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WAR NO MORE: BIDEN DEFENDS DEPARTURE FROM AFGHANISTAN

ELECTIONS2021: ELECTORAL COMMISSION RECEIVES FOUR COMPLAINTS, TWO ALREADY REFERRED FOR INVESTIGATION



Hong Kong A popular singer and pro-democracy activist will not be allowed to perform at one of the city's top theaters later this month, in an indication that a crackdown by authorities on dissent is reaching the entertainment and cultural scene. The Hong Kong Arts Centre cited a public safety clause in canceling Denise Ho's venue reservations for her concerts, according to a statement posted yesterday on Facebook by the singer's company, Goomusic. More on p7



Thailand Shopping malls, restaurants, parks and schools reopened in the capital yesterday after the government eased restrictions intended to slow the spread of the coronavirus. A surge that began in April sent new cases and deaths soaring, and department stores, restaurants, parks and other gathering places in Bangkok were ordered to close in July. But a decline in new cases in recent weeks led authorities to ease many of the restrictions.



India More students will be able to step inside a classroom for the first time in nearly 18 months, as authorities gave the green light to partially reopen more schools despite apprehension from some parents and signs that infections are picking up again. Schools and colleges in at least six more states are reopening in a gradual manner with health measures in place throughout September. In New Delhi, all staff must be vaccinated and class sizes will be capped at 50% with staggered seating and sanitized desks.

More on backpage

Casino revenue records steep drop of 47% in the heat of August

COLD PLAY

P2

PAUL PUN STEPS DOWN AS PRINCIPAL OF BRITO SCHOOL

P3



STATEMENT

Liu Xianfa*



US ORIGINS TRACING OF COVID-19 BY INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY HARMFUL

On 26 May 2021, US President Joe Biden, taking aim at China, ordered the intelligence community to finish an origins tracing report within 90 days. On 27 August, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence of the United States released a summary of the intelligence community assessment on COVID-19 origins, which does not rule out either natural exposure or laboratory accident as the origins of COVID-19. The report wrongly claims that China "continues to hinder the global investigation, resist sharing information and blame other countries". The statement by the White House issued on the same day also purported that China tries to hold back international investigation and rejects calls for transparency. It urges like-minded partners to exert pressure on China. Both the summary and the statement, stuffed with familiar "American flavors" of hegemony and bullying, are malicious and harmful.

Firstly, origins tracing by the US intelligence community of COVID-19 sets a bad precedent of politicizing virus origins tracing. Origins tracing of COVID-19 is a complex issue of science. It should and can only be undertaken by scientists around the world through joint research. Biden's 90-day deadline is essentially an anti-science political manipulation that places the arrogance of politicians above laws of science. In fact, most scientists around the world are endorsing a natural origins theory for COVID-19; the science-based origins tracing in China also concluded that the introduction of the coronavirus through a laboratory incident was extremely unlikely. However, the US government, out of its political agenda as well as all-time political logic of selectiveness, discarded science-based origins tracing and resorted to the intelligence agencies in an attempt to deceive the world and call black white with the help of its hegemony. If the international community doesn't resolutely oppose this, the US is likely to be more unscrupulous and wanton in convicting other countries for its selfish interests, and the world will thus be in unending chaos.

Secondly, origins tracing by the US intelligence community of COVID-19 is misdirecting the origins tracing efforts. China, like other countries, is a victim of the pandemic, and we all hope to find out the origins of the virus and cut off its transmission as early as possible. China has all along supported science-based origins tracing. Early this year, WHO experts came to China for origins tracing research as part of its global origins tracing endeavor. China upholds the principles of openness, transparency, science and cooperation, fully supports the work of the experts, and sets an example for the world. The US government, out of the purpose of fatiguing, blackmailing and containing China, takes the wrong path of resorting to intelligence community for origins tracing conclusions. It ignores the authori-

ritative conclusion in the Joint Report by the WHO-China joint study team, neglects the strong appeal of the international community of halting politicization of origins tracing, shuns the fact that the COVID-19 cases popping up in various places and some evidence implying the US as the origin of the virus. Its despicable behavior undermines the just and fair atmosphere as well as the foundation of international cooperation in origins tracing. If we don't purge the political virus, the science-based origins tracing will be stumbling.

Thirdly, origins tracing by the US intelligence community of COVID-19 is poisoning the atmosphere for the international cooperation in fighting COVID-19. Statistics from the WHO show that the pandemic is continuing to spread around the world with more than 200 million confirmed cases and 4.5 million deaths. In the US, the pandemic is also rebounding. The international community needs cooperation in combating the virus more than ever. Nevertheless, the US, turning a blind eye to the tragedy caused by the pandemic, is still obsessed with political manipulation on the origins tracing. Meanwhile, it also intimidates the WHO, silences experts and scholars, creates a "chilling effect", seriously hampering international cooperation in fighting the pandemic. The wrongdoings are strongly opposed by the international community. Compared with the perverse practice of the US, China, acting on the vision of a global community of health for all, is vigorously promoting international cooperation in combating the virus. China has been and is donating vaccines to more than 100 countries, and has exported vaccines to more than 60 countries, with a total exceeding 770 million doses, ranking the world's first. In a written message to the first meeting of the international forum on COVID-19 vaccine cooperation, Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged that China will provide 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines for the world and offer 100 million U.S. dollars to COVAX throughout this year, making substantial contribution and creating sound atmosphere for jointly fighting COVID-19, and thus winning world-wide accolades.

Just as Chinese President Xi Jinping has said, "Big countries should behave in a manner befitting their status and with a greater sense of responsibility." However, the US, after the outbreak of the pandemic, has failed its national responsibility to protect people's lives and health, as well as its international responsibility befitting its status. We want to once again urge the US side to immediately stop doing anything that poisons the atmosphere for international cooperation on origins tracing or undermines global solidarity against the pandemic, and return to the right track of science-based origins tracing and cooperation in the face of the pandemic.

* Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC in the Macao SAR

PHOTO ARCHIVE



GAMING

CASINO REVENUE RECORDS STEEP DROP OF 47% IN AUGUST

LYNZY VALLES

THE Macau SAR's gross gaming revenue (GGR) plummeted to MOP4.44 billion in August, a drop of 47.4% from last month's figures, according to data provided by the casino regulator.

In July, the city reported an aggregate MOP8.44 billion in GGR, an increase of 29.2% from the previous month.

The steep drop this month can be attributed to the Delta cases discovered in early August which led to strict immigration measures.

Since then, Macau has seen a downturn in mainland visitors, as Zhuhai reduced the validity period for nucleic acid tests from 24 hours to 12 hours.

It was only in late August that the city's tourism arrivals gained momentum as the government eased entry measures for visitors from the mainland: the city's biggest market.

In early August, Sanford C. Bernstein Ltd reported that casino revenues in the first week of the month have reverted to the levels of September last year.

Analysts at the firm reported that the average GGR dropped as much as 48% for the first week of August compared to the previous week. The weekly total of 125 million patacas is "the lowest daily GGR since late September [last year]," according to the statement.

Still, the report notes that August figures are expected to show a 30% drop compared to July and a 70%

drop compared year-on-year to 2019.

JP Morgan forecasted in July that the GGR may reach a post-pandemic high in August, expecting a full recovery in the mass sector to be achieved within about a year, by the third quarter of 2022.

Even casino executives previously expressed high hopes that the summer holidays would see an increase in foot traffic in the city, citing the stabilization of the Covid-19 situation in Guangdong, as well as improved conditions in Hong Kong.

