law as part of a decades-long effort by the ruling Communist Party to dictate the size of families in keeping with political directives. It comes just six years after the last change.

From the 1980s, China strictly limited most couples to one child, a policy enforced with threats of fines or loss of jobs, leading to abuses including forced abortions. A preference for sons led parents to kill baby girls, leading to a massive imbalance in the sex ratio.

The rules were eased for the first time in 2015 to allow two children as officials acknowledged the looming consequences of the plummeting birthrate. The overwhelming fear is that China will grow old before it becomes wealthy.

China long touted its one-child policy as a success in preventing 400 million additional births in the world's most populous country, thus saving resources and helping drive economic growth.

However, China's birth rate, paralleling trends in South Ko-

rea, Thailand and other Asian economies, already was falling before the one-child rule. The average number of children per mother tumbled from above six in the 1960s to below three by 1980, according to the World Bank.

Meanwhile, the number of working-age people in China has fallen over the past decade and the population has barely grown, adding to strains in an aging society. A once-a-decade government census found the population rose to 1.411 billion people last year, up 72 million from 2010.

Statistics show 12 million babies were born last year, which would be down 18% from 2019's 14.6 million.

Chinese over 60, who number 264 million, accounted for 18.7% of the country's total population in 2020, 5.44 percentage points higher than in 2010. At the same time, the working-age population fell to 63.3% of the total from 70.1% a decade ago.

The shift to the two-child rule led to a temporary bump in the numbers of births but its effects soon wore off and total births continued to fall because many women continued to decide against starting families.

Japan, Germany and some other wealthy countries face the same challenge of having

fewer workers to support aging populations. However, they can draw on investments in factories, technology and foreign assets, while China is a middle-income country with labor-intensive farming and manufacturing.

At its session Friday, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress canceled the leveling of fines for breaking the earlier restrictions and called for additional parental leave and childcare resources. New measures in finance, taxation, schooling, housing and employment should be introduced to "ease the burden on families," the amendment said.

It also seeks to address longstanding discrimination against pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace that is considered one of the chief disincentives to having additional children, along with high costs and cramped housing.

While female representation in the labor force is high, women, especially those with children, are severely underrepresented at the higher levels, holding just 8.4% of leadership positions at the central and provincial levels. Among the young party leaders who will take the reins in the coming decades, only 11% are women. **MDT/AP**

ZHOU JIANGYONG

TOP OFFICIAL IN HANGZHOU UNDER INVESTIGATION

CHINA'S ruling Communist Party is investigating the top official in the eastern tech and tourism hub of Hangzhou for what it called serious violations of discipline and law, usually considered shorthand for corruption.

A one-sentence notice on the website of the party's disciplinary watchdog Saturday gave no details of what Zhou Jiangyong is accused of, although as Hangzhou's party secretary, he had access to privileged information and leading figures, and major influence on budgets and appointments.

A native of Zhejiang province, of which Hanzhou is the capital, Zhou had steadily risen through the ranks of local government since the mid-1980s.

If convicted of corruption, he would be one of the more prominent officials to be ensnared in powerful Communist Party leader and President Xi Jinping's ongoing anti-graft campaign.

A former imperial capital famed for its West Lake and surrounding temples, Hangzhou has lately grown famous as the hometown of internet commerce giant Alibaba.

In 2019, Zhou presented the company's billionaire founder, Jack Ma, with a prestigious good citizen award, calling him an "innovator in the digital era and a role model of entrepreneurship."

Since then, the company and its founder appear to have fallen out of favor with Xi's administration.

Ma, one of China's richest and most prominent entrepreneurs, disappeared temporarily from public view after criticizing regulators in a November speech.

Alibaba was fined \$2.8 billion for anti-competitive behavior as the party tightens control over fast-growing technology industries. Subsidiary Ant Group was on the verge of a multibillion-dollar stock market debut in November when regulators ordered that suspended.

