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AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER LOSES CONTROL OF WECHAT ACCOUNT

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AP PHOTO



Ukraine NATO said that it's putting extra forces on standby and sending more ships and fighter jets to eastern Europe, as Ireland warned that new Russian war games off its coast are not welcome given tensions over whether President Vladimir Putin (pictured) intends to attack Ukraine. European nations like Denmark, Spain, France and the UK are ready for action.
More on p8

AP PHOTO



Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha will pay an official visit to Saudi Arabia this week, the first by a Thai head of government since relations between the two nations were soured more than three decades ago by a massive jewel theft and the killing of four Saudi diplomats. Prayuth's two-day visit starting today comes at the invitation of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

South Korea will expand rapid testing and shorten quarantines as it reshapes its pandemic response to deal with a faster-than-expected surge in coronavirus infections driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. The plans were announced as the country reported 7,513 new cases of infection yesterday, the third straight day exceeding 7,000 and nearing a one-day high of 7,848 reported in December, when a devastating delta-driven spread spiked hospitalizations and deaths.

France People who aren't vaccinated against COVID-19 are no longer allowed in France's restaurants, bars, tourist sites and sports venues unless they recently recovered from the virus. The new law came into effect yesterday requiring a "vaccine pass" that is central to the government's anti-virus strategy.

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THE LAST CONCERT

Macau is left without orchestras following the abrupt lay off of all their musicians; IC says the decision is related to the privatization process in place

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PRIVATIZING CITY'S ORCHESTRAS LEAVE MUSICIANS IN LIMBO

LYNZY VALLES

THE two orchestras in the city are currently in limbo as musicians await information on the future of the organizations following leaks that several staff have allegedly been compensated up to MOP250,000 for breach of contract.

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has allegedly abruptly laid off musicians from the Macao Orchestra (OM) and the Macao Chinese Orchestra.

Lü Jia, the principal conductor of the OM has also been cut and was not informed in person of the decision, an insider told the Times.

Lü also served as principal cello for OM, which is administered by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), since the middle of 2013.

"After 13 years of building up the OM into the leading orchestra of China to a European level, this is the treatment he has received," the source lamented.

According to the member of

the orchestra, Saturday night, January 22, was the group's last concert and not one member if the IC was present, "let alone any ceremony [was held] to show any appreciation for the work [Lü] has done, or of course, that of the musicians."

As cited in the IC's website, the insider was referring to a concert held at the University of Macau, where the group performed "Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 56, 'Scottish', 3rd movement" and "Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 4 in A Major, Op. 90, 'Italian', 4th movement."

As seen yesterday on the bureau's website, there are still four upcoming events listed between April and July, including "Music Hour with Musicians" and a "Pre-concert Talk."

However, according to the insider, the "IC wants to privatize the orchestras but as yet, there is no new company, no

CEO and no musical director."

In his comments to the Times, the insider slammed the decision, dubbing it an "attack against foreigners, their families and the orchestras that is just unforgivable to save the politicians' backs over how the orchestras were set up back in the day."

The contracts between the musicians of the orchestras and the IC will be terminated, and the IC will proceed with the statutory compensation

Residents of Macau have allegedly been compensated for the breach of contract but blue card holders "have been ignored, as always here, and have no information as to what will happen."

"This is a scandal on an in-

ternational level and should be taken to the maximum level of investigation I believe," the insider added.

The IC confirmed to the Times last night that pursuant to the Administrative Regulation No. 41/2021, the Amendment to Administrative Regulation No. 20/2015 "Organization and

Functions of the Cultural Affairs Bureau," the OM and the Macao Chinese Orchestra will be separated from the IC from February 1.

Back in November, president of the IC, Mok Ian Ian, disclosed that the city's two public orchestras will be privatized in the future to allow for swifter adjustment and reaction to market demands.

The privatization was set to take effect on January 1, 2022, with Mok emphasizing that privatizing the OM and the Macao Chinese Orchestra will give them "grea-

ter chances of development [...] such as performing overseas on behalf of the city." In the reply to an enquiry about their privatization, the IC noted that in a bid to achieve its long-term sustainable development, the two orchestras will operate as a public enterprise in the future.

"In response to the relevant arrangement, the IC has liaised with the musicians of the two orchestras. The contracts between the musicians of the orchestras and the IC will be terminated, and the IC will proceed with the statutory compensation in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations," confirmed the bureau.

The constitution of the new company for the two orchestras is in the process of implementation, and the respective works are expected to be concluded before February 1.

In October 2020, the Times reported that the OM is running with at least 13 musicians fewer than normal, some of whom are orchestra principals, with the rest on a reduced salary.

The Times contacted another member of the orchestra last night but the musician declined to reply as the group is "not sure of what is happening."

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ECONOMY

Macau to fully recover only in 2025: IMF

LYNZY VALLES

THE level of the SAR's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to surpass its pre-crisis level only in 2025, given the depth of the economic losses during the pandemic, according to a forecast made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The city's recovery is likely to continue across 2022 due to the strong fiscal support and the financial strength of the gaming operators, which has cushioned employment and consumption.

However, the sharp decline of economic activity exposed Macau's vulnerabilities to the effect of external on the inflow of tourists, according to the report.

The pandemic's impact on the city's growth only highlights the lack of diversification beyond the gaming industry.

In early 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic, Macau only welcomed a total of 5.9 million tourists, a staggering decrease of 85% compared to 2019 when the same period of time welcomed some 39.4 million tourists. Across 2020, the aggregate GDP shrank by 54% year-on-year, mostly due to the collapse of service exports.

This massive drop in tourist arrivals led to a lower GGR which only stood at approximately MOP60.44 billion in 2020 and MOP86.86 billion in 2021.

"The crisis brought Macau SAR's overreliance on the gaming sector into sharp relief. The gaming sector—the key

growth driver in the past two decades—almost came to a stop as tourist flows dried up," the report noted.

The travel corridor which lifted quarantine requirements for qualified visitors between Macau SAR and the mainland breathed life into the stagnant gaming sector.

The IMF estimates that the economy expanded by 17% year-on-year in 2021, helped by the partial recovery of the gaming sector.

It also projected that GDP will grow by 15% this year.

"The financial sector weathered the pandemic well, but pockets of vulnerability are emerging. The banking system remains well capitalized with solid levels of liquidity and profitability," the report stated.

The preliminary assessment is that Macau SAR's overall external position remains "substantially stronger than warranted by mediumterm fundamentals and desirable policies."

The IMF added that the current account surplus in 2021 is estimated at less than half of the level observed in 2019 due to the still relatively low tourism receipts, even though they increased relative to 2020.

This year's GDP will be boosted by increasing investment linked to the issuance of new gaming concessions and further integration with the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). According to IMF growth is expected to accelerate to 23% in 2023 before gradually converging to its longterm potential of around 3.5% over the medium term.

PHOTO ARCHIVE



IMF AFFIRMS CITY'S NEW FINANCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

THE International Monetary Fund Mission welcomed the initiatives of the SAR's Monetary Authority in launching new financial infrastructure to promote the development of modern financial services.

To advance the diversification agenda, the IMF Mission recommended a multi-dimensional approach in enhancing the supply of skilled labour to support financial sector expansion, including additional investments in professional training and information and communication infrastructure, expediting regional integration and streamlining business regulations.

Concurrently, it would be important to further strengthen the regulatory and supervisory framework for preserving financial stability and integrity in the course of promoting financial sector

development.

The IMF Mission conducted its Article IV Consultation for Macau SAR through virtual meetings in January 10-21, 2022 and preliminarily concluded the SAR's macroeconomic and financial assessments, according to the Monetary Authority of Macao.