MONTHLY GGR

	2021	2020	Variance
Jan	8,024	22,126	-63.7%
Feb	7,312	3,104	+135.6%
Mar	8,306	5,257	+58.0%
Apr	8,401	754	+1,014.4%
May	10,445	1,764	+492.2%
Jun	6,535	716	+812.5%
Jul	8,444	1,344	+528.1%
Aug	4,442	1,330	+234.0%

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ANTHONY LAM

CERTAIN stakeholders in the elevator industry are concerned that the government's proposal to adopt European Union standards may be unworkable in Macau, where Chinese-made elevators are prevalent.

The industry has suggested as an alternative the government either adopt the Chinese standards or both the EU and Chinese standards.

Recently, the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) released a report following public consultation on the elevator and escalator legislation, which concluded in June.

In the text of the report, the DSSOPT proposes to "make reference to the EU's latest standards governing escalators and elevators and relevant local stipulations," suggesting the adoption of EU standards. The proposal has thus caused anxiety across the industry.

Industry practitioners pointed out at the consultation sessions that if the EU standards are adopted alone, Chinese-made facilities may be incompatible, especially when the foreign standards are updated earlier than the Chinese standards.

In such a case, imported elevators and escalators would be unusable.

An industry practitioner, affiliated with the Jiangmen Communal Society, stressed the maturity of the Chinese standards. He questioned whether Chinese standards could at least be adopted in parallel with foreign standards.

On the other hand, the authority also proposed a regulatory

Industry concerned that elevator bill may be unfeasible

framework for technicians in the consultation text. It was proposed that any organization permitted to inspect such facilities must possess a team of specialized technicians. The team should consist of at least two instructing technicians and four inspectors. They must work on a full-time basis and hold the relevant ISO/IEC17020 certification, and inspections must be conducted by this team.

The consultation text also proposed standards on the qualifications of technicians and inspectors. For example, they must have the accreditations stipulated in Law No. 1/2015 and be registered with DSSOPT.

On the framework and requirements, some industry practitioners pointed out that the local requirements are stricter than those in mainland China. They hinted that assigning a team of six for an inspection may pose certain difficulties.

The DSSOPT pledged in a statement that the government will fully consider and refer to the opinions obtained during the public consultation. To conclude, the authority considers that a general consensus on the legislation has been achieved.

The final report is available in both official languages on the DSSOPT website.



PAUL PUN STEPS DOWN AS PRINCIPAL OF BRITO SCHOOL

LYNZY VALLES

YESTERDAY, Secretary-General of Caritas Macau Paul Pun stepped down as principal of St. John de Brito School after 30 years of leading the Catholic

school.

Currently, Pun remains a legal representative for all schools under Caritas Macau.

Speaking to the Times, Pun reckoned that this is a "good occasion" to step

down as leader of the school as "Caritas is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year, while Brito celebrates its 35th."

"It will also enable somebody to help run the school so I can serve the commu-

nity [better]," he said.

"It's not that I have other positions [to handle]," Pun clarified.

For the Secretary-General, Brito is a relatively small institution and undertakes a unique educational mission in the education sector of Macau.

However, with rapid social development, the social services that Caritas must undertake will become more urgent.

Therefore, Pun noted that this is a reason "for me to stop serving as the principal of the school."

Despite stepping down, Pun believes that he will still serve the school, along with schools under Caritas Macau, only not as the principal.

Cheong Chun Cheng officially took the position yesterday.

Local schools began the new academic year yesterday. This followed thorough deliberation of education authorities following the Delta cases that were recorded in early August.

GIRL FOUND DEAD AFTER FALL

A girl is believed to have climbed from the laundry window in her home and fallen to her death yesterday morning, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced yesterday.

She was pronounced dead at the public Conde de São Januário Hospital.

The Public Security Police Force (PSP) responded to the case initially and later referred the investigations to the PJ.

The body of the 16-year-old girl was found on Avenida de Ouvidor Arriaga at about 6:25 a.m. yesterday by a pedestrian. Later, parents of the girl arrived at the scene. They told the police that they had lost track of the girl's whereabouts in the apartment

and found the door of the safety cage outside the laundry window open.

After preliminary investigations, police believe that the girl had climbed through the door of the safety cage and fallen to the ground.

Wounds on the body are consistent with falling from a height.

A suicide note was found in the home of the deceased.

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) encourages residents to be conscious of their psychological and emotional state as well as those of their relatives and friends. For support, residents can call Caritas' Life Hope hotline (28525222) or IAS' counseling hotline (28261126). **AL**

ELECTIONS2021

CAEAL receives four complaints, two already referred for investigation

RENATO MARQUES

THE Legislative Assembly Electoral Affairs Commission (CAEAL) has confirmed that it has received four complaints concerning alleged electoral irregularities since the election campaign started, the president of CAEAL, Tong Hio Fong, said yesterday in a media briefing after a meeting of the commission.

"Since the campaign period started, we received a total of four complaints. Two of them have already been forwarded for investigation from the respective entities. The other two we received today; we are still processing and checking the complaints to see what kind of follow-up we will do," Tong said, ensuring that all complaints will follow the legal procedures.

Later, in response to media questions, Tong added that one of the complaints was referred to the Commission Against Corruption to investigate alleged electoral corruption, while another case, which Tong said might involve "irregular [campaign] acts on the internet," was referred to the Judiciary Police. Tong added that the two new complaints concern the display of campaign posters.

The CAEAL president refused to disclose which lists are the subject of the complaints, explaining that to publish that information during the campaign period, and



before the investigation determined the legality of the actions in question, "might influence the voting direction" of the public.

Nevertheless, he revealed that the four cases concern four different lists running in the Legislative Assembly elections.

PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS NOT BOUND BY THE SAME RULES

Questioned about private schools, that were allegedly taking advantage of the start of the academic year to endorse and campaign for particular lists, the CAEAL president

remarked that private institutions are not obliged to remain impartial and independent as public ones are.

"These duties of impartiality and independence do not apply to private [institutions]. They are exempt from [the rule

requiring that they] refrain from showing support or campaigning during the election campaign period," Tong explained.

PROTEST VOTES ARE NOT ILLEGAL

Reporters also questioned Tong about rumors circulating on the internet claiming that voters who cast protest votes are acting illegally. Tong explained, "it is up to each voter to decide for which list to vote, or even to not vote for any of the lists or even to abstain from voting. None of these [actions] are even legally punishable because the vote is completely anonymous and we have no way to know who voted in a certain way."

Protest voting is common in different electoral systems as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with the system or candidates running. It can occur in various forms, such as "blank ballots," with no markings on them; "null ballots," which do not result in a valid vote because the ballot was filled out incompletely or incorrectly; and "spoiled ballots," which have been defaced, crossed-out, or marked in such a way that they become ineligible.

Generally, the last method is the one which most clearly indicates the occurrence of a protest vote.

ELECTIONS2021

People undergoing quarantine still able to vote

RENATO MARQUES

REGISTERED voters who are currently undergoing or who may enter a period of mandatory medical observation in quarantine in local hotels will be able to vote in the forthcoming Legislative Assembly elections, the president of the Legislative Assembly Electoral Affairs Commission (CAEAL), Tong Hio Fong, confirmed yesterday in a media briefing after a meeting of the commission.

According to Tong, the rules and guidelines for quarantine voting have already been settled and the necessary preparations are

currently being made.

Among the most significant rules and procedures outlined in the briefing, Tong noted that until 11:59 p.m. on September 11, registered voters undergoing quarantine must sign a special form allowing the CAEAL to change their polling station to one specially set up in the lobby area of quarantine hotels.