Regulators announced executives of Alibaba, its main competitor, JD.com, and four other internet companies were summoned to a meeting and warned not to use their market dominance to keep out new competitors.

Hangzhou is also due to hold the Asian Games in just over a year. **MDT/AP**

SPACE

MARS ROVER SOLDIERS ON AFTER COMPLETING PROGRAM

CHINA'S Zhurong Mars rover is soldiering on after completing its initial program to explore the red planet and search for frozen water that could provide clues as to whether it once supported life.

China's National Space Administration said on its website Friday that Zhurong completed its 90-day program on Aug. 15 and was in excellent technical condition and fully charged.

It said it would continue to explore the area known as Utopia Planitia where it landed on May 14. Zhurong has been consistently sending back photos and data via the Tianwen-1 orbiter that crosses over it once a day.

After the United States, China is the second country to land and

sustainably operate a spacecraft on Mars, where days are 40 minutes longer than on Earth.

At 1.85 meters in height, Zhurong is significantly smaller than the American Perseverance rover, which is exploring the planet with a tiny helicopter. NASA expects its rover to collect its first sample in July for return to Earth as early as 2031.

Concurrently, China is assembling its permanent space station, with three astronauts now aboard the Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, core that was put into orbit on April 29. Two of the astronauts completed their second space walk on Friday. All three are due to return to Earth in September and be replaced by a new crew. **MDT/AP**





China both worries and hopes as US departs Afghanistan

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

IN the U.S. departure from Afghanistan, China has seen the realization of long-held hopes for a reduction of the influence of a geopolitical rival in what it considers its backyard.

Yet, it is also deeply concerned that the very withdrawal could bring risk and instability to that backyard — Central Asia — and possibly even spill over their narrow, remote border into China itself and the heavily Muslim northwestern region of Xinjiang.

The Taliban's takeover could certainly present political and economic opportunities for China, including developing Afghanistan's vast mineral riches, and Beijing has said it is ready to help rebuild the impoverished nation.

But stability will be required to reap most of those benefits, and the immediate result of the American withdrawal has been more instability, not less.

"I think Beijing will play up the narrative of American fecklessness and decline of Empire, painting this as evidence of why Beijing will be a better steward for the Eurasian heartland," said Raffaello Pantucci, an expert on the region at the Royal United Services Institute in London. "But in reality, I am not clear that I see that many huge upsides for Beijing at the moment."

Like many nations, China is concerned about the risk of terrorism from a Taliban-led Afghanistan. Beijing has repeatedly told the Taliban that the country cannot become a breeding ground

for militants to launch attacks in Xinjiang, much as Osama bin Laden used it as a base to prepare his 9/11 attacks on the U.S.

A more proximate threat may be the spillover of militancy into Pakistan and Central Asia, where China has invested heavily and sought to build alliances.

"The Afghan Taliban have promised that they will break from international terrorist forces, but we still haven't seen how they will do this because they are not officially in power," said Li Wei, an international security expert retired from the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations.

The Taliban could be an incongruent partner for China since their religion-based philosophy is diametrically opposed to Beijing's

vision of atheist rule under the Communist Party that puts social stability and economic development above all. That, however, has not prevented China's ultimately pragmatic leaders from reaching out to them.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi hosted a delegation led by the Taliban's political leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, late last month and pressed China's hopes for stability and an end to violence and terrorist threats.

Chinese officials and state media have been critical of what they call America's "hasty" retreat from Afghanistan. "Taliban's rapid victory embarrasses U.S., smashes image, arrogance," read a headline in the state-owned Global Times newspaper.

Despite the rhetoric, Wang

told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken that China was willing to work with the U.S. to promote the "soft landing" of the Afghan issue.

However, he added that "the U.S. cannot, on the one hand, deliberately curb and suppress China to damage China's legitimate rights and interests, and on the other hand, count on China to offer support and coordination."

President Joe Biden has said leaving Afghanistan will prepare America to deal with bigger potential threats, including from China.