In the Staff Concluding Statement of the 2022 IMF Article IV Mission, the IMF staff affirmed the SAR government's "strong policy response in containing the pandemic and the deployment of fiscal resources to soften its adverse impact on the economy."

Meanwhile, as cited in the report, the linked exchange rate system between the Macau pataca and the Hong Kong dollar continued to serve the SAR well, underpinning its economic and financial stability. **LV**

Sands China honors local suppliers, launches book to highlight SMEs



SANDS China Ltd. recently honoured some of its outstanding suppliers, recognized local SMEs graduating from its procurement training programme, and launched a book highlighting the success stories of its local SME suppliers.

"Sands China is very pleased to again recognise the outstanding services and products provided by our many suppliers, whose collaboration is essential for us to provide the world-class experience our integrated resorts are known for," said Wilfred Wong, president of

Sands China Ltd.

"As Macau continues to carry on in the face of an ongoing pandemic, we are grateful for the continued cooperation of our suppliers, whether small or large, local or international," he added.

Held at The Londoner Macao, the company hosted the 2021 Sands Supplier Excellence Awards, the 10th Sands Procurement Academy Graduation, and the launch of a new SME book recording the milestones of the company's local SME support programme since 2015.

It is Sands China's 9th year holding the Sands Supplier Excellence Awards, acknowledging the cooperation and services of some of the company's most noteworthy suppliers. This year's ceremony recog-

nised nine winners across six categories.

During the graduation ceremony for the Sands Procurement Academy, the company recognised 52 local SMEs, including 16 exhibitors from the 2021 Sands Shopping Carnival. Nearly 370 suppliers have enrolled in the academy since its founding in 2017, and 330 have graduated to date, including the recent group.

After initially targeting a few key categories of local suppliers, Sands China said that the academy has been open to all local SMEs in Macau since 2019.

The company also recalled that despite the pandemic's effect on the city's economy and tourism, it has exerted efforts to keep local procurement uninterrupted. **LV**

RENATO MARQUES



GAMING LAW

SATELLITE CASINO MAKES THE CORE OF AMENDMENT'S FIRST READING

ANTHONY LAM

SIMILAR to many members of the public, most lawmakers were concerned with the termination of "satellite casinos" in the first reading of the Gambling Law amendment.

A parliamentary plenary was held yesterday to discuss the overall direction of the legislation, with Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, sitting in to answer lawmakers' questions about the legislation.

"Satellite casinos" refer to casinos not located in premises owned by the gambling concessionaire operating the casinos. There are 20 of them currently.

Prior to answering lawmakers' questions, the senior official stressed that the term "satellite casino" is not a legal term and there is no legal definition whatsoever.

About a dozen lawmakers expressed their views, made comments and raised questions.

Leong Sun Iok and Ella Lei, both from the labor association, were concerned with the possible impact on the labor market with the anticipated closure of satellite casinos.

Lawmaker Lei Leong Wong warned the government that they should prepare for the worst, because this matter concerns a workforce of at least 7,000 people. "Counting supporting staff in, the figure may reach 15,000," the lawmaker pointed out, hinting that the government must handle the problem with extreme care.

Lawmaker Pereira Coutinho questioned about the possibility of outstanding debts under the names of these "satellite casinos."

Other lawmakers, such as casino executive Angela Leong, demanded to know if the government had evaluated the possible impact on business circles near satellite casinos.

They pointed out that satellite casinos have generated business environments in their neighborhood, supporting the existence of late-night restaurants and shopping, among other elements.

Some even referred to the "historic values" of satellite casinos, saying that they made massive contributions to the city before the gambling market opened and the city become well-known to the world.

"These satellite casinos have supported Macau's expenditure on education, healthcare and infrastructure," several lawmakers pointed out. "They have paid for our ferry terminals and airport."

In response to these questions, Lei did not answer directly whether the government had conducted any such evaluation. This is a contrast to the capping of the number of licenses at six, which he said was the result of "comprehensive evaluation and public opinion."

He referred to the proposal in the bill and said that the proposal that states casinos must be located in properties owned by concessionaires.

"As casinos are legally government premises, they need to be located in properties owned by concessionaires so that they can be retrieved by the government when needed," Lei said.

He assured lawmakers that with the three-year buffer period proposed in the bill, current owners of "satellite casinos" will have time to make necessary arrangements.

Lei reiterated at yesterday's parliamentary session that the government is not attempting to kill all satellite casinos.

Lawmaker Ron Lam slammed the government for not having a

vision in the proposed bill over the gambling industry of the city, especially as it is the core trade in the MSAR.

Furthermore, he pointed out that more clarifications are needed. "There is an industrial chain," he said. "We need to clarify many concepts now."

Moreover, he foresees that certain crucial information will be obstructed from the general public's knowledge because the bill proposes that bidding documents be confidential.

Lei, in response, said that the bill states certain documents must be kept in confidentiality

and the public will not be able to see them. The government has to abide with that, Lei said.

His reply prompted Coutinho's follow-up reminder about the fact that the bill is not yet a law: "I must remind everybody in the room that this is only a bill, which is under legislation process, waiting for the assembly to pass it."

Several lawmakers applauded the government's proposal on stipulated corporate social responsibilities. However, without elaborated clauses, they pointed out that grey areas can still be possible.

Lei replied that at legislation stage, the concept "has to be abstract." However, more elaborated stipulations will be made during the bidding stage. He also offered opportunities for bidders to make proposals on their corporate social responsibility vision, so that the government will have the chance to choose a better plan.

RON LAM VETOES BILL

CITING the Financial Secretary's insufficient disclosure on key information, lawmaker Ron Lam voted no on the Bill's first reading at the parliament.

More an expression of Lam's stance than having the capacity to affect the outcome, the "nay" did not affect the passing of the bill in general terms.

Lam was not satisfied with Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong's reply on several questions, with one of them about the legally stipulated payment to the Macao Foundation by gambling concessionaires.

Pursuant to the existing law, gambling concessionaires are required to pay 35% of their gross gambling revenue as gambling tax, in addition to at most 5% of public investments into certain funds, such as the Macao Foundation.

The 5% public investments are discretionary and have usually fluctuated. For the time being, most concessionaires have been paying below 5%.

Lam wanted the senior official to clarify why this has been happening. "Why [is the government]

not charging them the maximum amount?" the lawmaker questioned several times in the hopes of getting an answer.

However, the Financial Secretary reiterated his stance that an explanation would include certain disclosures of "detailed information," so he had to refrain from answering Lam's question.

He offered to explain further at the committee stage of the legislation process.

Lam did not find this explanation satisfactory. He even resorted to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly to demand a clear answer from the senior official.

Even so, the senior official replied that he would not give a definite answer at the plenary.

After voting, Lam made a statement on his decision, stressing that it is crucial for the public to know why the gambling concessionaires are not being charged the highest amount of public investments.

"We need to bear in mind that committee meetings are conducted close-door, blocking the public from the legislation process," Lam explained. **AL**

CTM to launch price reduction from Feb. 1

TELECOM operator CTM is set to reduce prices and enhance speeds from February 1.

The new pricing scheme will cover customers of residential, ordinary business Internet service and Direct Internet Access (DIA). The average reduction in price for residential fibre broadband services is 22%, with a price reduction of 48% for general business fibre broadband service, and 20% for DIA service. The new pricing also covers student broadband, with an average reduction of 26%.

The new pricing covers residential broadband, ordinary business broadband, DIA and fixed telephone services. In effect from February 1, a reduction in price of 14-24% will be applied to residential broadband services with speed enhancement up to twofold instituted, with 150Mbps the

LYNZY VALLES



lowest speed.