Then, voters will be given a specific time at which they will be allowed to leave their rooms and go down to the lobby area to vote, Tong added, noting that they must wear personal protection equipment, including gloves.

After each voter exercises their right to vote, staff will disinfect the area before the next voter arrives, following the same procedure.

"We have not yet confirmed the number of people that will vote by this method as every day there are new people entering quarantine, so only after September 11, at 11:59 p.m., will we be able to know exactly, and only those will be allowed to vote," Tong said. "Until now we only know that we have around 400 people [residents] who are in quarantine hotels, but we know that not all of them are registered voters and also probably not all of

them will express the wish to change the polling station [where they are registered to vote] to another one so they can vote in quarantine hotel," Tong added.

Not wanting to elaborate further on the details of the voting procedure, Tong remarked, "next week we will publish all details but I can confirm that all people who [fulfill] the conditions to vote will have the right to vote and we will organize everything to ensure that."

VOTING PROCEDURES REMAIN UNCHANGED

For the general population, Tong explained, voting procedures will

substantially remain the same as in previous elections. Voters will use a rubber stamp to indicate the list they wish to vote for. The only significant difference will be the requirement to present a green health code before entering the polling station, as is currently required at all public buildings and many private venues.

The CAEAL called on voters to have their daily health code generated early, to ensure that high demand is not placed on the system and that voters do not experience problems with the crea-

tion of their code at the last minute.

As on previous occasions, the CAEAL also reminds members of the public not to wear items of clothing or face masks that have clear references to any of the lists running, as this is considered illegal campaigning.

"More than the colors, what is [prohibited] is items that have symbols, or logos or other references that can immediately be identified with one or more lists," Tong said, adding, "of course if there is a large group of people who are oriented and coordinated to wear a certain color or a certain mask that can also report to a certain group, this can also be considered illegal campaigning," he said.

MGM AWAKENING LION

Dance Drama
Residency Show

醒獅 美高梅



BANG BANG BANG! The drums started rolling, the lions came in with style and dazzled around with vibrant moves. The "MGM Awakening Lion" BEGINS.

"MGM Awakening Lion" is the residency show re-arranged by MGM and Guangzhou Song and Dance Theater, debuts on October 8, 9 and 10 at MGM Theater, MGM COTAI. This exuberance show showcases the traditional dance drama with innovation, telling the great stories of the Chinese people with an internationalized and contemporary backdrop. It also explores the new possibilities in the utilization and preservation of Lingnan cultural heritage through a cluster of multiple cultural art elements including the lion dance, Southern Fist (Nanquan), and dance performance.

"Wherever there are Chinese, there are lion dances", this 70-minute drama is tailor-made according to the best dance drama in the China Dance Lotus Awards. Leveraging the cutting-edge technology and state-of-the-art equipment of the MGM Theater, the show blends ancient intangible heritage with virtual reality, taking the drama to a whole new sensational level. "Awakened by the spirit, rooted in the Lion" – the repertoire of "MGM Awakening Lion" is based on the awakening of a nation expressed in traditional culture. The ethnic dance drama depicts the journey of transformation of two lion dancers in the face of love and hate along with the dilemma of choosing between family and the nation, reflecting the perseverance of the Cantonese people.



This stunning drama without dialogue, has achieves bold innovations in stage music, design, lighting, and costume and demonstrates the unique artistic charisma of the repertoire, whilst telling the story of the Guangdong lion dance and Lingnan culture. This is inevitably an exemplar of cultural tourism catered to the new generation tourists. Stay tuned for the glitzy dance drama of the Year at MGM Theater at MGM COTAI for its first residency show this October!



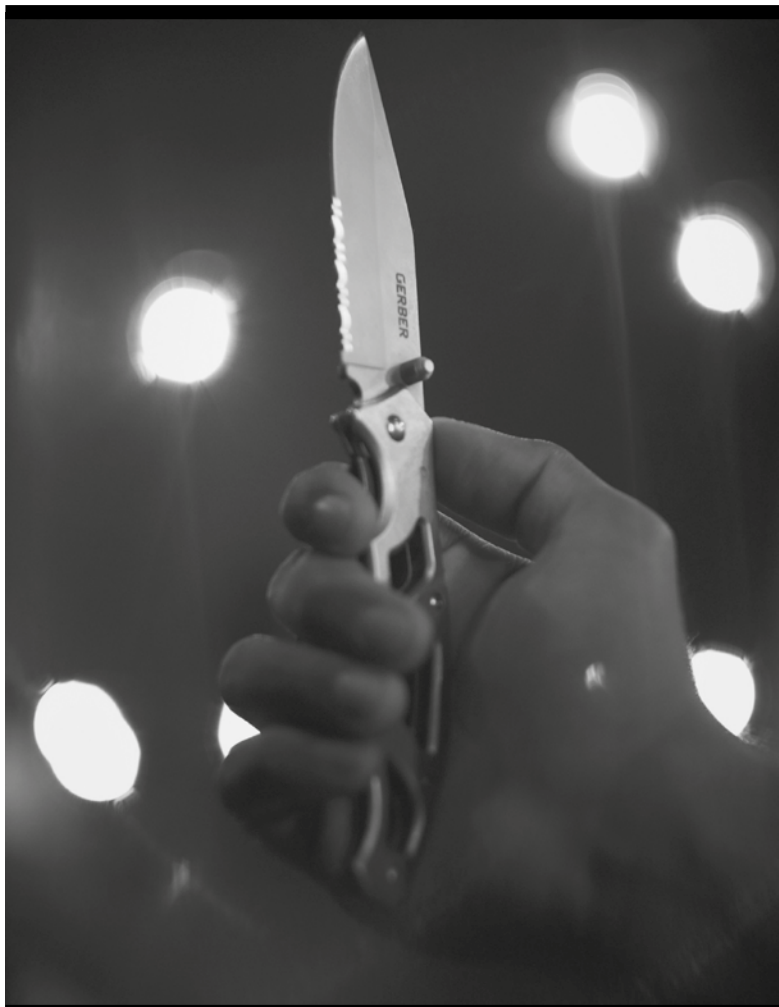
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CRIME

MAN APPREHENDED FOR ASSAULTING POLICE, GLUING NEIGHBORS' KEYHOLES

KIKO CAMACLANG



A local man named Ng and aged 37 has been apprehended by police after gluing several neighbors' keyholes, refusing to cooperate with police inquiries and finally assaulting the officers with a knife, causing injuries.

The case was reported yesterday at the regular police press briefing by both the Public Security Police Force (PSP) and the Judiciary Police (PJ). Both forces were called to the scene where the confrontation occurred.

At the end of August, a woman living in the Alameda da Tranquilidade Building reported to the police that the keyhole on the door of her residence had been glued, so she could not enter the dwelling. The police checked other keyholes on the same floor and found three other glued holes.

The police officers' attention was drawn to Ng, who lives on the same floor in the building.

The police were unable to investigate Ng because he locked himself in his apartment.

The negotiation team of the PJ was thus called to try to convince him to cooperate. Four hours of talking yielded no results, so the police decided to retreat and give Ng time to calm down.

On the next day, the police received a report that Ng was wandering along the corridor with a knife in his hand. The PSP deployed its team of specialists. Meanwhile, the PJ also deployed a team, alongside a medical team from the public Conde de São Januário Hospital.

When the police arrived, Ng locked himself in his room again.

With the permission of Ng's father, firefighters broke the door down. The police found Ng wielding a 10cm long knife. During the confrontation, Ng caused minor injuries to three PSP officers and five PJ inspectors.

The police then disarmed Ng with a baton. He was arrested and sent to the public hospital for medical attention. Officers discovered a black air

gun in Ng's apartment.