"Our true strategic competitors — China and Russia — would love nothing more than the United States to continue to funnel billions of dollars and resources and attention into stabilizing Afghanistan indefinitely," he said this week.

Yin Gang, a researcher in Middle Eastern Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the two countries share a common interest in a stable Afghanistan.

"If Afghanistan achieves stability, it will make the U.S. look good and China will be invited to participate in reconstruction," Yin said.

China has chased commercial ventures in Afghanistan, but the prospects of such projects reaching fruition appear no closer now than they were over the past 20 years of the U.S. presence.

A consortium led by China Metallurgical Group Corp. bid \$3 billion to develop what is one of the world's largest copper deposits at Mes Aynak, promising also to build a power plant, railway and other infrastructure. Years later, work has yet to start, largely because of insurgent activity in surrounding Logar province.

China's state-owned National Petroleum Corp. suspended oil drilling in the Amu Darya basin because of a delay in the signing of a transit agreement with Uzbekistan to allow crude oil to be trucked to China. The Afghan government later voided the drilling agreement. **MDT/AP**

'Imbecilic': Ex-UK leader Tony Blair slams Afghan withdrawal

TONY Blair, the British prime minister who deployed troops to Afghanistan 20 years ago after the 9/11 attacks, says the U.S. decision to withdraw from the country has "every Jihadist group round the world cheering."

In a lengthy essay posted on his website yesterday [Macau time], the former Labour Party leader said the sudden and chaotic pullout that allowed the Taliban to reclaim power

risked undermining everything that had been achieved in Afghanistan over the past two decades, including advances in living standards and the education of girls.

"The abandonment of Afghanistan and its people is tragic, dangerous, unnecessary, not in their interests and not in ours," said Blair who served as prime minister during 1997-2007, a period that also saw him back the U.S.-led war in

Iraq in 2003.

"The world is now uncertain of where the West stands because it is so obvious that the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan in this way was driven not by grand strategy but by politics," he added.

Blair also accused U.S. President Joe Biden of being "in obedience to an imbecilic political slogan about ending 'the forever wars', as if our engagement in 2021 was remotely com-

parable to our commitment 20 or even 10 years ago."

The former prime minister, whose reputation in the U.K. took a dive from the failure to find the alleged weapons of mass destruction that were cited as justification for U.S. coalition's invasion of Iraq, said Britain has a "moral obligation" to stay in Afghanistan until everyone who needs to be evacuated is taken out.

"We must evacuate and give sanctuary to those to whom we have responsibility — those Afghans who helped us and stood by us and have a right to demand we stand by them," he said.

Like other nations, Britain is trying to evacuate Afghan allies as well as its own citizens from Afghanistan, but with a U.S.-imposed Aug. 31 deadline hovering into view, it's a race against time. **MDT/AP**



Former British PM

Crimean Tatars bemoan their plight as Ukraine hosts summit

YURAS KARMANAU, KYIV

ERFAN Kudusov fled Crimea with his wife and four children after Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Black Sea peninsula in 2014, along with many other Crimean Tatars who resented Moscow's rule.

For Kudusov and others in Crimea, the Russian takeover evoked tragic family memories of the 1944 mass deportation of Crimean Tatars on Soviet dictator Josef Stalin's order, raising fears of discrimination and persecution.

Their fears have materialized.

A few friends of Kudusov who stayed in Crimea have since been convicted on charges of extremism, separatism and membership in banned organizations and have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from eight to 19 years.

The fate of Crimean Tatars is one of the top issues at Monday's inaugural meeting of the Crimean Platform, an international summit called by Ukraine to build up pressure on Russia over the annexation that has been denounced as illegal by most of the world.

"The fear for my children and the memory of repressions against my people forced us to pack all our things in two suitcases and leave our beloved Yalta literally in one day," Kudusov told The Associated Press at his small restaurant in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv. "Most of those who left were well-educated and energetic people who actively opposed the occupation of Crimea."

