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AP PHOTO



Japan has decided to divert some of its gas reserves to Europe amid growing concern over possible disruptions of supplies due to the Ukraine crisis. Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Koichi Hagiuda said yesterday. The decision was made at the request of the United States and European Union and is intended to help European countries cope with uncertainties about gas supplies given fears of a possible Russian incursion into Ukraine.

AP PHOTO



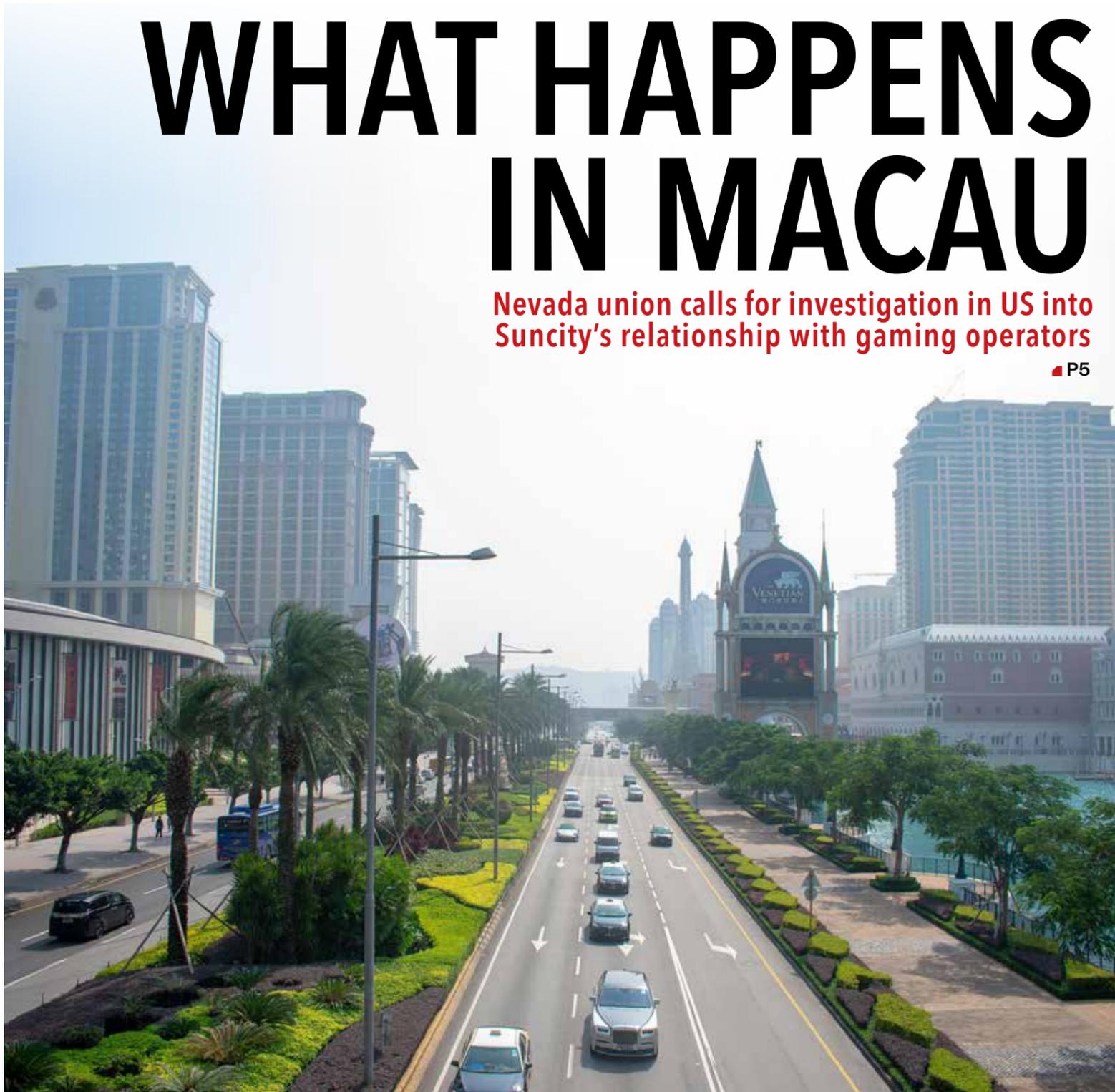
New Zealand Entrepreneur Elon Musk is helping reconnect Tonga to the internet after a volcanic eruption and tsunami cut off the South Pacific nation more than three weeks ago, according to officials, while repairs on an undersea cable are proving more difficult than first thought. The tsunami severed the sole fiber-optic cable that connects Tonga to the rest of the world and most people remain without reliable connections.

AP PHOTO



Iran unveiled a new missile yesterday with a reported range that would allow it to reach both U.S. bases in the region as well as targets inside its archfoe Israel. State TV reported that the missile uses solid fuel and has a range of 1,450 kilometers. It is called the Khaibar-buster, a reference to a Jewish castle overrun by Muslim warriors in the early days of Islam.

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AP PHOTO



BEIJING DIARY

TESTING POSITIVE AT THE NO-COVID OLYMPICS

JOHN LEICESTER, BEIJING

THE phone call comes in the early afternoon, six hours or so after the mandatory morning test. The number is immediately recognizable because it's so strange: a U.S. dialing code when the Chinese health official on the line is, in fact, calling from Beijing and bearing bad news.

"Sorry to bother," he says.

Uh-oh.

"Your test this morning was positive."

Sigh.

Again?

Like laundering with gasoline or hiking naked, traveling three weeks after a bout of COVID-19 to cover the Winter Olympics in China for The Associated Press is proving to have been not the brightest of ideas. Because here the coronavirus is Public Enemy No. 1 — hunted, tracked, isolated and zapped with no-nonsense rigor and militaristic zeal.

Lurking at the back of my throat are infinitesimal remnants of virus DNA that hitched along for the ride, and which the Olympic tes-

ters in top-to-toe hazmat suits are annoyingly adept at digging out with their cotton swabs.

"Say 'Ahhh,'" they say.

And that's how I ended up back here, in Isolation Room 2. For the second time in four days.

The cubicle, part of a Lego-like clump of nondescript pre-fabs outside the main Olympic press center, is roughly the size of a double bed but less welcoming.

There's a small electric heater to take the sting out of the cold seeping through the thin white metal walls. I switch it on.

There is a table and a chair. I shove them next to the electric socket, so I can power up my laptop and stay connected via wifi to the Olympic world that I can see, but am temporarily no longer welcome in, through two slit windows in the door.

Some passersby wave. Most don't even notice the person inside, confined until the result of another test determines his fate.

A positive could mean a swift transfer by ambulance to an isolation "hotel" for an indefinite stay. That's an unappetizing prospect

given the complaints about lack of comfort and inedible food from quarantined athletes who've endured them. There were 32 athletes in isolation as of Tuesday this week, with 50 others having been discharged.

The ambulance is parked outside the cubicle, ready to go.

So all fingers and toes are crossed for a negative that would trigger a return to the relative freedom of the "Closed Loop." That touchy-feely moniker is actually a ring-fence of stringent restrictions sealing off the Winter Games — behind high walls, police patrols and thickets of security cameras — from the rest of China and its people who, understandably, want potential virus-carriers kept firmly at bay.

In France, where I'm based, the coronavirus no longer inspires the same levels of fear for many that it did in the pandemic's early days. The vast majority of French adults are vaccinated. There have been multiple waves, the most recent being the fast-spreading omicron variant. It swept through so many homes that more people

are feeling that the worst may now be behind them. Even the kiss to both cheeks, the traditional French greeting that had become repellent to many, has made a comeback of sorts. France has lost more than 133,000 lives to the virus and counted more than 20 million infections.

Vaccination rates are high in China, too. But the ruling Communist Party has pursued a "zero-tolerance" strategy to keep COVID-19 infections low since cases overwhelmed hospitals in the pandemic's initial epicenter, the Chinese city of Wuhan. That means most people in China have never been exposed to the virus. And they don't want Olympic visitors to endanger them.

Popping my masked face briefly out of the cubicle, I ask a passing police officer if he would kindly snap a photo of me inside. He reels back when he sees the blue sign marked "Isolation Room 2" by the door. Stupid of me, really. The words spoken that same morning by Dr. Brian McCloskey, who heads an Olympic panel of medical experts overseeing the games' COVID-19 protocols, should have given me pause.