Ng's father told the police that Ng receives psychiatric medical support every month.

In another case, a woman allegedly had her savings stolen by her own brother after instructing him to withdraw HKD480,000 from a local junket and take the money back to mainland China.

The woman, aged 35, and her female friend, aged 29, are both from the mainland and are reported to be business partners.

According to the police, the two women were in need of money early this year, so the 35-year-old woman told her brother, a mainland resident aged 23 named Pan, to withdraw her money from a Macau junket.

The woman was later notified by the junket of the withdrawal, but heard nothing from her brother. Fearing a scam, she reported the case to the PJ.

Investigations showed that Pan did make the withdrawal, but immediately took the money to the gaming table, unfortunately losing the entire sum.

When, at the end of August, Pan re-entered Macau, the police arrested him at the Border Gate and charged him with abuse of trust. **AL**

AD

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CHINESE and U.S. officials plan to talk this week about reducing pollution by the world's two largest economies — an area of potential cooperation between two governments whose relations are strained on other issues.

U.S. climate envoy John Kerry is scheduled for meetings with counterparts from the Chinese government beginning yesterday.

Relations between Washington and Beijing have been strained by disputes over trade, technology and human rights, but the sides have identified the climate crisis as an area for possible cooperation.

“China and the U.S. have differences on some issues. In the meantime, we share common interests in a range of areas such as climate change,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing yesterday.

“Both sides should maintain dialogue and communication on the basis of mutual respect and carry out mutually beneficial cooperation,” Wang said.

The world's biggest coal user, China obtains roughly 60% of its power from coal and is the world's biggest source of greenhouse gases. It plans to build more coal-fired power plants but still plans to taper its use of the fossil fuel.

Kerry made a stop in Japan on Tuesday to discuss climate issues with Japanese officials before

US envoy Kerry due to talk on climate with Chinese officials

heading to China.

Beijing has pointed to historical U.S. emissions as a reason to resist action while making advances in solar power and other renewable energy sources. China has set a target of generating 20% of the country's total energy consumption from renewables by 2025, becoming carbon-neutral by 2060 and reducing total emissions starting from 2030.

President Joe Biden has announced a goal to cut up to 52% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 — double the target set by President Barack Obama in the 2015 Paris climate accord. The 2030 goal vaults the U.S. into the top tier of countries on climate ambition.

Kerry has called for stronger efforts to curb rising temperatures to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels. He urged China to join the U.S. in urgently cutting carbon emissions.

Global decarbonizing efforts will come under the spotlight at a U.N. conference to be held in Glasgow, Scotland, in late November, known as COP26. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry (left) meets Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga at the latter's official residence in Tokyo this week

Top Hong Kong singer loses concert venue amid crackdown

A popular Hong Kong singer and pro-democracy activist will not be allowed to perform at one of the city's top theaters later this month, in an indication that a crackdown by authorities on dissent is reaching the entertainment and cultural scene.

The Hong Kong Arts Centre cited a public safety clause in canceling Denise Ho's venue reservations for her concerts, according to a statement posted yesterday on Facebook by the singer's company, Goomusic.

The cancellation came days after pro-Beijing newspaper Ta Kung Pao accused Ho of being “anti-China” due to her involvement in the 2019 pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. Ho is an outspoken activist and joined in widespread protests during the city's Umbrella Movement in 2014 and later in 2019 that sought to protect Hong Kong's longstanding civil liberties from mainland Chinese interference.

AP PHOTO



Hong Kong pop singer Denise Ho

“We can't help but ask how the Hong Kong Arts Centre, as an independent institution supporting contemporary art which has been operating for 44 years, can now arbitrarily suspend contracts without substantive evidence?” Goomusic said.

The Hong Kong Arts Centre did not immediately comment.

Ho's sold-out concerts were slated for Sept. 8 to 12.

The cancellation has fed concerns that Hong Kong's flourishing cultural scene, which in the past was known for its freedom

of expression, is the latest target as Beijing tightens its control over the city.

Hong Kong authorities have over the past year arrested dozens of pro-democracy activists and pushed through electoral reforms that would reduce the number of directly elected legislators in the city.

Critics have accused Beijing and Hong Kong authorities of limiting freedoms promised to the city when it was handed over by the British to mainland China in 1997.

According to Goomusic, the Hong Kong Arts Centre canceled the reservation under a clause stating that it could terminate the booking of a venue if the person renting the venue fails to observe the terms and conditions in circumstances where “public order or public safety would be endangered.”

Ho's company said the Hong Kong Arts Centre had told Goomusic representatives that it was “bound to observe closely the recent

developments in society.”

Ho's company said it would refund ticket buyers and that the singer will livestream her concert instead on Sept. 12.

“We may face constraints in performance venues, but the stage itself is not limited by boundaries,” Goomusic said.

The cancellation came days after Hong Kong film director Kiwi Chow was fined 5,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$640) for allegedly flouting coronavirus restrictions during a private movie screening.

Chow, who directed the films “Ten Years” and “Revolution of our Times” about the city's democracy movement, held a private screening of his film “Beyond the Dream” last week.

Authorities raided the screening and accused attendees of flouting social-distancing rules, since public gatherings in Hong Kong are currently limited to four people.

Chow said the private

screening was limited to friends only, saying on a local radio program that he would not pay the fine and would take the case to court instead. The city's social-distancing restrictions do not apply to private gatherings.

Separately, seven pro-democracy activists were sentenced yesterday to between 11 and 16 months in jail for an unauthorized assembly during the anti-government protests in 2019.

The seven activists, including lawyer Albert Ho and Figo Chan, leader of the disbanded Civil Human Rights Front, had pleaded guilty to charges including organizing and inciting others to take part in the unauthorized assembly on Oct. 20, 2019.

Of the seven, only one — Raphael Wong of the League of Social Democrats political party — was not already serving jail time.

The other six were convicted earlier in relation to other unauthorized assemblies. MDT/AP



AFGHANISTAN

Biden defends departure from 'forever war,' praises airlift

AAMER MADHANI,
WASHINGTON

A defensive President Joe Biden called the U.S. airlift to extract more than 120,000 Americans, Afghans and other allies from Afghanistan to end a 20-year war an “extraordinary success,” though more than 100 Americans and thousands of others were left behind.

Twenty-four hours after the last American C-17 cargo plane roared off from Kabul, Biden spoke to the nation and vigorously defended his decision to end America's longest war and withdraw all U.S. troops ahead of an Aug. 31 deadline.

“I was not going to extend this forever war,” Biden declared yesterday from the White House. “And I was not going to extend a forever exit.”

Biden has faced tough questions about the way the U.S. went about leaving Afghanistan — a chaotic evacuation with spasms of violence, including a suicide bombing last week that killed 13

American service members and 169 Afghans.

He is under heavy criticism, particularly from Republicans, for his handling of the evacuation. But he said it was inevitable that the final departure from two decades of war, first negotiated with the Taliban for May 1 by former President Donald Trump, would have been difficult, with likely violence, no matter when it was planned and conducted.

“To those asking for a third decade of war in Afghanistan, I ask, ‘What is the vital national interest?’” Biden said. He added, “I simply do not believe that the safety and security of America is enhanced by continuing to deploy thousands of American troops and spending billions of dollars in Afghanistan.”

Asked after the speech about Biden sounding angry at some criticism, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the president had simply offered his “forceful assessment.”

Biden scoffed at Republicans — and some Democrats — who contend

the U.S. would have been better served maintaining a small military footprint in Afghanistan. Before Thursday's attack, the U.S. military had not suffered a combat casualty since February 2020 — around the time the Trump administration brokered its deal with the Taliban to end the war by May of this year.