Only an ancestral cover for their Quran, a few paintings of Crimea's rocky landscapes and some ceramics now remind Kudusov about his native land. Letters from prison and chats with relatives on messaging apps paint a grim picture of Crimean Tatars' life now under Russian control.

"Russia is enforcing a concentration camp there behind a nice facade," Kudusov said. "People in Crimea are very scared and fear talking aloud about it."

In August 2018, Vatan Karbash set himself ablaze in Crimea's regional capital of Simferopol to protest authorities' moves to raze Crimean

AP PHOTO



Tatars' homes. He survived with heavy burns.

Ethnic Russians, who form a majority of Crimea's 2.3 million people, widely supported the Russian annexation, but Crimean Tatars, who accounted for nearly 15%, opposed Moscow's takeover. An estimated 30,000 Crimean Tatars have fled Crimea since 2014.

Some of those who stayed have faced a relentless crackdown by Russian authorities, who banned the Crimean Tatars' main representative body and some religious groups. About 80 Crimean Tatars have been convicted and 15 activists have gone missing, according to Amnesty International.

"The Russian Federation continues its policy of intimidation, systematic pressure and criminal prosecution of Crimean Tatars, who disagree with the occupation or refuse to cooperate with the de facto authorities," said Kateryna Mitieva, a member of the rights group. "The homes of Crimean Tatar activists are systematically searched by the FSB (Russia's domestic security agency)."

In the past week alone, four Crimean Tatar activists were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 12 to 18 years on charges of being affiliated with Hizb ut-Tahrir, an international Islamist group that Russia outlawed as a terrorist organization in 2003. The group has been banned in most Arab countries, Chi-

na, Turkey and Germany.

"Russia has brought imperialism, fear, its own view of freedom and its understanding of who is friend and who is foe," mufti Ayder Rustamov said at a mosque in Kyiv that is frequented by Crimean Tatars.

Moscow has strongly rejected accusations of discrimination against Crimean Tatars. The Russian Foreign Ministry pointed at construction of new mosques in Crimea, the allocation of 100,000 land plots for Crimean Tatars and its growing support for their cultural and education projects.

At the same time, Russian officials have accused the leaders of Crimean Tatars who protested the annexation of serving Ukrainian interests and Russian law punishes those calling for Crimea to be returned to Ukraine.

Refat Chubarov, the leader of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, a representative body for the ethnic group, was sentenced in absentia to six years in prison by a Russian court in June on charges of inciting mass disturbances for protesting the annexation in 2014.

"Moscow is continuing the policy of squeezing Crimean Tatars, and all those repressions, including arrests and long prison terms, are intended to suppress the people's will and force them to leave Crimea out of fear for the future of their children," said Chubarov, who was forced to leave the Black Sea peninsula

in 2014.

Chubarov charged that Moscow has encouraged people from other regions to move to Crimea, with more than 500,000 Russians settling there since the annexation.

"Before our eyes, Russian authorities have artificially changed the ethnic makeup of Crimea," he said.

In 2016, Russian authorities outlawed the Mejlis as an extremist organization. In 2017, an international court asked Russia to repeal the decision, but it has ignored the ruling.

"Moscow has totally ignored all decisions, calls, recommendations and rulings by international organizations and courts," Chubarov said.

In a bid to draw international attention to Crimea's plight, Ukraine established the Crimean Platform, which has its first meeting in Kyiv on Monday, drawing top officials from 44 countries and blocs, including the United States, the European Union and Turkey.

"(This) is a constant dialogue platform that is aimed to consolidate the international and Ukrainian effort in order to de-occupy Crimea," Ukraine's First Deputy Foreign Minister Emine Dzhaparova told the AP.

Ukrainian authorities say massive construction projects launched by Russia in Crimea seek to militarize the peninsula. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1990 OUTRAGE AT IRAQI TV HOSTAGE SHOW



Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein has appeared on state television with western hostages, provoking a storm of outrage.