"We never relax about coronavirus," he said at a press conference.

Only her eyes visible in a full-body hazmat suit, a tester enters the cubicle to take an oral swab. She spreads a yellow plastic bag on the floor. Swab taken, she in-

serts the cotton bud with my sample into a tube for later testing. The sealed tube goes into a sealed plastic bag marked "BIOHAZARD." The bag goes into a screw-top plastic canister. It then goes into a double-clamped cooler box.

The extraneous remnants of the swab stick and the wrapping it came in go into the yellow bag. She sprays it 16 times with disinfectant and scrunches it up into a tight ball that she seals with a plastic tie. It then goes into another plastic bag also sprayed, eight times, that she compresses and ties again.

At the Beijing Olympics, the key to freedom is a number: 35. That's the organizers' positive-negative threshold. The number is a measure of how closely their testing machines have to hone in on a sample before detecting virus particles. A reading below 35 triggers a positive, requiring quarantine in an isolation facility.

Since landing, I've yo-yoed above and below the red line, negative in some tests, positive in others and, at least once, just "uncertain." Hence the two spells in the isolation chamber and others in my hotel room, waiting for results of follow-ups.

I'm far from alone. By Day 5, there have been more than 1 million tests, and 398 confirmed positives.

McCloskey says medical literature has documented cases of people testing positive as long as 109 days after an infection. His medical panel's job is to distinguish such cases from people who are newly infected and could contaminate others. They look at their patterns of tests over days or weeks, to determine whether the mouth swabs have just picked up dead remnants of virus from a previous infection or spotted a new and active case.

My phone rings again. The testing official with the strange number is on the line.

Negative, he says. Free to go.

He saved the best news for last.

To cheer me up after my in-and-out of isolation first days, he'd called my hotel to ask whether it would be possible to cook me a special dinner.

Spicy pork with scallions, and dumplings, he announced proudly. I'd previously told him when we had had a mutual gripe about food at the Olympics that they were my favorite Chinese dishes.

They were delivered to my room that night. The man wore protective overalls and visor. But my faith in humanity was restored. **MDT/AP**

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SPORTS

Macao International 10K budgeted at MOP8 million

LYNZY VALLES

THIS year's Macao International 10K will have a budget of MOP8 million, title sponsored by Sands China.

As reported by the Times earlier this week and confirmed in a press conference yesterday, the 10-kilometer run will be held March 20.

In accordance with anti-pandemic measures, all participants must have received two doses of Covid-19 vaccine at least 14 days prior the race.

Participants are also required to provide a valid negative Covid-19 test result before being permitted to take part in the race.

Registration for the 10K run event will begin February 12, while Fun Run registrations will start the following day (February 13): 6,000 places are available for the 10K race and 4,000 for the Fun Run.



The Fun Run race will start at 7 a.m. and the 10K race at 7:30 a.m. at the Sai Van Lake Square. The 10K course runs along Avenida Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, Kun Iam Ecumenical Centre and Sai Van Bridge, and finishes inside the Olympic Sport Centre Stadium.

This is the second straight year that the gaming operator has sponsored the sports competition.

As part of its support for the run, Sands China will bring its signature "Streetmosphere" performers to the course to entertain and cheer on the runners.

This year, the gaming operator will again sponsor the "FUNkiest Costume Award" to encourage more runners to participate in the races.

Sands China also plans to organize more than 200 team members to participate in the both the 10K and the Fun Run.

This will be the city's third major sports event in 2022 following the Macao International Regatta and the World Table Tennis Champions Macao 2021 China Stars held in January.

Sports tourism is one of the major policies mentioned in the Policy Address of 2021, in which the Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng announced that the government was aiming to hold one major international sports event in Macau in each month for the year. As agreed with the six gaming concessionaires, each will host or title sponsor two events per year.

BNU RECORDS 6.4% INCREASE IN PROFIT

Banco Nacional Ultramarino (BNU) has recorded a profit of MOP447.4 million in 2021, a 6.4% increase in revenue from 2020, as published in the Official Gazette. In 2020 when the pandemic started, profits amounted to MOP420.3 million in 2020, a significant plunge of 41.7% compared to 2019, when the bank closed the year with profits of MOP721.9 million. Following the results last year, BNU explained the decline as being due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation, which had dragged down the interest rates on loans and led to a significant fall in credit card transactions, particularly by tourists.

BOC REVENUES REACH MOP6B IN 2021

The Bank of China-Macau (BOC) recorded a profit last year of some MOP6 billion, an official financial report published yesterday at the Official Gazette shows. The figure represents a 7.5% increase from the revenues recorded last year. In 2021, the Bank of China (BOC), the parent company of Bank of China-Macau has received the green light from the authorities in mainland China and the Macau SAR to open a subsidiary in Macau. The project involves the investment of MOP13 billion. The bank explained that this investment is "a prominent move which will serve the national strategy, support the construction of the Greater Bay Area, and satisfy the needs of the Macau SAR in developing financial services with special characteristics."

UM PROFESSOR ELECTED INT'L STEM AMBASSADOR

Professor Tam Kam Weng in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Faculty of Science and Technology (FST), University of Macau (UM), has been elected as International STEM Ambassador of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE). Tam is the only scholar from Macau to receive this honor this year, according to a statement issued by the UM. In this position, he will assist IEEE in researching and formulating policies for international STEM education as well as hosting STEM training activities and competitions.

Pereira Coutinho questions gov't on Islands Hospital laws and regulations

RENATO MARQUES

LAWMAKER José Pereira Coutinho has put questions to the government concerning the laws and regulations to govern the Islands Hospital Complex, which the government has said will be entering into operation early next year.

In a written inquiry delivered at the Legislative

Assembly yesterday, the lawmaker has questioned the government about the status of different items of legislation regulating the operation of the hospital, specifically the public-private management model, adopted by the government.

According to Coutinho, many aspects of the legislation need to be discussed and clarified. Given

the government's announcement that the facility's construction would be completed by the end of this year, he urged the government to proceed as quickly as possible with the discussion of the legal matters.

Pereira Coutinho also wants to know how the hospital's operations and management will be supervised and how the go-

vernment plans to ensure that locals will have priority access to jobs at the new facility, which would be under the management of the Peking Union Medical College Hospital.

Following a meeting of the Islands Community Service Consultative Council on Tuesday, a member of the council reported the Health Bureau's decision that during the

first phase, the hospital would have limited capacity and would not be able to provide various services including emergency services at night. According to the council, the limited capacity of the hospital would be a direct result of the lack of medical and other staff.

The government had already announced on previous occasions that the opening of the hospital would be phased. However, it revealed neither which services would be provided nor the timetable for the different phases of the opening.

FIRST TORCH OF BEIJING WINTER GAMES ON DISPLAY AT WYNN

To promote the shared spirit of sportsmanship and the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games in Macau, Wynn has welcomed the first torch of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games, named "Flying", which will be exhibited in the lobby of Wynn Macau until February 20.

This is the first such official exhibition in China and the inaugural event in a series of activities taking place in Macau this year for the "Olympic Expo."

In a press conference



yesterday regarding the "Exhibition of The First Torch of The Beijing 2022

Olympic Winter Games," president and executive director of Wynn Resorts

(Macau), Linda Chen, said that Wynn will exhibit the torch in the lobby of Wynn Macau for 12 consecutive days, with hopes that it would enable residents "to share in the achievements of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games, they can experience the charisma and glory of the Olympics."

The official added that "Flying" is an important symbol which embodies the concept of the Beijing Winter Olympics and Chinese culture, as well as being a "concentrated ex-

pression of the vision and spirit of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games."

The torch lighting ceremony for the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games was held at the historic site of the ancient Olympic Games. The flame was then carried to Beijing by the first Chinese torchbearer for the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Torch Relay, Li Jiajun: one of China's best short track speed skaters and the first Chinese male athlete to win a medal at the Winter Olympics. LV

CRIME

CROUPIER CAUGHT STEALING HKD161,000 IN CASINO CHIPS

RENATO MARQUES

A 45-year-old man working as a croupier has been detected stealing gaming chips at a casino in Cotai where he worked, the Judiciary Police (PJ) reported yesterday at the regular joint police forces press conference.