Biden said breaking the Trump deal would have restarted a shooting war. He said those who favor remaining at war also fail to recognize the weight of deployment, with a scourge of PTSD, financial struggles, divorce and other problems for U.S. troops.

“When I hear that we could've, should've continued the so-called low-grade effort in Afghanistan at low risk to our service members, at low cost, I don't think enough people understand how much we've asked of the 1% of this country to put that uniform on,” Biden said.

Besides all the questions at home, Biden is also adjusting to a new relationship with the Taliban, the Islamist militant group the U.S. toppled af-

ter the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in America, and that is now once again in power in Afghanistan.

Biden has tasked Secretary of State Antony Blinken to coordinate with international partners to hold the Taliban to their promise of safe passage for Americans and others who want to leave in the days ahead.

“We don't take them by their word alone, but by their actions,” Biden said. “We have leverage to make sure those commitments are met.”

Biden also pushed back against criticism that he fell short of his pledge to get all Americans out of the country ahead of the U.S. military withdrawal. He said many of the Americans left behind are dual citizens, some with deep family roots that are complicating their ability to leave Afghanistan.

“The bottom line: 90% of Americans in Afghanistan who wanted to leave were able to leave,” Biden said. “For those remaining Americans, there is no deadline. We remain committed to get them out, if they want to come out.”

Biden repeated his argument that ending the Afghanistan war was a crucial step for recalibrating American foreign policy toward growing challenges posed by China and Russia — and counterterrorism concerns that pose a more potent threat to the U.S.

“There's nothing China or Russia would rather have, want more in this competition, than the United States to be bogged down another decade in Afghanistan,” he said

In Biden's view the war could have ended 10 years ago with the U.S. killing of Osama bin Laden, whose al-Qaida extremist network planned and executed the 9/11 plot from an Afghanistan sanctuary. Al-Qaida has been vastly diminished, preventing it thus far from again attacking the United States. The president lamented an estimated \$2 trillion of taxpayer money that was spent fighting the war.

“What have we lost as a consequence in terms of opportunities?” Biden asked.

Congressional committees, whose interest in the war waned over the years, are expected to hold public hearings on what went wrong in the final months of the U.S. withdrawal. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1945 JAPAN SIGNS UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER



Japanese officials have signed the act of unconditional surrender, finally bringing to an end six years of world war.

In the presence of 50 Allied generals and other officials, the Japanese envoys boarded the American battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay to sign the surrender document.

Within half-an-hour of the signing, a convoy of 42 US ships entered Tokyo Bay and landed 13,000 American troops.

The Supreme Commander of the Allied powers, US General Douglas MacArthur, briefly addressed the dignitaries on the deck of the battleship urging them to comply with the terms of the surrender “fully, promptly and faithfully”.

He continued: “It is my earnest hope and, indeed, the hope of all mankind, that from this solemn occasion a better world shall emerge out of the blood and carnage of the past; a world founded upon faith and understanding, a world dedicated to the dignity of man and the fulfilment of his most cherished wish, for freedom, tolerance and justice.”

He also referred to the nuclear bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, saying they had “revised the traditional concept of war”. The world had had its last chance, he said, and if it did not devise some greater and more equitable system Armageddon would be at its door.

Under the terms of the ceasefire, Japan has agreed to end all hostilities, release all prisoners of war, and comply with the terms of the Potsdam declaration, which confines its sovereignty to the four main islands which make up Japan.

It has also agreed to acknowledge the authority of the US supreme commander. Although Emperor Hirohito will be allowed to remain as a symbolic head of state.

From today the occupying force will be rapidly increased to about 500,000. British landing forces are expected to be relieved by US Army troops within a few days. Some will return home to Britain, others may be deployed for the reoccupation of surrendered ports.

The Japanese Prime Minister, Prince Higashi Kuni, broadcast an appeal to his people to obey the terms of the surrender.

He said the Japanese had to face defeat squarely and “suffer even the insufferable” in seeking to comply with the Emperor's surrender proclamation.

Marshal Joseph Stalin has welcomed the unconditional surrender of Japan.

Under the terms of the agreement the disputed southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands will pass into Soviet hands. The islands have been occupied by Japan since the Russo-Japanese war of 1904.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Allies celebrated victory over Japan on 15 August 1945, and that date as well as 2 September are both known as VJ Day.

Japan enjoyed a series of early victories from its entry in the war at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, followed by the conquest of Hong Kong, Burma, the Philippines, Malaya and Borneo.

But the war effort drained the country's economy and hardship prevailed. By 1943 defeats at Midway and Guadalcanal the previous year had contributed to Japan's decline. Japan suffered further defeats in 1944, then in March 1945 Tokyo came under sustained assault from US bombers. Tens of thousands died and much of the city was razed to the ground.

On 6 August 1945, the US dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima and three days later a second on Nagasaki. With that and the Soviet declaration of war on 8 August, the Japanese were forced into a surrender that was virtually unconditional.

Japan regained its independence in 1952 — although the US retained the island of Okinawa until 1972 and still has big military bases there.

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Go out with friends. Do something special for them. Colleagues may try to undermine you. Too much too fast will be the attitude surrounding your home environment.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Try not to overspend on friends or family. Entertainment could cost you more than you expect. Old friends may not like your choices.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Overindulgent people will cause disruptions in your life. You should be putting your cash into long-term investments like real estate. Business partnerships should turn out to be quite lucrative.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Put your energy into moneymaking ventures. Look out for those wanting to push you into a disagreement. It will be all around you. Your intellectual wit will bring greater popularity with your peers.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Family outings that aren't expensive will be enjoyable and help strengthen ties. Your emotions may get the better of you. Someone you least expect could be trying to make you look bad.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Stress may cause minor health ailments. Your home environment appears to be a little shaky. Changes in your home environment are likely.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Time is money and you must be ready to take action in order to reach your highest potential. Be sure to organize events that will keep the children busy.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Make a point of working on yourself. Depression may be likely if you're away from home. You will be able to make changes regarding your living arrangements.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Get involved in sports events that will benefit your physical appearance. You could be disillusioned if you let relative in on your emotional thoughts.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Let your lover know what your personal intentions are. Stick to your own projects and by the end of the day you'll shine. Unexpected bills may set you back.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Do things you enjoy instead of being a chameleon. Your unique approach to life will interest others. You can expect changes in your financial situation as well as in your status.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Try to do things with children that will enable you to bond closer to them. Discard may arise with someone you're close to. Uncertain changes regarding your personal life are evident.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

			4	6		9	5	
9	1	8				2		
5	6				1			8
		2	8	9			7	
	3		6		2		8	
	8			7	3	1		
6			1				2	3
		1				8	4	7
	2	5		4	7			

EASY+

6		7	5			4		
	3		7	8		9		
	9				3		2	
	1		4					8
7			6					4
9			5				7	
	4		8			3		
		2		3	6		4	
		9			2	1		6

MEDIUM

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9		1			7		4	
		4	9					1
	6				4			
			5				3	2
	4			2				

HARD

1	2		7					
							8	6
5						7	3	
				6	1			
2								
	4		2			1		
	6			7				
		8						