Saddam told the group of more than a dozen mainly British people they had been detained to prevent war and said Iraq wanted to see that they were safe.

They are among hundreds of foreigners being held in Iraq since its invasion of Kuwait at the beginning of August.

However, the Iraqi leader told them they were not being held as "human shields" saying Iraq was in a position to destroy any attacker.

Saddam singled out one young British boy - named only as Stuart - and ruffled the child's hair.

Speaking through an interpreter, he asked Stuart if he was getting his milk.

The Iraqi leader told the group: "We hope your presence as guests here will not be for too long.

"Your presence here, and in other places, is meant to prevent the scourge of war."

They would become heroes of peace, Saddam added.

The detainees, who looked strained and nervous, were promised tuition for their children and given permission to write to their families.

At the end of the 30-minute taped appearance, the Iraqi leader posed for photographs with the hostages before shaking each one by the hand.

A spokesman for the Gulf Support Group, set up by relatives of stranded Britons, said the interview "made all of us feel sick".

The British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, also criticised the broadcast.

Mr Hurd said: "I think the manipulation of children in that sort of way is contemptible."

The TV appearance has also been condemned by the US.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Saddam made a second TV appearance with the hostages.

In early September the women and children, including five-year old Stuart Lockwood, were allowed to fly home.

The men were not allowed to leave until early December.

Stuart Lockwood returned with his family to Worcester, central England but suffered a personal loss in 2001 when his father, Derek, died of a heart attack.

The refusal of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to withdraw his troops from Kuwait led to the UN-backed Operation Desert Storm in January 1991.

It would end in February with the defeat of the Iraqis and their subsequent forced departure from Kuwait.



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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

FOOTBALL | EPL

Grealish nets first goal for 5-star City, Liverpool wins again

STEVE DOUGLAS

MAN CITY 5, NORWICH 0

JACK Grealish closed his eyes, looked toward the sky, and stuck his index fingers into his ears.

A goal celebration most famously performed by Netherlands star Memphis Depay probably didn't stop the England international hearing the chant of "Super Jack Grealish" that was ringing around Etihad Stadium yesterday [Macau time].

Manchester City might just have a new fans' favorite.

Scoring scruffy tap-ins against a team like Norwich wasn't the reason why the Premier League champions spent a British-record fee of 100 million pounds (\$139 million) on the England international during the offseason.

There is plenty more to come from Grealish — most notably on the Champions League stage where he has been desperate to perform for so long — but it's not a bad start.

AP PHOTO



Manchester City's Jack Grealish celebrates after scoring his side's second goal

Grealish marked his home debut for City by scoring the second goal in a 5-0 thrashing of Norwich, the heaviest win so far in a league campaign that is just halfway through its second round.

He might not have scored an uglier goal — a cross from Gabriel Jesus went through a crowd of players, struck a surprised Grealish on the inside of his left leg,

and dribbled over the line — but they all count.

Grealish certainly looked like he enjoyed it.

Much tougher tests await for City, but the way the champions overran Norwich showed they might be starting to find their form after a disappointing start to the season at Tottenham, where they lost 1-0 last weekend.

Second-half goals by Aymeric Laporte and substitutes Raheem Sterling and Riyad Mahrez completed a win that was set on its way by an own-goal from Norwich goalkeeper Tim Krul.

"Still we are not in our top (form)," City manager Pep Guardiola said. "Still we have many things to do."

Two teams have started with

two straight victories and one of them is among City's big rivals for the title.

Liverpool beat Burnley 2-0 through goals by Diogo Jota and Sadio Mane. That came a week after its 3-0 win at Norwich, whose return to the top flight couldn't have gotten off to a tougher start.

Brighton is the other team with six points after beating Watford 2-0.

Since the last time there was a full house at Anfield — in March 2020 — Liverpool has won the league title for the first time in 30 years and relinquished it to Man City.