According to a statement, ordinary business broadband users are entitled to price reduction from 23-70%. For them, the lowest speed service plan will be automatically increased fivefold to 150Mbps. In terms of DIA services, customers

on a service plan higher than 2Mbps are entitled to enjoy 20% off. The new pricing also covers student broadband services, which will have rates reduced from 21-35%, with the lowest speed being raised to 150Mbps.

The new pricing for fixed

telephony will take effect on April 1. At this time, a 20% reduction will be applied for general business category plans, whereas up to 54% will be reduced for Social Housing residential fixed telephony services. The new pricing will be effective automatically. LV

MONG HA SPORTS CENTER OPENS MORE FACILITIES

Mong-Ha Sports Centre is opening more sports facilities for public from tomorrow, such as futsal court and squash court and volleyball court, the Sports Bureau said in a statement. Operation hour for these sports facilities and those that were already launched including badminton court, table tennis room, basketball court and the rooftop leisure area with jogging trail will be 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., Mondays to Sundays. Starting from 8:30 a.m. today, members of Sports Easy can reserve the newly launched venues seven days in advance through the bureau's official website or mobile app. On-the-spot booking for instant use is also available from January 26 at the Mong-Ha service counter.

NEW PILE FOUNDATION UNDERWAY ON LOT P

Construction of temporary housing units and home-swap housing units on Lot P in Area Preta began mid last year, where abandoned pile caps have been removed and existing piles have been tested. Works for new pile foundation are underway, with the project progressing according to plan, the Macau Urban Renewal Limited announced in a statement. Lot P comprises three lots of land and public roads. Lot A will have six residential towers, providing about 2,000 home-swap housing units, Lot B and Lot C will have eight residential towers, providing about 2,800 temporary housing units for urban renewal purpose. Planned for completion in 2024, the project will provide about 2,900 car parking spaces and over 1,000 motorcycle parking spaces.

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DIRE STRAIT

BEIJING SENDS 39 WARPLANES TOWARD TAIWAN, LARGEST IN NEW YEAR

Fighter jets fly past a Chinese military's J-16D electronic warfare airplane during 13th China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition

HUIZHONG WU, TAIPEI

CHINA flew 39 warplanes toward Taiwan in its largest such sortie of the new year, amid tensions over the self-ruled island's future and as the U.S. pushes to assert its presence in the region.

The Chinese formation Sunday night included 24 J-16 fighter jets and 10 J-10 jets, among other support and electronic warfare aircraft, according to

Taiwan's government.

Taiwan's air force scrambled its own jets and tracked the People's Liberation Army planes on its air defense radar systems, the ministry said.

The Chinese sortie came as the U.S. military said that two of its carrier strike groups were sailing on Sunday in the South China Sea, led by USS Carl Vinson and USS Abraham Lincoln. They engaged in anti-submarine, air and combat readiness operations.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined to comment on why the PLA had flown such a large sortie yesterday, saying it was not a diplomatic matter.

Taiwan and China split during a civil war in 1949, but China claims the island as its own territory. Beijing has used diplomatic and military means to isolate and intimidate the self-ruled island, but the U.S. has continued to support Taiwan by selling it advanced weapons and fighter planes.

Chinese pilots have been flying towards Taiwan on a near-daily basis in the past year and a half, since Taiwan's government started publishing the data regularly. The largest sortie was 56 warplanes on a single day last October.

The activity has generally been in the air space southwest of the island and falls into a zone that Taiwan's military says it monitors out of national security considerations.

Tensions have been high since

Taiwanese citizens elected Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, to which Beijing responded by cutting off previously established communications with the island's government. Tsai's predecessor was friendly to China and had endorsed Beijing's claim that the two are part of a single Chinese nation.

The U.S. regularly carries out exercises in the South China Sea in what it calls freedom of navigation operations, in line with international law. **MDT/AP**

COVID-19

China tests 2M in Beijing, lifts lockdown in Xi'an

A fresh outbreak in Beijing has prompted authorities to test millions and impose new measures two weeks ahead of the opening of the Winter Olympics, even as Chinese officials yesterday lifted a month-long lockdown on the northern city of Xi'an and its 13 million residents.

Despite falling case numbers, pandemic controls have been stepped up ahead of the Olympics, where all participants must be tested before and after their arrival in Beijing.

In the capital, the 2 million residents of Fengtai district underwent testing following the discovery of more than three dozen ca-

ses in the capital. Targeted testing was being conducted at residential communities in six other districts.

The government told people in areas of Beijing deemed at high risk for infection not to leave the city after 25 cases were found in Fengtai and 14 elsewhere. Residents lined up Sunday on snow-covered sidewalks in freezing weather for testing.

The Beijing Municipal Health Commission also said Sunday that anyone who had purchased medicine for fever, cough and other infections within the past two weeks would be required to take a COVID-19 test within 72 hours, the

state-owned Global Times newspaper reported.

The Olympics are being held under strict controls that are meant to isolate athletes, staff, reporters and officials from residents. Athletes are required to be vaccinated or undergo a quarantine after arriving in China.

The announcement by the city of Xi'an followed the restart of commercial flights from the city over the weekend. The major tourism center and former imperial capital, famed as the home of the Terracotta Warrior statue army, struggled to get food to some residents in the early days of the lockdown, after people were

confined to their homes.

Xi'an has been a cornerstone of the ruling Communist Party's "zero tolerance" strategy toward COVID-19 that mandates lockdowns, travel restrictions and mass testing whenever a case is discovered.

Xi'an is about 1,000 kilometers southwest of Beijing, where the Olympics open Feb. 4.

Access to Xi'an was suspended Dec. 22 following an outbreak attributed to the delta variant of the coronavirus.

Other outbreaks prompted the government to impose travel bans on a number of cities, including the port of Tianjin, about

an hour from Beijing. The stiff regulations are credited with preventing major nationwide outbreaks and China has reported relatively few cases of the highly infectious omicron variant.

China yesterday reported just 18 new cases of local infection, including six in Beijing. The country has 2,754 current cases of infection and has reported a total of 105,660 cases of COVID-19 with 4,636 deaths.

A number of nearby provinces reported cases linked to the outbreaks in the capital, including Shandong and Hebei provinces. The city of Shenyang in Liaoning province reported a positive test result in a person with

no symptoms, also related to the Beijing clusters.

Organizers yesterday said 39 people among the 2,586 athletes, team officials and others who arrived after Jan. 4 had tested positive for the virus upon landing at Beijing airport. Another 33 people who had already entered the bubble isolating participants from the general public later tested positive, the organizing committee said on its website.

The statement did not identify those who tested positive other than to say they were "outside stakeholders," a term that excludes athletes or coaches. China mandates 21 days of quarantine for people arriving from abroad, but had waived that for those coming for the Olympics on condition they tested negative for the virus. **MDT/AP**

AUSTRALIA

Prime minister Morrison loses control of WeChat account

ROD MCGUIRK, CANBERRA

AUSTRALIAN Prime Minister Scott Morrison has lost control of his account on the Chinese-owned social media platform WeChat and a lawmaker yesterday accused China's leaders of political interference.

Morrison's 76,000 WeChat followers were notified his page had been renamed "Australian Chinese new life" earlier this month and his photograph had been removed, Sydney's The Daily Telegraph newspaper reported. The changes were made without the government's knowledge, the report said.

Morrison's office declined to comment on the report.

In response to a question from The Associated Press, WeChat's parent company Tencent said that there was "no evidence of any hacking or third-party intrusion," related to Morrison's account.

"Based on our information, this appears to be a dispute over account ownership," the company said.

In accordance with Chinese regulations, Morrison's public account was registered with a Chinese citizen and was later transferred to its current operator, the

AP PHOTO



company said. It identified the present owner of the account only as a "technology services company," adding that it would "continue to look into this matter further."