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Attack on all sides; 6- Baby's cry; 10- HBO alternative; 13- Stadium used for sports or musical events; 14- Victor's cry; 15- Emilia's husband; 16- Tendency; 17- Get rid of; 18- Essence; 19- ___ avail; 20- Eternal; 22- Thief; 24- Decrees; 28- Give some slack; 31- Of sedate character; 32- Utopian; 34- Zodiac sign; 36- Mother of the Valkyries; 37- South American tuber; 38- Dilapidated; 41- A mouse!; 42- Sardine containers; 44- Get the picture; 45- ___-foot oil; 47- Summarize; 49- Comes to mind; 51- Threat finale; 53- Ballet's Nureyev; 56- Floating craft; 59- Billiard implements; 61- Single, individual unit; 64- Classic autos; 65- Utah's ___ Mountains; 66- Royal Indian; 67- Fashion mag; 68- Fads; 69- Tricky curve; 70- 24 hour periods; 71- Sanctify;

DOWN 1- Inner layer of a quilt; 2- Slip; 3- ___ evil...; 4- Dignify; 5- Tiny amount; 6- Money-grubbers; 7- Horton Hears ___; 8- Demeanor; 9- Actress MacDowell; 10- ___ chi ch'uan; 11- Classic two-seaters; 12- Barracks bed; 15- Set on fire; 20- Greek god of the winds; 21- Commercials; 23- Male swine; 25- Insertion mark; 26- They get high twice a day; 27- Minn. neighbor; 29- Born before, senior churchman; 30- "The Matrix" hero; 32- More remote; 33- Move rhythmically; 35- Confesses; 37- Other, in Oaxaca; 39- PBS benefactor; 40- Penury; 43- Italian sausage; 46- Reclusive; 48- Letter before omega; 50- Van Gogh masterpiece; 52- Made a mistake; 54- Sudden forward thrust; 55- Big parties; 57- Actress Ward; 58- Consecrated; 60- Lip; 61- Wrath; 62- ___ in turkey; 63- Nav. officer; 65- Metro area;

Yesterday's solution

A	S	T	A	W	A	S	H	D	R	A	M
S	T	O	A	G	A	L	E	A	Y	U	R
K	E	L	P	A	R	I	A	S	N	E	N
S	W	O	R	D	S	M	A	N	L	A	D
O	A	S									
D	E	M	O	N	I	C					
E	L	I	T	E							
O	P	A	L								
P	E	A	S	T	E						
P	E	A									
T	O	S	S								
O	T	I	C								
M	A	R	E	S							
S	W	A	N	I	L	I					
H	O	S	T	I	L	E					
S	T	A	R	K							
S	T	A	R	K							
F	L	A	T	T	E	N	E				
T	A	R	P								
B	R	O	N	C							
A	C	A	D								
A	L	O	E								
O	A	T	E	R							
H	A	S	A								
Y	A	W	N								
D	O	S	T								
T	R	E	Y								

Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999

Fire department 28 572 222

PJ (Open line) 993

PJ (Picket) 28 557 775

PSP 28 573 333

Customs 28 559 944

S. J. Hospital 28 313 731

Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333

Commission Against

Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300

IAM 28 387 333

Tourism 28 333 000

Airport 59 888 88

Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283

Water Supply – Report 2822 0088

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Electricity – Report 28 339 922

Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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AUTOMAKER

US ASKS TESLA HOW AUTOPILOT RESPONDS TO EMERGENCY VEHICLES

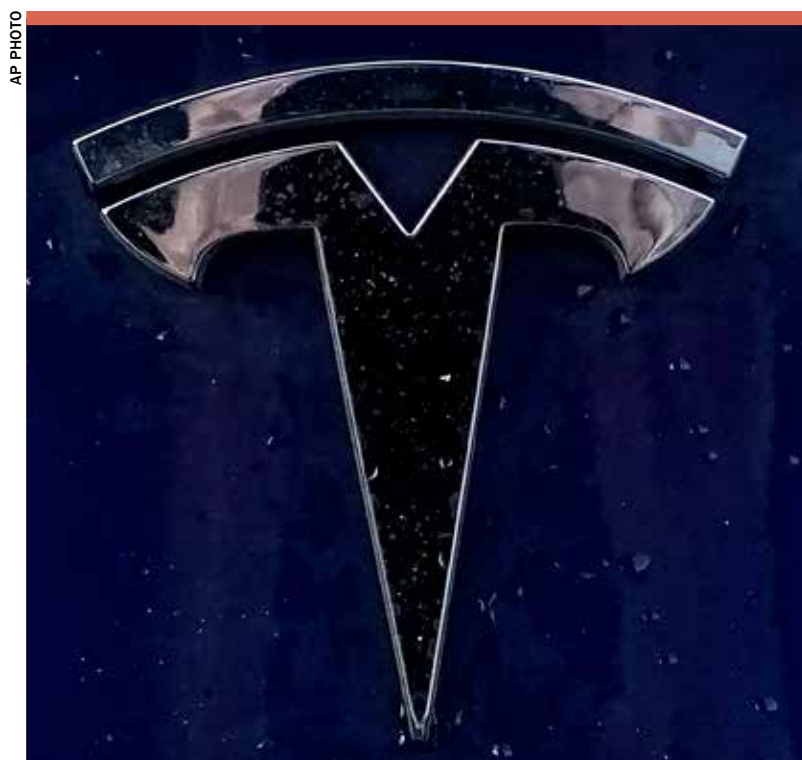
TOM KRISHER, DETROIT

THE U.S. government's highway safety agency wants detailed information on how Tesla's Autopilot system detects and responds to emergency vehicles parked on highways.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration made the request in an 11-page letter sent to the electric car maker that was dated Tuesday.

The letter is part of a wide-ranging investigation into how the company's partially automated driving system behaves when first responder vehicles are parked while crews deal with crashes or other hazards. The agency wants to know how Teslas detect a crash scene, including flashing lights, road flares, reflectorized vests worn by responders and vehicles parked on the road.

NHTSA also wants to know how the system responds to low light conditions, what actions it takes if emergency vehicles are present, and how



it warns drivers.

The agency also added a 12th crash to its probe in which a Tesla on Autopilot hit a parked Florida Highway Patrol cruiser Saturday on an inter-

state highway near downtown Orlando. In all the crashes, at least 17 people were injured and one was killed.

NHTSA announced the investigation into Tesla's driver

assist systems after a series of collisions with emergency vehicles since 2018. The probe covers 765,000 vehicles from the 2014 through 2021 model years.

Autopilot has frequently been misused by Tesla drivers, who have been caught driving drunk or even riding in the back seat while a car rolled down a California highway.

The agency also is asking Tesla for all consumer complaints, lawsuits and arbitration cases involving Autopilot. And it wants to know where the system can operate and how it makes sure drivers are paying attention.

NHTSA also wants to know Tesla's policies and procedures for testing Autopilot and updates before they are released to the owners. The request includes "the extent of field testing or vehicle validation miles required prior to the release of such a system or feature."

Tesla "beta" tests its systems using its customers to gather

data while they're driving in traffic.

The probe is another sign that NHTSA under President Joe Biden is taking a tougher stance on automated vehicle safety than under previous administrations. Previously the agency was reluctant to regulate the new technology for fear of hampering adoption of the potentially life-saving systems.

The National Transportation Safety Board, which also has investigated some of the Tesla crashes dating to 2016, has recommended that NHTSA and Tesla limit Autopilot's use to areas where it can safely operate. The NTSB also recommended that NHTSA require Tesla to have a better system to make sure drivers are paying attention. NHTSA has not taken action on any of the recommendations. The NTSB has no enforcement powers and can only make recommendations to other federal agencies.

Tesla has to respond by Oct. 22 or seek an extension. The agency says it can fine Tesla more than \$114 million if it fails to comply.