According to the PJ, the man was caught in an operation organized by the PJ after the casino reported to the police that they suspected the man of the crime.

In the initial report, the casino said that they had reason to believe that the worker had been stealing chips while working. According to the casino's calculations, he had stolen from the casino on least 17 occasions between December 13 and January 17.

The casino estimated the loss to be at least HKD161,000 in gaming chips.

Surveillance footage handed to the PJ at the time of the report shows the man pocketing a chip from his Baccarat table and subsequently, during his break, handing it to his wife in a public area of the casino.

The wife is then seen going to the casino cage to cash in the chip.

The PJ organized an operation in collaboration with the casino, aiming to catch the suspect in the act. At 8 a.m. on February 6 he was finally caught.

The PJ found that he was using adhesive tape on the palm of one of

RENATO MARQUES



his hands, which he used to palm the chips while handling them during games. He then would store the chips until he was able to pass them to the wife who would then exchange them for cash.

At the time he was arrested it was also found that in his personal employee's storage locker he had

two rolls of adhesive tape, a pair of scissors, and one chip with the face value of HKD10,000.

Later that day in a search of his home, the PJ also arrested his wife.

On being questioned by the police, she denied any involvement with the crime. She only admitted to having on a few occasions ex-

changed chips for cash, but was unaware that the chips had been stolen.

Nevertheless, the PJ spokesperson said that the force has gathered sufficient proof of the involvement of both suspects in the theft.

According to the same spokesperson, the man had worked as a

croupier in the casino for over eight years.

Both suspects were referred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on February 7 where the man has been charged with breach of trust and the wife for assisting him in the crime.

RECEPTIONIST DETAINED FOR THEFT OF MOP70,000

A 40-year-old local woman, a former receptionist in a Dental Clinic in the NAPE area, has been detained by the PJ and has admitted to having stolen MOP70,000 from the cash register at her workplace.

The woman had been reported by the clinic's owner who noticed the loss of the money after the woman suddenly quit her job.

After reviewing the surveillance camera footage, the PJ searched for the suspect at her place of residence, detaining her on February 7 at around 11 a.m.

She confessed she had committed the crime, explaining that she took the money on three separate occasions in early January this year.

She said that she would use her key to return to the venue after hours, and take the money from the cash register.

She explained her crime by saying that she needed to repay debts contracted in a previous business venture.

She said that she only intended to borrow the cash temporarily. She explained that she thought she could use it to gamble, win more money which she could then use to repay both her debts and her employer. However, she lost all the money at the casino.

The case was referred to the MP on February 8 for further investigation, and for the woman to be charged.

GBA

Guangdong pilot reforms to boost service trade for HK, Macau entrepreneurs



A comprehensive pilot program will be conducted in Guangzhou and Shenzhen to reform and expanding the service industry, according to an action plan for promoting high-quality development of service trade during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025) which was recently announced by the People's Government of Guangdong Province.

The plan emphasizes the need to speed up the industrial standard alignment in the service sector between Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau to facilitate professionals

working on the Chinese mainland.

Investors of all types will be encouraged to do business in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone.

According to the plan, the scale of the service sector will be further enlarged. The total volume of the service trade is projected to equal no less than 4.5 trillion yuan from 2021 to 2025, retaining its position in the top three in the country.

In a move to better advance the development of the Greater Bay Area, the plan sets out to optimize the structure of the service trade, bolster the development of emerging service trades, and ensure that the average annual growth of the emerging service trade and digital trade volume will be no less than 15%.

The plan will also continue to open up the service industry, and improve the policy system for the service trade industry, thereby gradually building an open service system in line with international standards.

In terms of the digital economy and financial services, Guangdong will facilitate the interconnection of mobile payment in the Greater Bay Area and steadily promote financial interconnectivity between Hong Kong and Macau.

Furthermore, it also puts forward that Guangdong will improve cross-boundary RMB business supporting policy system and product service system to enhance GBA's global competitiveness in financial services.

To accelerate the digital transformation of traditional trade, the plan includes the building of a pilot zone for global digital trade in the Greater Bay Area.

With regards to transportation services, it will upgrade airport infrastructure and expand international airway networks. **MDT/NEWSGD**

GAMING

Union calls for US investigation into Suncity's relationship with gaming operators

LYNZY VALLES

LOCAL 501, a U.S.-based union, is calling for a coordinated U.S. federal investigation into the gambling junket operator Suncity Group and its historical relationships with U.S. gaming companies.

According to a statement published yesterday (Macau time), The International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 501 has sent separate letters to the U.S. Justice Department, the U.S. Secretary of State, the U.S. Treasury Department, the White House National Security Council and the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

The union, which represents over 2,000 members working in casinos in Las Vegas, Nevada, highlighted incidents involving Suncity Group and its owner Alvin Chau.

Chau was arrested in Macau in late November for running a cross-



LYLE HASTIE

boundary gambling syndicate and organising illegal Chinese residents to travel to VIP junkets to take part in cross-boundary gambling.

In the statement, the group recalled that in February 2021 (prior to his arrest in Macau), regulators in New South Wales, Australia, cited "information relating to US Government reports that Chau

had links to organized crime."

Local 501 noted that the government had flagged an incident in which local casino officials discovered USD5.6 million in cash stored in a Suncity high-roller room – an event that "set money-laundering alarms ringing" at the casino.

"It is clear that money laundering did occur within that room,"

Australian regulators concluded during public hearings, as cited in a report titled "Inquiry under section 143 of the Casino Control Act 1992 (NSW)," published on February 1, 2021.

Aside from this, the union recalled The Guardian's report that Chau has been "banned from entering Australia due to his alleged criminal links" since October 2020.

"Concerns over Chau's Suncity operations [are a matter of] geopolitical concern for U.S. authorities," the union said. It also recalled that in 2016, testimony from Philippines Senate proceedings revealed that a Chau-controlled Suncity VIP room received tens of millions of dollars stolen in the infamous robbery of USD81 million from the Bangladesh Central Bank account held at the New York Federal Reserve.

In the union's view, "these findings should alarm US officials."

"Multiple U.S.-based casino licensees with overseas operations

have for years collaborated extensively with Chau's Suncity Group to bring high roller gamblers to their properties and accommodate exclusive "Suncity"-branded VIP rooms inside their casinos," Local 501 stated.

Suncity Group has recruited and issued credit to high rollers to gamble in exclusive casino VIP rooms.

Back in December, following the junket mogul's arrest, the Times reported that Public Prosecutions Office (MP) has ordered all notaries in the city to immediately suspend any notary actions or services involving the assets of Alvin Chau and related companies.

Furthermore, according to Local 501, the union is engaging with U.S. federal authorities because "state-run gambling regulators have proven either unwilling or incapable of regulating VIP-junket activity and its interplay with U.S. casino companies operating abroad."

MIECF launches March 31 with online and in-person events

LYNZY VALLES

THE 2022 Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum & Exhibition (MIECF) will be held from March 31 to April 2 with the theme of "Commitment to Green Development, Moving Towards the Dual Carbon Goals" at The Venetian Macao.

The environmental exhibition will focus on topics such as carbon neutrality, green mobility, and technological innovation, MIECF announced in a statement.

Due to travel restrictions and borders remaining closed to non-Chinese residents, the forum will incorporate online and offline features to assist experts, scholars and traders.

Last year, the exhibition was held online in August due to government measures which included restrictions on popular gatherings to slow the spread of Covid-19.

This year, the two major



in-person events will be the "Green Forum" and the "Green Showcase."

This year's "Green Forum" will bring together speakers, representatives from renowned enterprises and policy makers to share their insights, and will highlight the concept of "carbon neutrality." The "Green Showcase," on the other hand, will continue to feature a "Green Mobility Zone" and a "Greenovation Zone" this year. The former will display alternative fuel vehicles and as-

sociated equipment, while the latter will present innovative green technologies including fields such as general and plastic waste reduction.

A series of activities including Green Matching, networking activities, Green Business Co-operation Day and Green Public Day will also be organized to facilitate international co-operation and exchanges in environmental protection and spread the message of environmental protection to society.

MIECF is also set to host a 14-day online business matching service from March 20 to April 2.

This year, MIECF will also serve as a platform for exchange and co-operation between the environmental sectors from mainland China, especially the Pan-Pearl River Delta Region and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and their international counterparts.