Joint Parliamentary Committee on Intelligence and Security Chair James Paterson said WeChat had not immediately replied to an Australian government request that the prime minister's account be restored.

Paterson accused the Chinese Communist Party of censoring the prime minister with Australia's elections due by May.

Paterson, who is a member of Morrison's conservative Liberal Party, called on all lawmakers to boycott the platform, which is owned by Chinese technology giant Tencent.

"What the Chinese government has done by shutting down an Australian account is foreign interference of Australian democracy in an election year," Paterson said.

Paterson said it was concerning that 1.2 million Chinese Australians who use the platform couldn't access news from the prime minister, but could still

see criticisms of the government made by opposition leader Anthony Albanese.

Fergus Ryan, a Chinese social media expert with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, tweeted that Morrison was one of at least a dozen Australian politicians who use WeChat accounts now registered to Chinese citizens.

Liberal Party lawmaker and former diplomat Dave Sharma said the interference was likely sanctioned by the Chinese government.

Sharma said Morrison used WeChat to connect with Australia's

Chinese diaspora, but that ultimately the social media platform is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

"More likely than not it was state-sanctioned and it shows the attitude towards free speech and freedom of expression that comes out of Beijing," Sharma said.

Graeme Smith, a China expert at the Australian National University, said Morrison's account was registered to a Chinese national in China's Fujian province.

"It's not the most difficult thing to hack an account within China," Smith told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"I don't think we know who's behind this. I dare say we could safely say it was at least inspired by the China government," he added.

Smith said he did not believe that Morrison's WeChat problem was evidence that China would back Albanese's center-left Labor Party at the next election.

"They really couldn't care less who wins the election," Smith said. "They don't care who wins as long as people don't trust democracy."

Albanese told Brisbane Radio 4BC he would talk to Morrison about "any national security implications" of the prime minister's WeChat problem.

Morrison has had a vexed relationship with China since he replaced Malcolm Turnbull as prime minister in 2018.

The Chinese have been critical of a new partnership involving Australia, Britain and the United States announced in September under which Australia will be provided with nuclear-powered submarines. **MDT/AP**

TONGA

Four Japanese planes fly more aid after volcanic blast

FOUR Japanese aircraft left Australia yesterday to deliver more vital aid to Tonga as the Pacific nation deals with the aftermath of a volcanic eruption and tsunami.

The two Japanese Lockheed C-130 Hercules and two Kawasaki C-2 left the Royal Australian Air Force Base at Amberley in Queensland state to make the 3,300-kilometer (2,050-mile) journey east to the islands that were devastated by the Jan. 15 twin disasters, the Australian Defense Department said in a statement.

"Australia proudly joins Japan and other Pacific Island countries working alongside the people of Tonga," the statement said.

AP PHOTO



A Japan Air Self-Defense Force aircraft sits on the tarmac at Tonga's Fua'amotu International Airport, near Nuku'alofa

Aid flights from Australia, Japan and New Zealand also carried food, water, medical supplies and telecommunications equipment to Tonga over the weekend.

Chinese Foreign Minis-

try spokesman Zhao Lijian said Beijing was providing an additional \$3.1 million in assistance to Tonga. The Chinese Embassy in Fiji has already sent drinking water, food, generators, water pumps, and other

goods to help in the relief effort, Zhao told reporters at a daily briefing.

Because of the COVID-19 risk to a nation that has not had a local outbreak, aid flights are landing, offloading supplies, then leaving without contact with locals on the ground. The goods are left for 72 hours to reduce the infection risk before they are unpacked.

The main airport runway has been cleared of ash spewed when the nearby Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano erupted. The explosion set off a Pacific-wide tsunami that smashed boats in New Zealand and caused an oil spill in Peru.

Cleanup efforts were going smoothly, with the

Tongan government and military officials working together, Australian Minister for International Development and the Pacific Zed Seselja said on Sunday. Ships from the U.S. and Britain were on their way. HMAS Adelaide, an Australian navy ship with helicopters on board as well as engineers and a 40-bed hospital, is expected to reach Tonga by Friday.

The ship can generate electricity and purify water.

A lack of clean water was a priority because local supplies have been damaged by layers of volcanic ash and salt water. Red Cross teams on the ground reported widespread stagnant pools of salt water that were dumped by the tsunami, polluting the clean

drinking water sources of tens of thousands of people, said Katie Greenwood, the Pacific head for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

On Saturday, the Japanese government said a Self-Defense Forces C-130 aircraft arrived in Tonga with three tons of drinking water. That followed another Japanese flight on Friday.

The death toll has been limited, with only three deaths confirmed in Tonga so far.

U.N. humanitarian officials reported that about 84,000 people — 80% of Tonga's population — have been impacted by the eruption.

The tsunami severed the single fiber-optic cable that connects Tonga to the rest of the world, leaving many unable to connect with loved ones abroad. **MDT/AP**

UKRAINE CRISIS

NATO sends ships, jets east as Ireland rejects Russia drills

LORNE COOK, BRUSSELS

NATO said yesterday that it's putting extra forces on standby and sending more ships and fighter jets to eastern Europe, as Ireland warned that new Russian war games off its coast are not welcome given tensions over whether President Vladimir Putin intends to attack Ukraine.

The U.S.-led military organization said that it is beefing up its "deterrence" presence in the Baltic Sea area. Denmark is sending a frigate and deploying F-16 war planes to Lithuania; Spain will also send warships and could send fighter jets to Bulgaria; and France stands ready to send troops to Romania.

Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said NATO will "take all necessary measures to protect and defend all allies." He said: "We will always respond to any deterioration of our security environment, including through strengthening our collective defense."

The announcement came as European Union foreign ministers sought to put on a fresh display of resolve in support of Ukraine, and paper over concerns about divisions on the best way to confront any Russian aggression.

"We are showing unprecedented unity about the situation in Ukraine, with the strong coordination with the U.S.," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who is chairing their meeting, told reporters in Brussels.

Asked whether the EU would follow a U.S. move and order the families of European embassy personnel in Ukraine to leave, Borrell said: "We are not going to do the same thing." He said he is keen to hear from Secretary of State Antony Blinken about that decision.

Britain yesterday also announced it is withdrawing some diplomats and dependants from its embassy in Kyiv. The Foreign Office said the move was "in response to the growing threat from Russia."

Ukraine's foreign ministry spokesman, Oleg Nikolenko, said the U.S. decision was "a premature step" and a sign of

AP PHOTO



An instructor trains members of Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces, volunteer military units of the Armed Forces, in a city park in Kyiv

"excessive caution." He said that Russia is sowing panic among Ukrainians and foreigners in order to destabilize Ukraine.

Germany is monitoring developments, but German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock stressed that "we must not contribute to unsettling the situation further; we need to continue to support the Ukrainian government very clearly and above all maintain the stability of the country."

Arriving at the EU meeting, Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said he would inform his counterparts that Russia plans to hold war games 240 kilometers off Ireland's southwest coast — in international waters but within Ireland's exclusive economic zone.

"This isn't a time to increase military activity and tension in the context of what's happening with and in Ukraine," Coveney said. "The fact that they are choosing to do it on the western borders, if you like, of the EU, off the Irish coast, is something that in our view is simply not welcome and not wanted right now, particularly in the coming weeks."

During yesterday's meeting, which Blinken will attend virtually, the ministers will restate Europe's condemnation of the Russian military build-up near Ukraine, involving an estimated 100,000 troops, tanks, artillery and heavy equipment, diplomats and officials said ahead of the meeting.