A message was left yesterday seeking comment from Tesla, which has disbanded its media relations office. **MDT/AP**

AD



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AP PHOTO



ANALYSIS

Mbappe's non-transfer shows where soccer power lies

ROB HARRIS

THE deal that didn't happen best defines the landscape of European football after a summer transfer window that saw unexpected moves by Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

Kylian Mbappé will remain with Paris Saint-Germain this season, and the star French forward could leave for Real Madrid as a free agent at age 23 next summer for free rather than for a fee that could have exceeded \$200 million now.

A decade into ownership that leads to the emir of Qatar, PSG is among the few clubs able to weather the pandemic, protected by its sovereign wealth. The club benefits by UEFA's Financial Fair Play being in flux during an overhaul, rules that often appeared flimsily applied.

PSG also could gamble on the hope Mbappé helps it win the Champions League for the first time in a strike force with Messi and Neymar, then extend his contract.

Ultimately, there will be questions over whether Madrid could fund Mbappé's transfer. Club president Florentino Pérez has

been badly bruised by the spectacularly ill-judged and short-lived Super League he fronted. Real Madrid, like others, is coping with more than a season of lost revenue caused by empty seats.

PSG never signed up to the largely closed European breakaway with a dozen clubs from England, Italy and Spain in April. Instead, its Qatari president, Nasser Al-Khelaifi, emerged from the wreckage with more clout as leader of the European Club Association — and now with a team that figures to unnerve opponents with Mbappé, Neymar and Messi leading the attack.

Even though Al-Khelaifi helped to destroy the Super League's launch, PSG's Qatari funding remains a source of ire for La Liga president Javier Tebas.

"Club states are as dangerous to the football ecosystem as the Super League," Tebas tweeted yesterday. "We were critical of the Super League because it destroys European football and we are just as critical of PSG."

Little wonder, when the French club rebuffed bids for Mbappé after having acquired one of the greatest players of all time from the Spanish league.

Messi only came on the market because Barcelona, weighed down by debt that ballooned to 1.35 billion euros (\$1.6 billion), had to shed players to comply with the financial regulations enforced by La Liga. Even as the window was about to close, Barcelona cut its wage bill further by loaning high-salaried Antoine Griezmann to Atletico Madrid in a deal that might only recoup 50 million euros (\$59 million), two years after paying 120 million euros (\$146.1 million) for the striker.

Now it's clearer why Barcelona was so willing to enrage the football order by splitting from the Champions League structure to bank an instant windfall worth hundreds of millions of euros from the Super League that never was. It also shows why Barcelona, along with Madrid and Juventus are clinging to the project despised by UEFA and fans alike, despite the prospect of a Champions League ban.

This was the transfer window that humbled the elite from Spain and Italy and, most strikingly, reasserted the status of the world's wealthiest soccer competition — the Premier League — as a destination of choice.

While Messi experienced a

tearful and reluctant departure from Barcelona, Ronaldo was the instigator of his push to abandon Juventus just one match into his fourth season.

More surprising than Messi and Ronaldo switching clubs in the same transfer window was the speed of the 36-year-old Portugal forward's deal to return to Old Trafford after 12 years, a decision pushed by former United manager Alex Ferguson. And Ronaldo's replacement at Juventus was Moise Kean, a forward returning to Turin after being unable to make an impact at Everton.

Serie A not only lost last season's top scorer to the Premier League but also its second-most prolific player, Romelu Lukaku, who helped to win the title for Inter Milan. A bid of 115 million euros (\$135.7 million) was accepted from Chelsea from Inter, which is hamstrung by the financial difficulties of its Chinese ownership, the Suning conglomerate.

"The players who left Italy were taken by teams that are financially stronger, but they came here to reassert themselves," Italy coach Roberto Mancini said. "This means that our league is not so bad. It's clear that it's a pity to lose them because young peo-

ple always improve by watching the champions."

The Italian league's overall financial plight is not helped by having to stream its games for free on YouTube in the Middle East after previously earning \$500 million over three seasons from beIN Sports — the Qatari-based broadcaster also run by PSG's Al-Khelaifi that did not bid again due to a piracy dispute.

One of the few clubs able to rival PSG's financial clout remains Manchester City. Funding from Abu Dhabi's sovereign wealth fund enabled Pep Guardiola's side to pay 100 million pounds (\$139 million) for winger Jack Grealish last month.

Yet, perhaps the Premier League's transfer window was also defined by a transfer that didn't happen. Tottenham denied Harry Kane a move to City, when more than 100 million pounds (\$137.3 million) was offered, because the value of Premier League rights has been protected during the pandemic and the striker had three years remaining on his contract.

The biggest spender during Europe's summer transfer window was a fallen power off to a terrible start this season.

The signing of Japan defender Takehiro Tomiyasu on Tuesday took Arsenal's spending to 150 million pounds (\$206 million). The north London club, which last won the Premier League in 2004, is in last place with no points from three games — just four months after being considered part of the Super League elite. **MDT/AP**

OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

**CLIMATE
COLLABORATION
SHOULD NOT BE VENUE
FOR GEOPOLITICAL
RIVALRY**

US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry's visit to China from Tuesday to Friday has both symbolic and substantial meaning, as the wide attention it is receiving around the world indicates.

If the face-to-face talks between the world's top two carbon emitters can produce something definite ahead of the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to be held in Glasgow, Scotland, this November, the upcoming COP 26 might be worth the expectations that are being put on it.

It is to be hoped that Kerry's four-day visit carries on the positive momentum generated during his two-day visit in April, when he became the first senior US representative of the Joe Biden administration to visit China.

But with that in mind, Kerry should not come with the unrealistic impression that the United States can pressure China to take any impractically bigger strides in emissions reduction. Something the Japanese foreign minister told the media that Japan will seek to do together with the US after his meeting with Kerry on Tuesday during the latter's stop in Japan on his way to China.

It is fair to say that Kerry has so far done a good job in trying to insulate climate cooperation from the escalating tensions between Beijing and Washington. However, if he attempts to coerce China to swallow US pills on climate action, he will be undoing all the good work he has done so far.

As a veteran diplomat and an expert on climate change issues, Kerry should be well aware that China is doing all it can to realize its planned emissions peak before 2030 and attain carbon neutrality before 2060, the 30-year period between those two goals being the shortest among all major economies. No developed countries have peaked their carbon emissions while their industrialization was still going on, as China aims to do.

Kerry also knows that given their inaction in providing the overdue technology and funding supports they promised to provide the less-developed countries to cut emissions, it is the developed countries, the US in particular, that should demonstrate more ambition and match their earnestness with actions to resolve the climate crisis.

China will adhere to the road map it has charted to achieve its emissions reduction targets, an integral part of its green development strategy. Although China always keeps its door open for cooperation and dialogue in that regard, those must be based on an equal footing and mutual respect, and stick to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

If the US tries to make climate cooperation another part of its geopolitical competition with China, its indifference to the common fate of human beings will be self-evident.

**SPAIN ANNOUNCES 107 ARRESTS
IN MAJOR MARIJUANA RAIDS IN JULY**

More than 100 people were arrested when police in Spain busted an illegal drug ring this summer, Europol said yesterday.

The European policing authority said that the arrests occurred on July 13 when Spanish police, in collaboration with police from Germany and Albania, detained 107 individuals during 42 raids in Barcelona and three smaller cities in Spain's northeast.