This is in a bid to "promote the construction of the Green 'Belt and Road' Initiative and the new 'dual circulation' development paradigm of green economy," according to MIECF.

Hosted by the SAR government, the MIECF is co-organized by the provincial and regional governments in the Pan-Pearl River Delta Region, and coordinated by the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) and the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA).

MACAU TO HOST MOWS FOR THE FIRST TIME

MACAU will host the Annual event of the Masters of Wines and Spirits (MOWS) for the first time, the DFS Group announced in a press statement.

The tenth annual MOWS exhibition will take place at T Galleria by DFS at City of Dreams.

The exhibition that takes place from February to April will feature an exclusive collection of over 100 of the world's rarest and finest wines, spirits, and champagnes from 65 world-renowned distilleries and wineries.

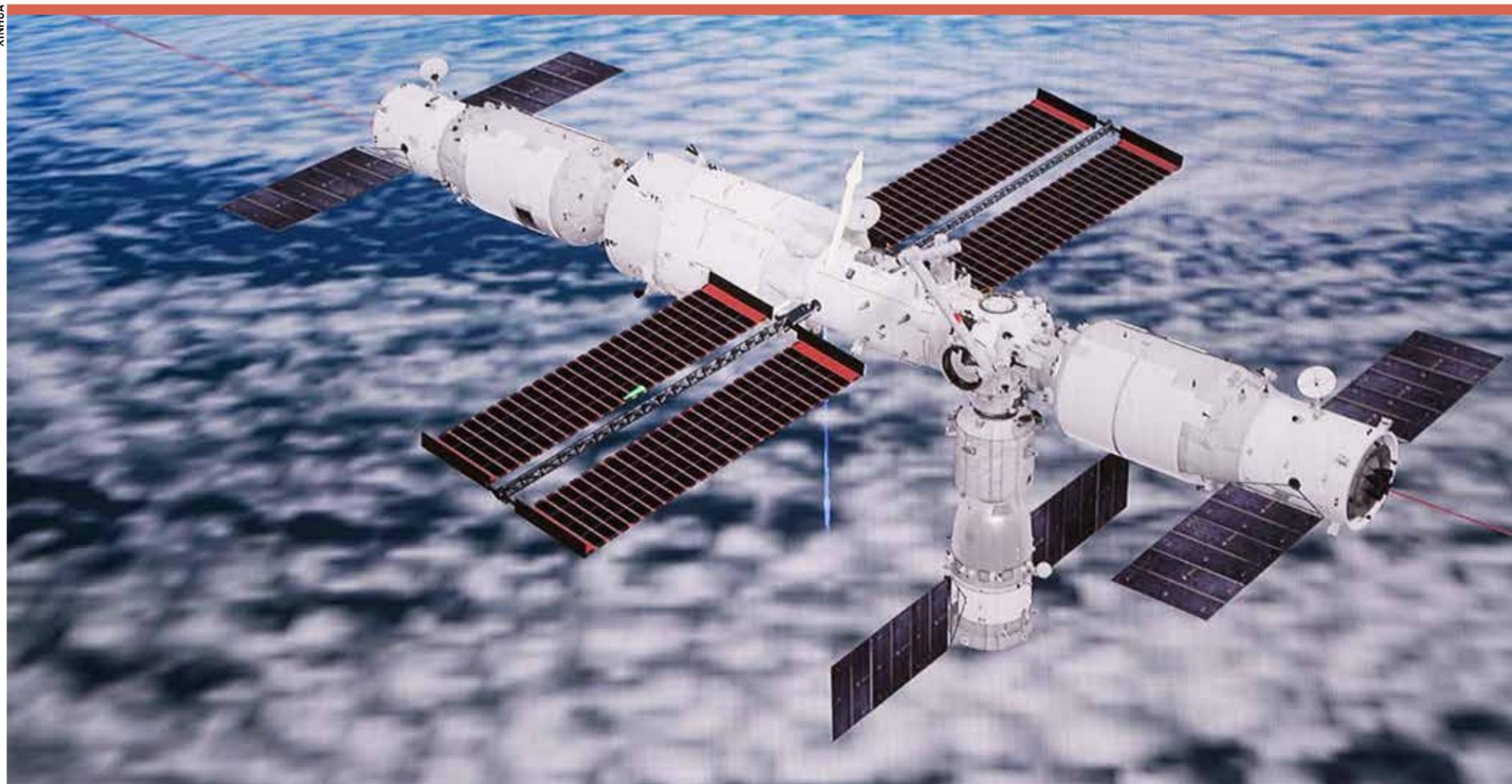
The MOWS pop-up, which will be open to the

public, will feature cognac, champagne, whiskey, and wine display zones, each showcasing unique or exclusive pieces.

In addition, the Masters Bar will remain open throughout March and April, featuring tastings and guest bartenders.

DFS Group's president of merchandising, Christophe Marque said, "We are thrilled to present the tenth edition of our esteemed Masters of Wines and Spirits exhibition, and to introduce City of Dreams Macau as our host location for the first time, reinforcing our commitment to our China customers." **RM**





SPACE

CHINA TO MAKE SIX HUMAN SPACEFLIGHTS, ROCKET'S MAIDEN FLIGHT IN 2022

CHINA will make six manned space flights in 2022 to complete the building of its space station and see the maiden flight of Long March-6A, the country's first carrier rocket powered by a solid and liquid engine.

Ma Tao, deputy director of the Space Department of the China

Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), revealed yesterday China's rocket launch plan at a press conference.

CASC, China's rocket series developer and the leading force of the country's space industry, released the 2021 Blue Book of China Aerospace Science and Technology.

China carried out 55 space launch missions in 2021, with this number ranking first in the world, and its total mass of spacecraft launched reached 191.19 tons, an 85.5 percent year-on-year increase, according to the blue book.

The CASC brought 103 aircraft into space with 48 launches in

2021, said He Yang, director of Beijing Institute of Space Science and Technology Information, at the press conference.

The country's other successful space missions last year included three launches by the Kuaizhou-1A carrier rocket and one launch by the CERES-1 carrier rocket, according to He.

In 2021, the world saw 146 space launches, the highest number since 1957, with 1,846 spacecraft launched into space.

The United States carried out 51 space launch missions in 2021, with the total mass of spacecraft launched reaching 403.34 tons, according to the blue book. XINHUA

Taiwan, Somaliland ties growing despite diplomatic isolation

TAIWAN and Somaliland are expanding economic and political ties despite being two of the world's most diplomatically isolated governments.

Somaliland Foreign Minister Essa Kayd met with Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing-wen yesterday and said his visit to Taipei "signifies our mutual determination and resolve to upscale, expand and deepen our friendship and cooperation to new heights for the mutual benefits of our two countries."

Tsai hailed the relationship as one of her administration's chief diplomatic breakthroughs.

Somaliland broke away from Somalia in 1991 and has no formal diplomatic

relations with any nation.

Self-governing democratic Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, has diplomatic ties with just 14 countries, but maintains robust informal ties with the U.S. and most other major nations. It has formal relations with just one African nation, the kingdom of Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland.

Taiwan opened its representation in the Somaliland capital of Hargeisa in August 2020, with Somaliland opening a representative office in Taipei on Sept. 9 the same year.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian accused Tsai's Democratic Progressive Party

government of "fanning the flames and undermining the independence and integrity of other countries."

"This benefits nobody and will only end up hurting itself," Zhao said at a daily briefing.

China works relentlessly to undermine such diplomatic arrangements, both formal and informal.

A February 2001 agreement to exchange trade offices with Guyana lasted barely 24 hours before Chinese pressure persuaded the the South American country to call off the move. And in December, Nicaragua switched diplomatic relations from Taiwan to China, even turning over the Taiwanese embassy building to Beijing.

Along with its growing diplomatic clout, China often uses its massive economic resources as both an inducement to abandon Taiwan and a cudgel to threaten those who go against its will.

Most recently, China has banned trade with the tiny Baltic state of Lithuania and threatened to retaliate against foreign companies that do business with it.

China withdrew its ambassador to Vilnius and expelled the Lithuanian ambassador to Beijing after Lithuania agreed to allow Taiwan to open a representative office using the name Taiwan, rather than Chinese, Taipei, a term used by

other countries to avoid offending Beijing.