They'll renew calls for dialogue, notably through the European-backed "Normandy format," which helped to ease hostilities in 2015, a year after Putin ordered the annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Fighting in eastern Ukraine has killed around 14,000 people and still simmers today.

Should Putin move on Ukraine again, the ministers will warn, Russia would face "massive consequences and severe costs." Those costs would be of a financial and political nature. The EU insists that it stands ready to slap hefty sanctions on Russia within days of any attack.

Over the weekend, some of the member countries closest to Russia — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — confirmed that they plan to send U.S.-made anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine, a move endorsed by the United States.

But questions have been raised about just how unified the EU is. Diverse political, business and energy interests have long divided the 27-country bloc in its approach to Moscow. Around 40% of the EU's natural gas imports come from Russia, much of it via pipelines across Ukraine.

Gas prices have skyrocketed, and the head of the International Energy Agency has said that Russian energy giant Gazprom was already reducing its exports to the EU in late 2021 despite high prices. Putin says Gazprom is respecting its contract

obligations, not putting the squeeze on Europe.

The EU's two major powers appear most cautious. Germany's Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia, which is complete but yet to pump gas, has become a bargaining chip. French President Emmanuel Macron has renewed previously rejected calls for an EU summit with Putin.

Late last year, France and Germany initially expressed doubts about U.S. intelligence assessments that Moscow might be preparing to invade.

Late on Saturday, the head of the German navy, Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schoenbach, resigned after coming under fire for saying that Ukraine would not regain the Crimean Peninsula, and for suggesting that Putin deserves "respect."

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban plans to meet with Putin next week to discuss a Russian-backed project to expand a Hungarian nuclear power plant.

Still, diplomats and officials said hard-hitting sanctions are being drawn up with the EU's executive branch, the European Commission. But they were reluctant to say what the measures might be or what action by Russia might trigger them.

The aim, they said, is to try to match the doubts Putin has sowed about his intentions for Ukraine with uncertainty about what any retaliatory European action might look like, or when it would come. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1971 IDI AMIN OUSTS UGANDA PRESIDENT



General Idi Amin has seized power from President Milton Obote, the man who led Uganda to independence in 1962.

The general led a military coup while the president was out of the country attending the Commonwealth conference in Singapore.

Ugandan troops have sealed off Entebbe airport and there are reports of tanks and soldiers on the streets of the capital, Kampala. The president's residence is said to have been surrounded and major road links have been blocked.

Dr Obote became the country's first prime minister in 1962 at the head of an uneasy coalition between his own Uganda People's Congress and the Kabaka Yekka or King's party representing the Baganda tribe from the largest and richest province of the country.

Sir Edward Mutesa, better known as "King Freddie", became president.

Four years later Obote ousted the king and revised the constitution to make himself president.

General Amin, for seven years heavyweight boxing champion of Uganda, spent most of his army career as a sergeant, but once Dr Obote became president was rapidly promoted to chief of the armed forces.

A broadcast on Uganda radio accused the Obote government of corruption and said that ministers and senior civil servants owned cars, fleets of buses and even aeroplanes.

The broadcast said the army believed President Obote's policies would lead to bloodshed, accusing him of giving preferential treatment to the Lango region in the north of the country.

Cheering crowds were reported in the streets of Kampala after the radio broadcast.

The army has imposed a night-time curfew.

Dr Obote arrived at Nairobi airport in Kenya tonight and was taken immediately to a hotel where he is holding talks with the Kenyan vice president, Arap Moi and the attorney general and foreign minister.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Reports from Uganda had indicated that revolution against Obote's regime was brewing. He survived an assassination attempt in 1969. After the coup, he went into exile in Tanzania, from where he tried to organise his comeback. In 1979, Amin was toppled by Ugandan rebels and Tanzanian troops. He fled the country in 1979 and spent his last years in exile in Saudi Arabia where he died in August 2003. In 1980 Obote was re-elected president and established a multi-party democracy. But the army remained unwilling to submit to his control and in 1985 he was deposed in a second military coup. He has since lived in Zambia. Yoweri Museveni has been president of Uganda since 1986.

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You need time to make things better. It might be best to keep your ideas to yourself today. You can get ahead if you play your cards right.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Don't make mountains out of molehills if you want to avoid conflict. Expressing yourself in novel ways should lead you down new avenues.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Social events will be plentiful. You may find that depression is causing you to feel lonely and insecure. You might be overly emotional concerning situations at work.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Travel and communications will not run as smoothly as you had hoped. Don't let someone talk you into parting with your cash unless you can truly see the benefits of doing so.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Talk to the party involved and make sure that they are informed as to what actually happened. Club memberships or donations could be expensive and prove unnecessary.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Changes involving your domestic scene may be unpleasant. Insurance pay outs, tax rebates, or just plain luck. It might be best to keep your ideas to yourself today.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Problems with appliances or electrical gadgets will drive you crazy. Read some books on self awareness. Problems with fire, gas, or oil may cause disruptions and annoyances.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Make changes that will enhance your appearance. Look into the cost factor, but don't try to get backing yet. Don't trust others with private information that could be used against you.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Pleasure trips will be most enjoyable and should lead to new and lasting friendships. Your partner could make you angry if they steal your thunder or embarrass you in front of others.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Avoid any over indulgences. You have a real need to be vocal. Rethink your motives and make the necessary changes to yourself. Erratic behavior at home may be hard to handle.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You may have some difficulties with someone you live with. Be careful not to consume too many spicy foods, or minor health problems could put you out of commission for the day.

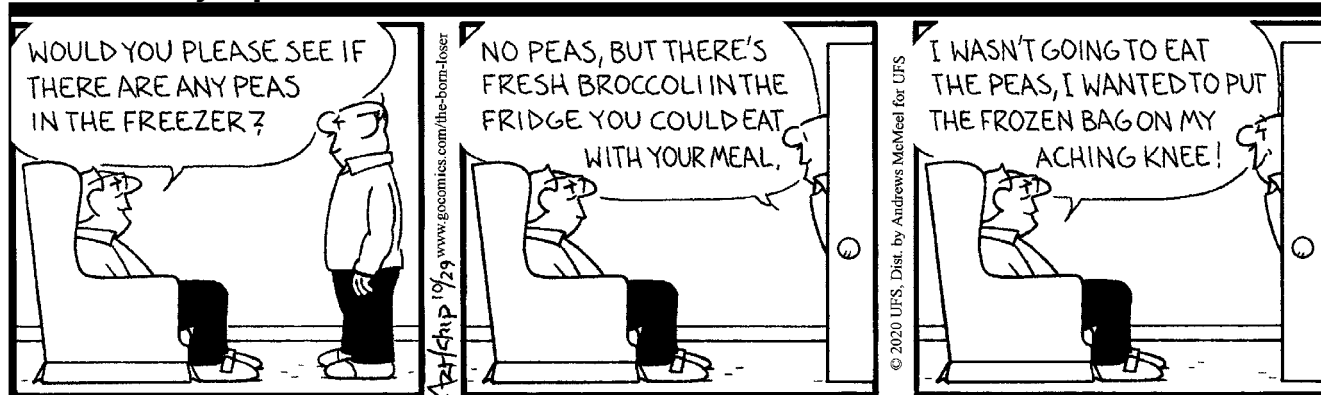


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Put your energy into your work or moneymaking ventures rather than into your emotional life today. People who try to persuade you to do things their way will annoy you.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-6	6	fine
Harbin	-17	-5	cloudy
Tianjin	2	4	rain
Urumqi	7	9	overcast
Xi'an	8	10	rain
Lhasa	-5	3	fine
Chengdu	12	15	overcast
Chongqing	6	9	rain
Kunming	2	6	rain
Nanjing	19	22	rain
Shanghai	5	9	overcast
Wuhan	4	8	rain
Hangzhou	0	6	rain
Taipei	-12	-2	cloudy
Guangzhou	14	21	overcast
Hong Kong	18	20	overcast