Liverpool's fans were back in force and there was something of a celebratory atmosphere against Burnley, which had claimed a shock victory in the same fixture last season to end Liverpool's 68-game unbeaten run at Anfield in the league.

Jota scored for the second straight game to put Liverpool ahead and Mane converted a pass from Trent Alexander-Arnold to seal the three points.

Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp expressed his concern after the game about the directive that looks to be pushing referees to let games flow more this season and therefore involve fewer interruptions by VAR. He was unhappy about aggressive challenges by Burnley's players.

"Watch wrestling if you like these kind of things," Klopp said. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

World Views

Yasir Masood, China Daily

RAPPORT KEY TO AFGHAN PEACE

The international media have been taken aback by the swift takeover of Kabul by the Taliban following the withdrawal of US forces from the country after almost 20 years. It was the United States that sowed the seeds of Taliban militancy.

The US' aim was to train Afghan and Pakistani youths, along with mercenaries and militants who moved to the region from the Middle East, to counter the spread of communism and fight the Soviet forces, which had moved into Afghanistan in 1979, and helped install Babrak Karmal as the leader of the country.

After the departure of the Soviet troops in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the objectives of the US changed. However, what really changed the US' attitude toward the Taliban were the Sept 11, 2001, terrorist attacks carried out by the Afghanistan-based al-Qaida. After the then ruling Taliban regime refused to hand over al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden to the George W. Bush administration, US-led forces, with the sanction of the UN, invaded Afghanistan in late 2001.

The US' objectives were ostensibly to liberate the people of Afghanistan from the grip of terrorism and religious extremism; restore "democracy" in the country; and develop the region as a whole. Although the US is said to have spent up to \$2 trillion, it could not realize any of these objectives. Instead, the US war in Afghanistan caused the deaths of tens of thousands of Afghan people and displaced many more.

The quintessential question is: What was the true rationale behind the US' almost 20-year "occupation" of Afghanistan? Perhaps it was to gain the upper hand over China and Russia and spread its influence in the region and beyond, make other regional players including India partners in its regional hegemony, and use the civil war in Afghanistan to halt the economic ascendancy of rival powers.

Pakistan has lost more than 80,000 innocent lives and over \$140 billion worth of economic output in terrorism-related violence and other activities. The worst part of the US-led "hybrid war" is that it hindered Pakistan's economic growth and confined the country to its own geostrategic and geopolitical realm.

When China and Pakistan agreed to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and China started investing in the project, some countries used all means possible, including insurgency according to some reports, to sabotage this mega infrastructure project.

Many Chinese nationals have been targeted in Pakistan, with the most recent attack being carried out in Dasu in the northern part of the country. More than 20 people, including nine Chinese nationals, died in that attack.

Some reports even suggest that as part of their bigger plan, the US and its regional partners let the Afghan soil to be used to incite violence and create instability in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region of China in a bid to achieve their objectives which include fomenting an uprising in Xinjiang, and stigmatizing China on the pretext of human rights violations.

The US is known to use double standard, and is notorious for violating human rights across the globe, especially in the Muslim world, by triggering sectarian conflicts with the help of its allies, contractors and mercenaries.

Given these facts, China must be complimented for making unprecedented efforts to curb terrorism, religious extremism and separatism in Xinjiang and ensure that everyone in the region lives in peace and harmony.

It's time the US stopped playing "zero-sum" games and desisted from blaming China for all its ills, and instead supported the efforts of China and other countries that are genuinely trying to eliminate terrorism.

According to Al Jazeera, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said that they won't allow the territory to be used against anybody or any country. This is a positive overture on the part of the Taliban.

It is to be seen whether the Taliban forms an inclusive government led by the Afghan people. But the time has come for all regional stakeholders, as well as the US and its allies to abandon their selfish interests and help the Afghan people form an inclusive government that will end terrorism and lead Afghanistan toward economic progress.