Beijing accuses Lithuania of conspiring with the U.S. in a plot to "contain China."

China also seeks to prevent Taiwan from representing itself in global forums and has refused all contacts with Tsai's government since shortly after she came to power in 2016. Tsai was reelected last year by a large margin to a second four-year term.

Neither Taiwan or Somaliland is recognized by the United Nations, but Kayd said that did not negate its right to an independent foreign policy.

"As a sovereign nation, Somaliland's right to engage in peaceful and friendly fo-

reign relations with all other nations is enshrined in international law," Kayd was quoted as saying by Taiwan's official Central News Agency.

"All coercive or threatening measures to deny such collaboration between international partners not only represent affront to the principle, protocols and norms on which the international order is based, but do little to promote the peace and security that the region and the world require," he was quoted as saying.

Kayd is leading a delegation of ministers and the two sides hailed growing cooperation in agriculture, fisheries, education and energy. MDT/AP

Blinken lands in Australia ahead of Indo-Pacific meeting

SECRETARY of State Antony Blinken and key allies are “voting with their feet” by flying to Australia to focus on challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, Australia’s foreign minister said yesterday, as fears rise of a Russian invasion of Ukraine on the other side of the globe.

Blinken landed in the Australian city of Melbourne yesterday ahead of a meeting with Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne as well as their Indian and Japanese counterparts who form the so-called “Quad.”

It will be the fourth such ministerial-level meeting of the bloc of Indo-Pacific democracies that was created to counter China, and Blinken’s arrival makes him the most senior member of the Biden administration to set foot in Australia.

The visit comes as tensions between Washington and Moscow continue to escalate over Ukraine.

Payne said the gathering sends a message to Beijing that security in the Indo-Pacific remains an important challenge to Washington.

The Quad ministers were “voting with their feet in terms of the priority that they accord to issues” important to the Indo-Pacific, said Payne, who will host the meeting Friday.

Blinken’s trip is designed to reinforce America’s interests in Asia and its intent to push back against increasing Chinese assertiveness in the region. He will also

AP PHOTO



visit Fiji and discuss pressing concerns about North Korea with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts in Hawaii.

While China will top the Quad meeting agenda, U.S. officials say Ukraine and the relationship between Beijing and Moscow will also be a topic for discussion

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian responded to a question about Blinken’s visit with a lengthy attack on American democracy and a defense of China’s contributions to the global order.

“With its so-called democracy having collapsed long ago, the U.S. is forcing other countries to accept the standards of the American democracy, drawing lines with democratic values and piecing together cliques. That is a

complete betrayal of democracy,” Zhao told reporters at a daily briefing.

Zhao said China “seeks peace and development, promotes cooperation, promotes the construction of an equal, open and inclusive security system in the Asia-Pacific region that does not target third countries.”

“We oppose forming exclusive cliques and setting up groups within groups, as well as creating confrontation between camps,” he said.

With the Quad, Blinken is expected to highlight the benefits of Indo-Pacific nations aligning themselves with democracies and democratic values, officials said. “That part of that discussion will relate to the challenges that China poses to those values and to the

rules-based order,” said Daniel Kritenbrink, the top U.S. diplomat for Asia.

Blinken is also expected to address threats posed by a growing partnership between authoritarian Russia and China, particularly after the Sunday meeting in Beijing between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping at the opening of the Winter Olympics.

The U.S. had hoped that the Xi-Putin meeting would have demonstrated Chinese wariness about Russia’s military buildup along Ukraine’s borders. Instead, as China increasingly asserts its determination to reunite the island of Taiwan with the mainland, Xi was largely silent on the matter.

“That meeting should have provided China the opportuni-

ty to encourage Russia to pursue diplomacy and de-escalation in Ukraine. That is what the world expects from responsible powers,” Kritenbrink said. If Russia invades Ukraine and “China looks the other way, it suggests that China is willing to tolerate or tacitly support Russia’s efforts to coerce Ukraine even when they embarrass Beijing, harm European security, and risk global peace and economic stability.”

After a brief stop in Fiji, where he will be the first secretary of state to visit since 1985, Blinken will return to Washington via Hawaii, where he will hold North Korea-focused talks with the Japanese and South Korean foreign ministers.

A series of recent North Korean missile tests have underscored the threat posed by the nuclear-armed nation, which has ignored multiple entreaties by the United States to return to the negotiating table.

“Countering the threat posed by North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs remains a top priority for the United States and I am confident the same can be said for our Japanese and South Korean partners,” Kritenbrink said of the talks planned for Honolulu.

“We have made clear many times that we remain prepared to engage in serious and sustained diplomacy without preconditions to achieve that end and to make tangible progress. We have reached out repeatedly to Pyongyang. However, to date, we have not received a substantive response,” he said.

China is North Korea’s most important ally, and Zhao reiterated Beijing’s call for the U.S. to lift its unilateral sanctions on Pyongyang and take the North’s “legitimate security concerns” into consideration. **MDT/AP**

Australia, Lithuania to unite in countering China pressures

ROD MCGUIRK,
CANBERRA

THE foreign ministers of Australia and Lithuania agreed yesterday to step up cooperation on strategic challenges, in particular pressures from China.

Lithuania’s Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis and his Australian counterpart Marise Payne met at Parliament House.

Australian exporters have lost tens of billions of dollars to official and unofficial Chinese trade barriers covering coal, wine, beef, crayfish and barley that have coincided with deteriorating relations with Beijing.

Lithuania, a country of

2.8 million in the Baltic region, more recently drew Beijing’s ire after breaking with diplomatic custom by agreeing that Taiwan’s office in its capital Vilnius would bear the name Taiwan instead of Chinese Taipei, a term used by other countries to avoid offending Beijing.

“For quite a while, Australia was probably one of the main examples where China is using economy and trade as a political instrument or, one might say, even as a political weapon,” Landsbergis said.

“Now Lithuania joins this exclusive club... but it is apparent that we’re definitely not the last ones,” he added.

Payne said she agreed with Landsbergis on the importance of like-minded countries working together with a consistent approach to maintaining the international rules-based order, free and open trade, transparency, security and stability.

“There are many colleagues with whom the foreign minister (Landsbergis) and I work and engage on these issues [...] the more I think we are sending the strongest possible message about our rejection of coercion and our rejection of authoritarianism,” Payne said.

Landsbergis welcomed Australia to World Trade Organization consulta-

tions over a complaint by the European Union accusing Beijing of holding up goods — both from member nation Lithuania and from EU companies that use Lithuanian components — at China’s borders.

“We need to remind countries like China or any other country that would wish to use trade as a weapon that like-minded countries across the globe [...] have tools and regulations that help withstand the coercion and not to give in to [...] political and economic pressures,” Landsbergis said.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Tuesday that China was adhering to WTO

rules in its dealings with Lithuania.

“The so-called ‘coercion’ of China against Lithuania is purely made out of thin air,” he said Tuesday.

“China urges Lithuania to face up to the objective facts, mend its ways and come back to the right track of adhering to the one-China principle. It should stop confounding right with wrong and maliciously hyping things up, let alone trying to rope other countries in to gang up on China,” Zhao said.

The one-China principle holds that Taiwan is part of China and the Communist government in Beijing is China’s sole legitimate government.

Lithuania’s first embassy in the 31-year history of bilateral ties opened in Canberra yesterday. Lithuania also offered support for Australia reaching a free trade deal with the EU. Australia plans to open a trade office in Lithuania soon.

Landsbergis said disruptions by China and Russia of the “global rules-based order” required an international response. “We have to act counter-disruptively. That means reassuring and strengthening our ties and, actually, this rules-based order that provides security for some of us and prosperity also for the others,” he added. **MDT/AP**

UKRAINE CRISIS

US general says Russia turmoil could spill to Middle East

LOLITA C. BALDOR,
WASHINGTON

THE Army general tapped to take over as top U.S. commander in the Middle East warned senators yesterday [Macau time] that if Russian invades Ukraine, as many fear, it could create broader instability in the Middle East, including Syria. But he was clear that Iran remains the key threat to U.S. and allies in the region.

Lt. Gen. Erik Kurilla also told the Senate Armed Services Committee that China is expanding its power and spending in the Central Command region, including in countries needed by the U.S. to gather intelligence on extremist activities in Afghanistan.