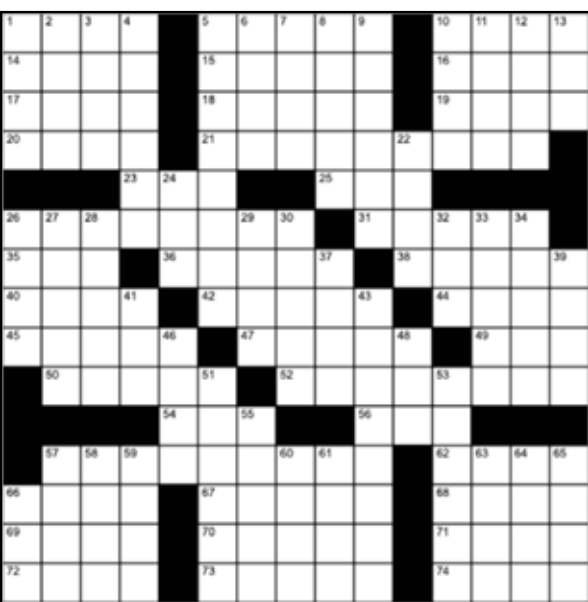
WORLD

Moscow	-9	-12	overcast
Frankfurt	0	3	overcast
Paris	0	6	overcast
London	2	4	overcast
New York	-7	7	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Web locale; 5- Curt; 10- Chinese dynasty; 14- Masked critter; 15- Grinder; 16- Impression; 17- Black cuckoos; 18- Manila hemp plant; 19- Actress Diana; 20- ___ Ha!; 21- 1968 Diana Ross & the Supremes hit; 23- Set; 25- Stutz contemporary; 26- Back-and-forth; 31- Snow conveyances; 35- Takes too much; 36- ___ having fun yet?; 38- Challenges; 40- Civil disturbance; 42- Gossipmonger; 44- Story; 45- Adjusted pitch; 47- Cessation; 49- Russian space station; 50- Donnybrook; 52- Variety of turnip; 54- Fast flier; 56- Andean tuber; 57- Rigidly austere; 62- Like some excuses; 66- Tackle box item; 67- Sports area; 68- Construction beam; 69- Delighted; 70- Strained; 71- Large wading bird; 72- Old cloth measures; 73- Rival of Helena; 74- Walking stick;

DOWN 1- Sign of healing; 2- New Rochelle college; 3- Labor; 4- Banner; 5- Very young children; 6- Rail rider; 7- Norwegian saint; 8- One on track?; 9- Vestiges; 10- Calf-length skirt; 11- Graven image; 12- Square; 13- Beetle juice?; 22- Grasp; 24- Writer LeShan; 26- Legal wrong; 27- Intense hatred; 28- In unison; 29- Film spool; 30- Holder; 32- Chow down; 33- Stage play; 34- Baseball commissioner Bud; 37- Famous last words; 39- Lab fluids; 41- ___ Aviv; 43- Motorcade; 46- Lucie's father; 48- Lobbying org.; 51- Fancy home; 53- European sea; 55- Gogol's "___ Bulba"; 57- Haul; 58- Orsk's river; 59- Cincinnati team; 60- Barber's call; 61- Arrow poison; 63- "Dancing Queen" quartet; 64- Chief; 65- Scottish Gaelic; 66- Bigger than med.;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply – Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone – Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity – Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	



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FOR RENT
Taipa Village **HKD 11,500/mth**
Ref: 2012 1001 900 ft² 2 bed 1 bath

Rain Dance Property
"We dance until it's SOLD!"
Hellene Gardens **HKD 7,680,000**
Ref: 2109 6001 1,663 ft² 3 bed 2 bath 1 car

FASHION

KENZO RETURNS TO JAPANESE ROOTS IN HISTORY-MAKING MOMENT

THOMAS ADAMSON, PARIS

It was a fashion history-making moment in Paris for Kenzo yesterday [Macau time] as it unveiled the debut for its first Japanese designer since house founder Kenzo Takada.

Nigo, 51, thus becomes only the second Asian designer at the head of a European high fashion label, alongside Bally's Filipino-American Rhuigi Villaseñor. His appointment represents a milestone as the luxury industry wrestles more broadly with questions over racism and diversity.

The show venue of Galerie Vivienne underlined the historic importance of the debut collection, teasing out parallels between the Nigo and Takada. Both are Japanese, both studied at the same Tokyo fashion college decades apart, both have an East-meets-West artistic vision and are considered fashion code breakers. The arcade is the very location where Takada held his inaugural fashion show in 1970.

Nigo's close friend Pharrell Williams and Kanye West applauded



A model wears a creation for the Kenzo fall-winter 22/23 men's collection, in Paris

amid the ancient bookshops alongside an audibly enthusiastic audience after his vibrant creations were revealed.

KENZO'S FULL CIRCLE

Nigo first drew global renown with the streetwear brand A Bathing Ape that he began in 1993. Several decades later at the helm of one of LVMH luxury giant's biggest labels Kenzo, those vibrant

colors and streetwise prints were evident in creative fusion with some traditional Kenzo themes such the red poppy print.

Both designers, the house said, had "an understanding of the synthesis between Japanese and Western wardrobe traditions." Nigo is "envisioning it as a tunnel toward the future and beyond the borders of fashion."

Thus, exaggeratedly oversized

berets mixed with clashing-color prints on silk, standout loose wool coats in maize, printed silk neck scarves, chunky sheeny leather loafers, and high-waisted chino pants. Stripes followed checks, tassels, straps and gold-buckled belts. There were even a series of finely tailored sartorial preppy looks with loose proportions, one of which nicely evoked the cross-over styles of Japanese clothing.

Nigo went all out, sending myriad styles and silhouettes — as well as men and women's designs — down this unusual runway. Sheer vibrancy was the one unifying theme.

WOORYOUNGMI GOES TO 1920s MOSCOW

Moscow's glittering St. Basil's cathedral seeded the colors and styles for menswear brand Wooryoungmi on Sunday to produce a collection that glistened with jewel tones of pinks, greens, blues and oranges.

The novel "A Gentleman in Moscow" by Amor Towles was what the South Korean brand said inspired its Russian musing —

with references to the ornate city and its famous churches peppering the show.

Scarves with frontal fastenings seemed to be the brand's take on ecclesiastical headwear, while black patent statement boots that sported a chunky sole were a hip way of managing Russia's famed winter snow.

The best moment? When an unexpected decorated strap — evoking the military — appeared out of a beautiful, tailored minimalist bronze wool coat. It was subtle yet effective.

SACAI'S BOOTS

Gargantuan statement boots made from puffer jacket material were the leitmotif of Sacai's show by Chitose Abe.

With hoops, zippers, laces, ribbing and toggles, the original footwear looked ready for a Moon landing, laying out a fashion forward aesthetic for the fall-winter season.

Elsewhere, an artistic collaboration with Japanese-born, New York-dwelling artist Madsaki produced some food for thought in the form of large spray paint prints and embroideries across sweatshirts and the back of jackets.