The remains of American-born singer and dancer Josephine Baker will be reinterred at the Pantheon monument in Paris, making the entertainer who is a World War II hero in France the first Black woman to get the country's highest honor.

Le Parisien newspaper reported yesterday that French President Emmanuel Macron decided to organize a ceremony on November 30 at the Paris monument, which houses the remains of scientist Marie Curie, French philosopher Voltaire, writer Victor Hugo and other French luminaries.

The presidential palace confirmed the newspaper's information.

After her death in 1975, Baker was buried in Monaco, dressed in a French military uniform with the medals she received for her role as part of the French Resistance during the war.

Baker will be the fifth woman to be honored with a Pantheon burial, and will also be the first artist.

Holocaust survivor Simone Veil, one of France's most revered politicians, was buried at the Pantheon in 2018.

ISRAEL STRIKES GAZA AFTER VIOLENT PROTESTS ALONG BORDER

ISRAEL'S military bombed Palestinian militant weapons sites in the Gaza Strip yesterday in response to a violent demonstration on the perimeter fence that left an Israeli police officer critically injured, the army said.

Saturday's violence erupted after hundreds of Palestinians took part in a demonstration organized by Gaza's Hamas rulers to draw attention to the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of the territory. The demonstration grew violent after dozens of people approached the fortified border fence and threw rocks and explosives toward Israeli soldiers from behind a black smoke screen billowing from burning tires.

At least 24 Palestinians, including a 13-year-old, were injured by Israeli gunfire, according to the Gaza health ministry. An Israeli Border Police officer was shot and critically injured.

The army said in a statement that in response to the violent demonstrations, fighter planes hit "four weapons and storage manufacturing



sites" belonging to Gaza's Hamas rulers, and that the military deployed additional troops to the region near the border with the Palestinian enclave. There were no immediate reports of injuries in the airstrikes.

Addressing the Cabinet yesterday, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said that Israel "will settle the score with those who harm our soldiers and Israeli civilians," adding that the military is "ready for any scenario."

Israel and Hamas are bitter enemies that have fought four wars and

countless skirmishes since the Islamic militant group seized control of Gaza in a 2007 coup, a year after winning a Palestinian election.

May's most recent round of fighting, an 11-day war fought to an inconclusive cease-fire, killed at least 254 people in Gaza, including 67 children and 39 women, according to the Gaza health ministry. Hamas has acknowledged the deaths of 80 militants. Twelve civilians, including two children, were killed in Israel, along with one soldier. MDT/AP



Israel A government commission investigating a deadly accident at a Jewish pilgrimage site in April held its first day of hearings yesterday, almost four months after the stampede at Mount Meron left 45 people dead. The April 29 incident at the Jewish festival in northern Israel was the deadliest civilian disaster in the country's history. Around 100,000 worshippers, mostly ultra-Orthodox Jews, attended festivities despite coronavirus regulations limiting outdoor assemblies to 500 people, and in spite of longstanding warnings about the safety of the site.



Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed hope yesterday that the Kremlin's United Russia party will continue its dominance in parliament after the country's parliamentary election in September. The Sept. 19 vote is widely seen as an important part of Putin's efforts to cement his rule before the next presidential election in 2024. The 68-year-old Russian leader, who has been in power for more than two decades, pushed through a constitutional reform last year that would potentially allow him to hold onto power until 2036.



Poland Parades for LGBT rights took place under heavy police presence Saturday at the foot of Catholic Poland's most revered monastery in Czestochowa, in the south, and in Gdansk, on the Baltic coast. The massive police presence, which included officers on horseback, was seen as the factor that prevented any clashes with far-right groups, which shouted anti-LGBT slogans like "No Homosexual Love" at the marchers.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

Chih Wey/Xinhua



Sonic Boom. A fighter plane breaks the sound barrier as part of an aerial performance during the National Day Parade show at Singapore's Marina Bay, Saturday.