"The United States faces a new era of strategic competition with China and Russia that is not confined to one geographical region and extends into the (Central Command) area of responsibility," said Kurilla during the committee's hearing on his nomination. "As the United States rightfully prioritizes com-

petition with China, we must remain engaged in the Middle East and Central and South Asia."

Kurilla, a combat-hardened officer with extensive experience in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, got a friendly reception from the panel and was told he would probably be confirmed.

If he gets the job, Kurilla would take over as the Pentagon continues to try to shift its focus to the Indo-Pacific and counter a rising China, and to bolster defenses against Russia in Europe. But Iran and Tehran-backed proxies have kept up a steady drumbeat of attacks on U.S. and allied forces across the Middle East, often hindering plans to shift more troops out of the region.

Kurilla would replace Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, who is retiring after three years leading the command. McKenzie has overseen a tumultuous time in the region, with America's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, the dismantling of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and escalating threats from Iran and its proxies as they launch

more attacks against Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and ships at sea.

Kurilla, who is currently the commander of the 18th Airborne Corps, told the committee that after the hearing he was deploying to Germany as part of the U.S. effort to reassure allies concerned about Russia's military build-up along Ukraine's borders.

Asked about the potential for repercussions in the Middle East of a potential Russian invasion of Ukraine, Kurilla said he believes that it could spill over into Syria, where Russia already has a military base and troops.

"If Russia does invade Ukraine they would not hesitate to be able to act as a spoiler in Syria as well," said Kurilla, who previously served as a deputy at Central Command.

He added that the U.S. doesn't believe Russia wants to go to war with the United States.

On China, Kurilla said 18 of the 21 countries in the Central Command region have signed strategic agreements with Beijing, which has increased its

development in the Middle East. The U.S., he said, has to be able to counter China there.

Senators quizzed Kurilla on efforts to monitor al-Qaida and Islamic State extremists in Afghanistan, now that there are no longer U.S. forces in the country. He said efforts continue to work with surrounding nations to set up "over-the-horizon" capabilities.

The U.S., which left Afghanistan at the end of August, has been struggling to negotiate with a number of countries in the region to allow overflights, basing or other intelligence gathering from within their borders. Military leaders say it is difficult to monitor extremist groups from afar because doing so requires long drone flights that allow limited surveillance time.

Asked about working with the Taliban, Kurilla said the U.S. should take a pragmatic approach. He said the Taliban also views the Islamic State group as an enemy, so that may be a potential area of agreement. He also said the U.S. must find ways to deal with the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, and that may involve Taliban help with food deliveries.

Kurilla graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1988, and has served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, commanding conventional and special operations forces. He commanded a Stryker battalion in Iraq in 2004, and was shot and wounded. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1952 INDIA PASSES FIRST TEST OF DEMOCRACY



The Congress Party of India, led by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, has won an outright victory in the country's first general election.

The party has won 249 of the 489 seats contested in the Lower House, and even with 133 results yet to be declared it is clear that the Congress Party will control the next Parliament.

The victory has earned Pandit Nehru a further five-year term in office. He has led the interim government since 1947, when power passed from British to Indian hands, but this makes him India's first prime minister to be elected by universal suffrage.

The elections are widely seen as a test for India's ability to succeed as a democracy following independence from Britain two years ago.

They are the first to be held under the new constitution, drawn up with the British parliamentary system as a model.

There were fears that extremist groups would use the opportunity to whip up inter-ethnic tensions, but to everyone's relief voting has so far gone peacefully.

The polling operation is on a massive scale.

There are 176 million people eligible to vote, although only 15% can read or write.

Symbols are being used on ballot papers for each of the parties and independent candidates, so that those who cannot read know where to cast their vote.

Voters are not even required to mark their ballot papers - they simply have to put them into a box marked with the symbol of their favoured candidate.

About 18,000 candidates are running for 4,412 seats: 497 in the Lok Sabha, or lower house of parliament, and the rest in state government.

Although the Congress Party, which has been inextricably linked with the drive for independence, has secured an absolute majority in the parliamentary elections, it suffered some unexpected setbacks in state elections.

In three southern states in particular - Madras, Hyderabad and Travancore-Cochin - the party failed to win an outright majority in the face of strong support for the Communist Party.

The result has caused some concern in the Congress Party. The states do not have to follow central government policies, so the Communist Party's strength there could potentially cause the government serious difficulties.

However, two of the most feared militant parties - the Hindu Mahasabha, and the separatist Sikh Akali Party - did so badly that both parties are expected to collapse following the elections.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Communist Party of India (CPI) continued to be a thorn in the government's side for some years, particularly in the southern states.

In 1957 it was elected to rule the state government of Kerala (formerly Travancore-Cochin and neighbouring Malabar), only to have the government dismissed and President's Rule declared in 1959.

The CPI is now split into several splinter groups.

Although it still has support in Kerala and in some other states, its share of the parliamentary vote has more than halved.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru governed the country until his death in 1964, and remains a towering figure in independent India's early political history.

The Congress Party, largely led by Nehru family members, continued in an almost unbroken run of power until 1989.

Following a decisive victory in the 1996 elections, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as the strongest party and formed a government under its moderate leader, Atal Behari Vajpayee.]

But in 2004, the Congress Party once again returned to power under former Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh.



Lt. Gen. Michael E. Kurilla

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Pleasure trips or friendly get-togethers will be satisfying and intellectually stimulating. Verbal abuse may lead to walkouts; don't make any rash statements you may regret later.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

You may experience setbacks due to additional responsibilities with loved ones. You need an outlet that will help take your mind off any troubles at work.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

You may be torn between two possibilities. This has left you in a confused and uncertain state. You may be ill-treated if you have to deal with institutional environments.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Some time spent with that special someone should be your intent. You need an outlet that will not only stimulate you but also challenge your intelligence as well.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Large organizations may try to talk you out of your hard-earned cash. You can ask for favors or run your ideas by those who will be able to support your objectives.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Resist any idle chatter. Your talent will be recognized. You will have a problem dealing with groups. Property investments, insurance, tax rebates, or inheritance should bring you financial gains.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You need to look into some private matters before you can proceed with your plans. Try to be patient and understanding. Try to take some time to listen to their complaints.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Your stability will aid you in getting support from your fellow workers. Take time to deal with legal documents and the affairs of people who you may be indebted to.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Pamper yourself today. It's a good time for long awaited relationships to begin. You will attract new love interests. Try to be reasonable.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Visit someone who hasn't been feeling well lately. Watch your weight gain due to water retention. Unexpected visitors will be a welcome surprise.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Don't be afraid to make a move if you aren't happy with your emotional situation. You will gain new friends if you get involved in environmental issues.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Opportunities for romance will develop through activities with large groups. Don't think the worst if you hear something negative about your partner.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