"Sheeple Zombies and Kool-Aid," it read, referencing how people following the trends are unable to think independently. MDT/AP

AD

合夥人 PARTNERS:
官樂怡 Rui José da Cunha*
山度士 Álvaro Rodrigues*
馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata*
趙魯 Zhao Lu*
馬傑安 João Nogueira Marques
大律師 ASSOCIATES:
高文軒 Adelino Correia*
羅善齡 Zelina Rodrigues*
白秀蘭 Susana Batalha
馬潔冰 Maria João Marques
陶義德 António Isó de Azeredo
白穎怡 Iclia Berenguel
冼玲鳳 Mariana Afonso Esteves
馬秀文 Sofia Mendes Martins
飛嘉華 Carlos dos Santos Ferreira*
杜力信 Nelson de Azevedo
宋哲言 João Gonçalves Assunção
莫永誠 Rui Velez de Moura
安東尼 António Manuel dos Santos
巴慧雅 Vera Bastos
歐文傑 Miguel Evaristo
陳芷喬 Joana Chan
顏曉蓉 Teresa Xiaorong Yan
諾瑪莉 Maria Noras
康靜雅 Viviana Hong
梁淑嵐 Ana Leon
黃瀚賢 Frederico Vong
實習律師 TRAINEE LAWYERS:
張偉鴻 Cheong Wai Hong
陳健雄 Eurico Chan
吳達鋒 Ng Teng Fong
戴博晴 Tai Pok Cheng
吳佩愉 Ng Pui U
法律專家 JURISTS:
羅成軒 José J. Rodrigues
斐彥德 Gonçalo Figueiredo
潘卡莉 Candice Pun
陳子健 Kimi Chan
伍福賢 Domingos Ng
劉慧敏 Amanda Liu
楊詩婷 Si Teng leong



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TENNIS

Go Canada: Auger-Aliassime joins Shapovalov in quarterfinals

BRUCE MATTHEWS,
MELBOURNE

FELIX Auger-Aliassime and Denis Shapovalov are enjoying quite a run in the Australian sun.

For the first time, two Canadian men have reached the Australian Open quarterfinals.

Auger-Aliassime wore down 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic 2-6, 7-6 (7), 6-2, 7-6 (4) yesterday to join Shapovalov in the last eight.

"I lost three times to Marin. He's going to come out with his best level and make me earn my win and I'm happy to get through, particularly the way I did it," the 21-year-old, No. 9-seeded Auger-Aliassime said. "The sun here in Australia hits you pretty hard (but) I feel good."

The Canadians tuned up for the Australian Open by winning the ATP Cup in Sydney earlier this month, the pair winning their singles matches to defeat Spain in final.

The 22-year-old Shapovalov will play 20-time major winner Rafael Nadal in the quarterfinals today in the top half of the men's bracket. Auger-Aliassime will play U.S. Open champion Daniil Medvedev on Wednesday.

WHERE IS PENG SHUAI?

Tennis great Martina Navratilova and French player Nicolas Mahut have joined the criticism



Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada autographs a flag after defeating Marin Cilic of Croatia

of Australian Open organizers following a crackdown on activists wearing T-shirts and unfurling banners at the tournament to support Chinese player Peng Shuai.

Mahut said the order for spectators to remove the banners and T-shirts came as Melbourne Park carries signage for 1573, a Chinese distillery.

"What's going on!?" What lack of courage! What if you did not have Chinese sponsors #1573. beyond disappointed" Mahut posted on social media.

The Chinese government has been accused of "disappearing" tennis player Peng Shuai after she made a sexual assault allegation late last year against a close ally of President Xi Jinping – an accusation which she recently denied in the Chinese media.

The WTA, which runs the wo-

men's tennis tour, has responded by saying it won't play any tournaments in China this year.

Navratilova, a three-time Australian Open singles champion, added her voice to those condemning the censorship when she tweeted: "That's just pathetic. The @wta stands pretty much alone on this!!!"

Mahut, who was seeded seventh in the Australian Open men's doubles competition with compatriot Fabrice Martin, and Navratilova were outraged by footage screened on Sunday of security and police requesting a fan remove a shirt which featured an image of Peng on the front and "Where is Peng Shuai?" on the back.

Tennis Australia responded initially by stating that such attire breached its rule on "political messaging."

In a further response yesterday to the social media backlash, Tennis Australia said it understood "people have strongly held personal and political views on a range of issues."

"Peng Shuai's safety is our primary concern. We continue to work with the WTA and the global tennis community to do everything we can to ensure her well-being," the statement said. "Our work is ongoing and through the appropriate channels."

"To ensure that the Australian Open remains a welcoming, safe and inclusive event for everyone, we have a longstanding policy of not allowing banners, signs or clothing that are commercial or political."

After advancing to the quarterfinals, veteran French player Alize Cornet said "I think that everybody should, like, be able to manifest their support to Peng Shuai." Asked about the issue at a daily briefing in Beijing yesterday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said China was "always opposed to the politicization of sports."

"Such actions are unpopular and will never succeed," Zhao said.

FLYING THE FLAG

Iran has its first female winner in a Grand Slam tournament with Meshkatolzahra Safi's advance in the Australian Open girls singles event.

Safi emphasized the message to "don't give up on your dreams"

after beating local qualifier Anja Nayar to set up a second-round match against eighth-seed Sofia Costoulas of Belgium.

Inspired by watching Rafael Nadal on television, Safi is determined to forge a path for others to follow in Iran where soccer is the major sporting passion.

Safi started playing through the ITF program Junior Tennis Initiative and won six of seven finals during 12 tournaments last year.

"I really had tough times. Playing professional tennis in my country is really hard. I had a really tough time playing tournaments, I couldn't get visas, I didn't have sponsors a lot of times. I didn't have a chance to get a lot of points because I couldn't play tournaments," she said.

"In my country, if you ask which sport you like, they say football. I was watching (Nadal) with my mother, we were curious, is there any tennis in Iran? We can just try."

Safi wears the traditional head covering and long pants which is difficult with the searing temperatures on Melbourne Park's hard courts.

"I like the sun, but not this much. I'm used to this hijab and this covering. I've been playing with this since I was nine. Today was really, really difficult ... but I'm used to it (the hijab) and it doesn't bother me," she said.

The 17-year-old Safi, who's ranked 74 in juniors, has a goal to play all four Grand Slam junior events this year. The next step is to get a visa for the French Open to continue to boost her ranking for the main singles draws.

"I just really want to say don't give up on your dreams. When I start my journey, everyone in Iran was saying this is impossible, you cannot do that. I just kept pushing. Believe in your dreams," she said.

MDT/AP

FOOTBALL

Missed penalty, injury and burglary on same day for Benzema

A missed penalty kick. An injury. A burglary.

It wasn't the type of day Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema had hoped for.

Benzema had a tough day on the field yesterday [Macau time] then came back home to realize his house had been burglarized while he was away.

Police told Spanish media yesterday they were investigating the incident that took place at Benzema's house while he was playing a Spanish league game with Madrid at the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium.

Police said no one was at the player's home when it was burglarized. They did



not give any detail about what was taken.

Benzema had already had his house burglarized during a game in 2019. Si-

milar incidents happened involving other players in Spain and other European countries in the past.

Benzema has been one

of Madrid's top players this season, leading the team with 24 goals. He is the Spanish league's top scorer with 17 goals, five more than any other player. His partnership with Vinícius Júnior has worked well in attack, and the duo has been red-hot from the start.

But Benzema endured an unusually tough day Sunday as Madrid was held by Elche to a 2-2 home draw, missing a chance to increase its lead over Sevilla at the top of the standings. It is four points ahead after 22 matches.

His struggles began with a bad miss with only the goalkeeper to beat inside

the area, a position from where he rarely fails to score. Then moments later he couldn't capitalize on a penalty kick, sending his shot from the spot way over the crossbar for his first penalty miss with the Spanish club.

The injury came early in the second half, when he apparently pulled a muscle. He asked to be substituted after feeling some discomfort, and grabbed the back of his left leg as he walked into the changing room to be evaluated more closely.