The people were arrested on suspicion of forming a group of "mainly of Albanian-speaking criminals" who grew and traffi-

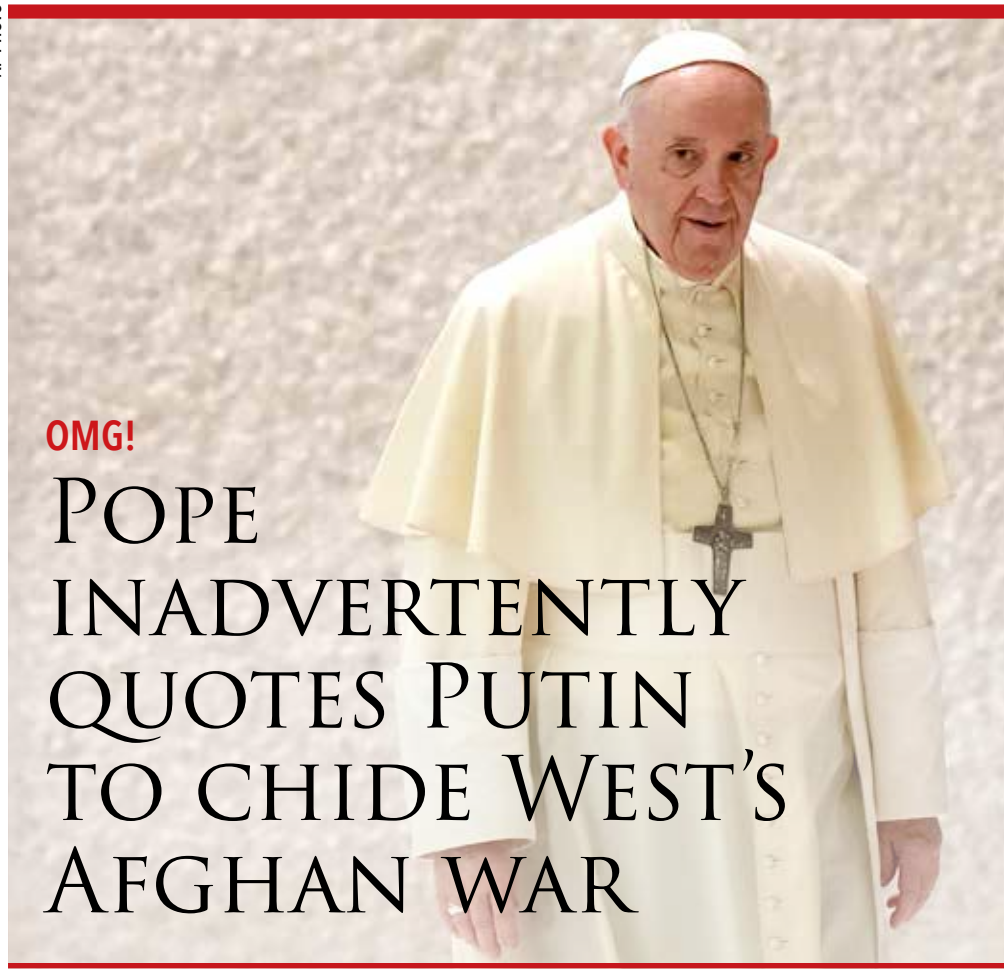
cked marijuana. They included Albanians, Spaniards, Greeks and Slovaks, Europol said.

Police allege that the network illegally grew marijuana in Spain and smuggled it to other European countries for sale.

More than 50 clandestine cannabis farms were discovered in the operation. Police estimate that the ring used over 1.6 million euros (\$1.9 million) in stolen electricity to run the farms.

THE
BUZZ

AP PHOTO



ARITZ PARRA, MADRID

POPE Francis has criticized the West's two-decade-long involvement in Afghanistan as an outsider's attempt to impose democracy — although he did it by citing Russia's Vladimir Putin while thinking he was quoting Germany's Angela Merkel.

Asked during a radio interview aired yesterday [Macau time] about the new political map taking shape in Afghanistan after the United States and its allies withdrew from the Taliban-controlled country after 20 years of war, the pope said he would answer with a quote that he attributed to the German chancellor, whom he described as "one of the world's greatest political figures."

"It is necessary to put an end to the irresponsible policy of intervening from outside and building democracy in other countries, ignoring the traditions of the peoples," the pope said, using his own translation into Spanish.

But the words were spoken last month by the Russian president in the presence of Merkel, during her visit to Moscow.

During the meeting on Aug. 20, Putin scathingly criticized the West over Afghanistan, saying that the Taliban's rapid sweep over

the country has shown the futility of Western attempts to enforce its own vision of democracy. Merkel, meanwhile, urged Russia to use its contacts with the Taliban to press for Afghan citizens who helped Germany to be allowed to leave Afghanistan.

During her press conference with Putin, Merkel conceded that "on another project, namely for there to be a collective position of the Afghan population for its own future, we did not achieve our goals — I want to say that very openly."

"I must say that, in our development cooperation efforts, we did not want to force any system on Afghanistan," she added. "But we saw that millions of girls were glad to go to school and that women could participate. There are many in Afghanistan who are very, very unhappy about developments now."

The pope's interview with Spain's Cadena COPE took place at the Vatican late last week. The radio station owned by Spain's Catholic bishops' conference aired the talk on Wednesday and said that its content had been vetted by the pope himself.

Francis also said that "not all eventualities were taken into account" in the departure of Western allies from Afghanistan.

"I don't know whether there will be a review or not (about what happened during the withdrawal), but certainly there was a lot of deception perhaps on the part of the new (Afghan) authorities," said the pope. "I say deceit or a lot of naivety."

He said he believed that the Vatican's top diplomat was offering to engage in Afghanistan to make sure that locals don't suffer and called for Christians across the world to engage in "prayer, penance and fasting" in the face of events in Afghanistan.

In the interview, Pope Francis addressed direct questions about his health for the first time since he underwent bowel surgery in early July.

He said his body is adjusting well to the removal of part of his colon and that he can now eat whatever he wants and leads "a totally normal life."

He said that he expected his trip to Slovakia and Hungary between Sept. 12-15 would be as busy as previous ones and said he would continue visiting small European countries, including an upcoming tour taking him to Cyprus, Greece and Malta.

The pope also said he was expecting to appear and speak at the U.N.-sponsored COP26 climate talks in November in Glasgow. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Lebanon Driving back to base after firing rockets toward Israeli positions from a border area last month, a group of Hezbollah fighters was accosted by angry villagers who smashed their vehicles' windshields and held them up briefly. It was a rare incident of defiance that suggested many in Lebanon would not tolerate provocations by the powerful group that risk triggering a new war with Israel. As Lebanon sinks deeper into poverty, many Lebanese are more openly criticizing Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Israel yesterday approved a series of measures easing its blockade of the Gaza Strip, including opening the main commercial crossing with the Palestinian enclave to imports. The announcement came a day after Israeli officials allowed the import of crucial construction material needed for the Gaza Strip's rebuilding following the recent conflict in May. Tensions have run high in recent weeks as Hamas activists have launched incendiary balloons into Israel, sparking a number of wildfires across the border, and staged a series of sometimes violent demonstrations along the border fence with Israel.

US Three men held at the Guantanamo Bay detention center have been formally charged in connection with the 2002 Bali nightclub bombings and other plots in Southeast Asia after 18 years in U.S. custody, with defense lawyers insisting afterward that the long-delayed arraignment was so flawed it may have to be repeated. The men appeared in a secure courthouse encircled by razor wire on the U.S. base in Cuba amid defense complaints about courtroom interpreters that caused what was supposed to be a brief arraignment before a military judge into a two-day affair.

Russia Europe's top human rights court has ruled that Russian authorities failed to conduct an effective investigation into the killing of a prominent human rights activist in the Russian republic of Chechnya. Tuesday's ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) related to the July 15, 2009 murder of Natalia Estemirova, a leading rights defender in Chechnya, who was abducted and later found dead with shots to the head and chest.