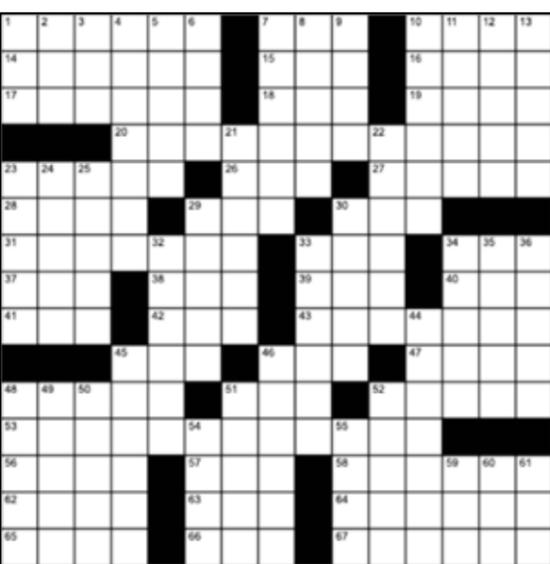
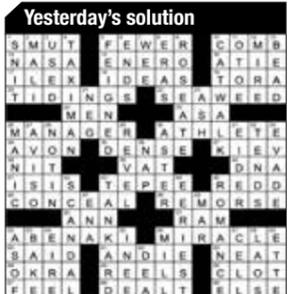
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	5	fine
Harbin	-21	-14	cloudy
Tianjin	3	11	fine
Urumqi	1	9	fine
Xi'an	6	11	overcast
Lhasa	-5	0	fine
Chengdu	10	15	cloudy
Chongqing	5	15	cloudy
Kunming	1	6	overcast
Nanjing	17	20	cloudy
Shanghai	1	12	fine
Wuhan	-22	-16	cloudy
Hangzhou	-3	10	fine
Taipei	-15	-2	fine
Guangzhou	10	18	fine
Hong Kong	16	20	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	-12	-14	snow
Frankfurt	3	4	cloudy
Paris	8	11	overcast
London	7	12	rain
New York	1	3	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Maroon; 7- The fruit of a hen; 10- Spanish snack; 14- Playground retort; 15- Heston's org.; 16- Medical suffix; 17- Camper's equipment; 18- Make lace; 19- "Give that ___ cigar!"; 20- Junction; 23- Facial hair; 26- Day break?; 27- Main artery; 28- Scraps; 29- Venomous viper; 30- PIN requester; 31- Cocktail; 33- CD earnings; 34- Clean air org.; 37- Youth org.; 38- Trail the pack; 39- Latin word meaning "nothing"; 40- Extinct bird, once found in New Zealand; 41- Paris possessive; 42- K-O connection; 43- Pertaining to Flanders; 45- Theatrical hint; 46- ___ v. Wade; 47- Otherwise; 48- Emblem; 51- Projection at the corner of a door architrave; 52- War horse; 53- Be too optimistic; 56- Stand; 57- Cries of surprise; 58- King of pop; 62- Architectural pier; 63- ___ Dawn Chong; 64- Boring tool; 65- Get better; 66- Break off; 67- Fervent;

DOWN 1- Woebegone; 2- Capote, to friends; 3- TKO caller; 4- Initially; 5- Very much; 6- Blockhead; 7- Catch in a sting; 8- Comprehend; 9- Fence opening; 10- Native drum; 11- Light ___; 12- Wine grape; 13- Yoga posture; 21- Banner; 22- Bovine animals; 23- Explosive weapons; 24- Clear the boards; 25- Gillette razors; 29- Make ___ for oneself; 30- Old-womanish; 32- Light up; 33- Disclose; 34- "South Pacific" hero; 35- Deputised group; 36- Oohed and ___; 44- Like some mail; 45- Breakfast food; 46- Elevated; 48- Law of Moses; 49- Sheeplike; 50- Outer coat of a seed; 51- One of the Allens; 52- Fab Four name; 54- Smarting; 55- Official records; 59- Reveal, in verse; 60- PC linkup; 61- Med. specialty;



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
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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AD

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

BEIJING 2022

ROUNDUP OF OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALS

WEDNESDAY, FEB.9

ALPINE SKIING WOMEN'S SLALOM

Petra Vlhova added an Olympic gold medal to her growing list of achievements, winning the women's slalom at the Beijing Games.



It was Slovakia's first Olympic medal in Alpine skiing. Mikaela Shiffrin again failed to finish the race.

Katharina Liensberger of Austria was 0.08 seconds slower than Vlhova over the two legs for second. Wendy Holdener of Switzerland was third, 0.12 behind Vlhova.

FREESTYLE SKIING MEN'S BIG AIR

Norway's Birk Ruud won gold in the Olympics' first men's freestyle skiing big air event, re-emerging as a leader in the



extreme sport after losing his father to cancer and injuring his knee.

Ruud has two Winter X Games big air gold medals and four world cup wins, but only one since 2019.

Ruud's final score of 187.75 was well clear of American silver medalist Colby Stevenson's 183. Swedish veteran Henrik Harlaut took bronze at 181.

SNOWBOARD WOMEN'S SNOWBOARDCROSS

Lindsey Jacobellis captured America's first gold medal of the Olympics, riding hard to the line in her snowboardcross final a full 16 years after a mistake cost her the title.



The 36-year-old racer was in her fifth Olympics and captured the first U.S. win of what has been an otherwise dismal Games for the U.S.

France's Chloe Trespeuch won silver and Canada's Meryeta Odine won bronze. **MDT/AP**

BEIJING 2022

SHIFFRIN SHAKEN BY 'LETDOWN' OF 2 EXITS IN 2 OLYMPIC RACES

THE first question posed to Mikaela Shiffrin as she met with reporters after her second consecutive quick exit from an Alpine skiing race at the Beijing Games was short, simple and to the point: What happened?

The complicated, thought-out, talked-out answers that followed entailed little analysis of her actual performance on skis — which lasted all of five seconds before things went awry in yesterday's first run of the two-leg slalom, about half as long as the American stayed on course in Monday's first run of the two-leg giant slalom — and, in the end, boiled down to this: Shiffrin herself was not exactly sure what brought her to this point or where she goes from here.

AP PHOTO



Mikaela Shiffrin of the United States

"I've never been in this position before," the two-time Olympic gold medalist said, tears dampening her cheeks, "and I don't know how to handle it."

What the shaken Shif-

frin was certain of: "It feels like a really big letdown."

The 26-year-old from Colorado, who won the slalom at the 2014 Sochi Games and the giant slalom at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games, was the

seventh racer out of the starting hut yesterday on a course set by her coach, Mike Day.

She began losing her balance and teetering out of control just four seconds and four gates in, swerving too far as she veered to her right. The neon yellow handle of her right ski pole scraped along the snow as she ended up way wide of the fifth gate.

Shiffrin went over to the side of the course, clicked out of her skis and plopped herself down on the ground, shaking her head, then resting it on her arms atop her bent knees. That will be the lasting image of this day — back in the U.S., NBC's coverage lingered on that shot of Shiffrin, drawing anger on social media from some viewers — and, perhaps, of these Olympics for someone who arrived in China as one of the biggest stars of any Winter Games sport.

"GS and slalom, those were my biggest focuses," she said. "So it really feels like a lot of work for nothing." **MDT/AP**

AD

HOLIDAY RENTAL HOUSES

Lugar das Letras Casa de Gouvães

The houses are set in the heart of the World Heritage Site of the Douro Valley and its famous winery landscape where the worlds Ports are produced. Both restored relics overlooking the Rio Douro, these eight rooms houses have been blessed with gorgeous wooden floors, plush queen beds and marble baths; the best have dazzling river views. But it is the welcome that makes this place stand out from the crowd.

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AP PHOTO



Australia's Scotty James

BEIJING 2022 | EXPLAINER

All those flips and twists on Olympic halfpipe

EDDIE PELLIS, ZHANGJIAKOU

AUSTRALIAN snowboarder Scotty James calls the process of perfecting his signature trick on the halfpipe akin to a right-handed person “trying to write a thesis with your left hand.”

Impossible? No. Extremely difficult? Yes.

That goes for pretty much any trick that might be good for a medal on the Olympic halfpipe. The women's final is today and the men's final is Friday.

Chloe Kim made it through yesterday's qualifying round and is a heavy favorite to capture her second straight gold medal in the women's event. Three-time champion Shaun White, competing in his last contest, is an underdog.

That's in large part because James and a stable of Japanese riders, including two-time silver medalist Ayumu Hirano, have a jump that, only a year ago, seemed like little more than a dream, even for the best of the best.

A look at that trick, along with a few other key things to know

before they start flipping for medals on the halfpipe:

TRIPLE CORK

This has been the game-changer in men's halfpipe this winter. The ironic part is that White started working on it in 2013 but abandoned it because he felt it was too dangerous and the risk wasn't worth the reward.

A rider gathers speed up the side of the halfpipe and makes what are essentially three head-over-heels spins while twisting above the pipe.

“With the tricks that have preceded this one, there's usually a way of getting out of it if it goes wrong,” American Taylor Gold said. “With this one, there's really no way of getting out of it.”

Hirano has landed the trick twice in competition this season, only to fall on his next jump. The halfpipe final is a three-run contest and only the best score counts. It's common for competitors to put down “safety runs” at the start — a run with their ‘B-plus’ material that can deliver a potentially meet-winning score — then bring out

the big guns at the end, only if they need them.

James has also been working on a triple and White says he's “not going to take it off the table.” But there are other tricks that could also make a difference.

SWITCH BACKSIDE DOUBLE CORK 1260

One thing that makes it tough for the average fan to appreciate the difficulty of some snowboard tricks is that, unlike, say, in skiing, it's often hard to tell if a rider is going forward or backward.