Benzema was expected to undergo further tests Monday so team doctors could determine the extent

of the injury. He will have extra time to recover during the international break, as Madrid's next match isn't until February.

The 34-year-old Benzema had been rested during a Copa del Rey match against Elche last week, when Madrid won in extra time to advance to the quarterfinals.

Last year, Benzema was given a one-year suspended jail sentence and a fine of 75,000 euros (then \$84,000) after he was found guilty of being involved in a 2015 attempt to blackmail France teammate Mathieu Valbuena in a sex-tape case.

MDT/AP

OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

EU PARLIAMENT TOO BIG FOR ITS BOOTS

Some in the European Parliament are clearly too big for their breeches.

Pointing their fingers at China's Hong Kong, they have cajoled the EP into adopting a resolution on Thursday condemning what they allege is the "deterioration of human rights" in the Chinese territory and "violations of fundamental freedoms". It is the second resolution of the kind since July last year.

They also urged the EU Council to introduce targeted sanctions against Hong Kong and Chinese mainland officials and have even urged the Chinese authorities to repeal the National Security Law for Hong Kong.

Do they believe that those officials in the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong who are responsible for bringing to an end the chaos in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region should be punished? What about the rioters who trashed public property and assaulted police officers and even innocent residents in Hong Kong in 2019?

Have these EU politicians done anything to urge the EP to condemn the actions of those who plunged Hong Kong into chaos in 2019? If they are truly concerned about the rights and interests of the people in Hong Kong, they should condemn the organizers and perpetrators of the violent unrest in Hong Kong that pushed the SAR to the brink of the abyss.

They have no qualms about imperiously urging the Chinese mainland leadership to repeal the National Security Law. Who do they think they are?

Hong Kong is China's territory and China's internal affair. The National People's Congress has the right to adopt such a law, whose implementation has helped restore social order in the HK-SAR and guaranteed that patriots administer the special administration region.

If these MEPs are really concerned about the well-being of residents in the SAR, they should support what the central authorities have done to restore law and order in Hong Kong.

It is obvious that some MEPs are telling lies when they say that they are concerned about freedom and democracy in Hong Kong. They either harbor malice toward China and hope to see social chaos in Hong Kong and even in the Chinese mainland or they just want to act as pawns in the strategy of the United States to contain the rise of China by pulling the wool over people's eyes.

However, they should remind themselves of the fact that they are ruining bilateral EU-China relations. Despite China overtaking the US to be the largest trade partner of the EU in 2020, they are blocking the signing of an investment treaty between China and the EU.

What they are doing is also detrimental to the peace and development of the world.

UAE BANS FLYING OF RECREATIONAL DRONES AFTER FATAL ATTACK

The United Arab Emirates has banned the flying of drones in the country for recreation after Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed a fatal drone attack on an oil facility and major airport in the country.

As of Saturday, drone hobbyists and other operators of light electric sports aircraft face "legal liabilities" if caught flying the objects, the Interior Ministry said, adding it may grant exemptions to businesses seeking to film.

A rare drone and missile strike on the capital of Abu Dhabi blew up several fuel tankers and killed three people last week.

The Houthis, who hold Yemen's capital and have fought a bloody, yearslong war with a Saudi-led military coalition that includes the UAE, claimed the assault. While the UAE has largely withdrawn troops from the stalemated conflict, the country continues to be a major player and support local militias on the ground.

The UAE said the Houthis targeted the country with bomb-laden drones and cruise and ballistic missiles, adding the country had intercepted some of the projectiles. In response to the strike, the Saudi-led coalition has escalated attacks on the rebel-held parts of Yemen in the last week.

THE
BUZZ

UK TO PROBE LAWMAKER'S CLAIM SHE WAS FIRED OVER MUSLIM FAITH

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

BRITISH Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday ordered an investigation into a Conservative lawmaker's claim that she was fired from a government job in part because of her Muslim faith — the latest allegation of wrongdoing that is shaking the Conservative government and Johnson's grip on power.

Former Transport Minister Nusrat Ghani says that when she was demoted in 2020, a government whip said her "Muslimness" was "making colleagues uncomfortable." She told the Sunday Times that she was told "there were concerns 'that I wasn't loyal to the party as I didn't do enough to defend the party against Islamophobia allegations.'"

Chief Whip Mark Spencer identified himself as the person who spoke to Ghani in 2020, but called her allegation "completely false."

Johnson's office said yesterday that the prime minister had asked government officials "to establish the facts about what happened." It said Johnson "takes these claims very seriously."

Ghani was elected to Parliament in 2015 — the Conservatives' first female Muslim lawmaker — and was made a junior minister in 2018. At the time her boss, then Transport Secretary Chris Grayling, said it was proof the Conservatives "were a party of opportunity." But some have accused the party of failing to stamp out anti-Muslim prejudice under Johnson, who in 2018 compared women



An official file portrait of Conservative lawmaker Nusrat Ghani

who wear face-covering veils to "letter boxes."

Two senior Cabinet ministers, Health Secretary Sajid Javid and Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi, spoke in support of Ghani and said her claims must be investigated.

Ghani says that when she was demoted, a gov't whip said her 'Muslimness' was 'making colleagues uncomfortable'

"It takes a lot of bravery for someone to stand up and say: 'My religion was taken into consideration when I was being assessed for what I do as a job,'" Zahawi said. "That should never happen and there is no room for it."

Ghani's claim has deepened the rifts roiling Johnson's governing party, which is being wracked by allegations about lockdown-breaching parties in the prime minister's office while Britain was under coronavirus restrictions.

The "partygate" allegations have infuriated many in Britain, who were

barred from meeting up with friends and family for months in 2020 and 2021 to curb the spread of COVID-19. They are being investigated by a senior civil servant, Sue Gray, whose report, expected this week, will be a pivotal moment for the prime minister.

Ghani's allegation comes after another Conservative legislator, William Wragg, accused party whips of intimidating and blackmailing members of Parliament to ensure they supported the government. Wragg says he is meeting with police this week to discuss his claims.

A handful of Conservative lawmakers have called for Johnson to resign. If Gray's report is highly critical, more may be emboldened to call for a no-confidence vote in Johnson that could result in his ouster.

Even if he makes it through the week, many Conservatives have decided Johnson's days in office are numbered, and weakness at the top is letting party divisions spill into the open. **MDT/AP**



Norway The Taliban and western diplomats have begun their first official talks in Europe since they took over control of Afghanistan in August. The closed-door meetings were taking place at a hotel in the snow-capped mountains above Oslo. Taliban representatives will be certain to press their demand that nearly \$10 billion frozen by the United States and other Western countries be released as Afghanistan faces a precarious humanitarian situation.



UK WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange yesterday won the first stage of his effort to overturn a U.K. ruling that opened the door for his extradition to U.S. to stand trial on espionage charges. The High Court in London gave Assange permission to appeal the case to the U.K. Supreme Court. But the Supreme Court must agree to accept the case before it can move forward. "Make no mistake, we won today in court," Assange's fiancée, Stella Moris, said.

Burkina Faso's President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré is being held by mutinous soldiers, two of the rebellious soldiers told AP by phone yesterday. They did not say where Kaboré is being held, but said he is in a safe place. Gunshots were heard late Sunday night near the president's residence and in the early hours of Monday a battle took place at the presidential palace while a helicopter flew overhead.



Cameroon A fire erupted at a popular nightclub in the Cameroon capital of Yaounde, setting off explosions that killed at least 17 people and seriously injured seven others, government officials said yesterday [Macau time]. The tragedy comes as the central African country hosts thousands of soccer players, fans and officials from across the continent for the month-long African Cup of Nations soccer tournament.