The starting point on James' signature trick is that he is riding “switch,” or backward, which means leading with his right foot. And flipping backward, too. For the first part of this trick, riders can't really see the landing area they're trying to hit.

At the last Olympics, where James took the bronze medal, he was convinced the trick didn't get enough love from the judges. He said he's noticed this season that “switch,” or backward, riding seems to be getting more credit.

THE 1440

The number put in front of a spin is equal to the total number of degrees of rotation the rider puts in. It's a combination of head-over-heels flips and sideways twists.

Iouri Podlodtchikov, the “I-Pod,” won the 2014 Olympics with the YOLO — “You Only Live Once” — a first-of-its-kind trick with 1440 degrees of rotation. In 2018, White and Hirano both landed back-to-back 1440s — one riding forward, the other riding backward. It was the first time White had landed two like that, and he edged out Hirano for his third gold medal.

CHLOE'S GOAL

Kim separates herself by being able to sky higher than any of the other women in the halfpipe. She capped off her victory at the last Olympics with back-to-back 1080-degree spins — a combination no woman had ever landed in a halfpipe.

She has been very secretive about her plans for this year, but she offered a small hint as to what might be coming in Thursday's final. Spoiler alert: The holy grail of riding is to be able to execute tricks in all four directions — forward front flip, forward back flip, backward front flip (called a “cab” jump) and backward back flip (See above on James).

“That's the way I want to push snowboarding is by really encouraging people to be a good all-around snowboarder and be able to spin all four ways,” Kim said.

“That's my goal. I'm working on it and I'm really excited to show you guys.”

MADDIE'S TAKE

If Kim were to have an off day, then American Maddie Mastro might have been the one to scoop up the gold. She's been working on a frontside, double-cork 1080, an insanely difficult trick that involves two head-over-heels flips with one full twist. But Mastro finished 13th in qualifying and failed to advance to the final.

Still, maybe we'll see it: Kim has had this trick in her bag, too, but nobody has landed it in a competition.

FOR PURISTS

American Taylor Gold is a longshot, in part because he's more invested in the style of snowboarding than massive tricks. This doesn't always win medals, but it does win the hearts of snowboard purists.

So, watch Gold perform his double Michalchuk 1080 — a trick named after Canadian snowboarder Michael Michalchuk but also known as a “Chuck Taylor,” an homage to the throwback Converse sneakers.

It's a double backflip off the back wall with one horizontal spin mixed in. When Gold is on, he grabs the board with both hands. It will not look as spectacular as some of the tricks on the halfpipe. But ask any rider who knows: They'll tell you it's a beauty. **MDT/AP**

OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION TO BREAK
US CHIP BLOCKADE

In a move that is clearly aimed at maintaining its own advantages in high technology, the United States has once again used domestic regulatory measures in an attempt to grab Chinese technology companies by the throat.

On Monday, the US Department of Commerce announced that its Bureau of Industry and Security had added 33 Chinese enterprises to its unverified list. Their inclusion on the so-called red flag list means the Chinese companies must certify that they are complying with US regulations to continue receiving shipments from US exporters who in turn will now need a license if they want to ship products to any of the companies on the list.

The US Commerce Department justified the move by saying that the BIS "could not establish the bona fides" of the entities and could not verify their "legitimacy" through end-use checks.

Most of the companies that have been red-flagged are electronics enterprises, but state laboratories at universities and other businesses are also on the list. Most notable among the 33 companies is the Shanghai Micro Electronics Equipment Group, which held a launch ceremony for its newly developed 2.5D/3D lithography packaging machine the day before the US Commerce Department announced its move. This is China's first domestically developed lithography machine that can package chips in a three-dimensional way for use in high-performance computing and high-end artificial intelligence applications.

Like the so-called America COMPETES Act of 2022, which was recently passed by the US House of Representatives, the move under the guise of enhancing the competitiveness of the US is a further attempt to curb and suppress China's innovation and development, so as to maintain the global hegemony of the US.

Indeed, the BIS makes no bones about its remit, stating its role is to advance US national security, foreign policy and economic objectives by promoting continued US strategic technology leadership.

But by using export controls as "a tool of political repression and economic bullying", the US is not only hindering normal economic and trade cooperation between Chinese and US enterprises, it is also severely disrupting the global industrial and supply chains and damaging the international economic and trade orders and free-trade rules, as China's Ministry of Commerce has said.

In response to the US taking a wrecking ball to the international tech trade, the Investment Promotion Agency of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce is promoting closer cross-border cooperation in the semiconductor sector.

At a conference in October, the ministry proposed the founding of a Cross-Border Semiconductor Work Committee, which points to the right way to counter the US' tech chain vandalism, namely rallying more international collaboration in the chip industry to make the chains more resistant to being vitiated by the US. It is to be hoped that this initiative gains traction as the US needs to know that it cannot always get things its own way at the expense of others.

UK TO REQUIRE PORN SITES TO
VERIFY USERS ARE 18 OR OLDER

Britain's government said all pornography websites will be legally required to verify that users are 18 or older as part of new online safety rules.

Under the government's draft online safety bill, porn sites will be legally required to put "robust checks" in place to protect children from accessing them. Companies could use secure age verification technology to confirm a user has a credit card, or use a third-party service to confirm a user's age against government data.

Officials said that if sites fail to conform they can be fined up to 10% of their annual global turnover. Their sites could also be blocked in the U.K. by the communications regulator, and the companies' bosses could be held criminally liable.

Currently the online safety bill, which was published in May, only covers commercial porn sites that allow user-generated content. The proposed update means that all commercial porn sites will be regulated.

Officials said that while the communications regulator could recommend the use of age verification technologies, the onus will be on companies to decide how best to comply with the new rules.

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THE
BUZZ

AP PHOTO



A Hawksbill sea turtle that was found on a beach is displayed after an autopsy was performed along with trash mostly plastic materials and food items at the Al Hefaiyah Conservation Center lab, in the city of Kalba, UAE

PLASTIC POLLUTION IN
OCEANS ON TRACK TO
RISE FOR DECADES

PLASTIC pollution at sea is reaching worrying levels and will continue to grow even if significant action is taken now to stop such waste from reaching the world's oceans, according to a review of hundreds of academic studies.

The review by Germany's Alfred Wegener Institute, commissioned by environmental campaign group WWF, examined almost 2,600 research papers on the topic to provide an overview ahead of a United Nations meeting later this month.

"We find it in the deepest ocean trenches, at the sea surface and in Arctic sea ice," said biologist Melanie Bergmann who co-authored the study, which was published this week.

Some regions — such as the Mediterranean, the East China and Yellow Seas — already contain dangerous levels of plastic, while others risk becoming increasingly polluted in the future, it found.

The authors concluded that almost every species

in the ocean has been affected by plastic pollution and that it's harming important ecosystems such as coral reefs and mangroves.

As plastic breaks down into ever-smaller pieces it also enters the marine food chain, being ingested in everything from whales to turtles to tiny plankton.

"We find [plastic] in the deepest ocean trenches, at the sea surface and in Arctic sea ice."

MELANIE BERGMANN
BIOLOGIST

Getting that plastic out of the water again is nearly impossible, so policymakers should focus on preventing any more of it entering the oceans in the first place, said Bergmann.

Some of the studies showed that even if this were to happen today, the amount of marine microplastic would keep increasing for decades, she said.

Matthew MacLeod, a professor of environmental science at Stockholm University who was not in-

cluded in the report, said it appeared to be a sound review of existing studies, focused on the effects of plastic pollution.

"The part that can (and will) be argued about is whether there is enough evidence to warrant aggressive action (such as what is advocated in this report) that will certainly disrupt current practices for plastic production, use and disposal," he said.

MacLeod was involved in a separate study recently that also concluded immediate measures are required because of the possible global impacts.

Heike Vesper of WWF said while consumers can help reduce plastic pollution by changing their behavior, governments have to step up and share the burden of tackling the problem.

"What we need is a good policy framework," she said, looking ahead to the upcoming U.N. environmental meeting in Nairobi. "It's a global problem and it needs global solutions." MDT/AP



Egypt's president yesterday swore in the first-ever Coptic Christian to head the country's highest court. Judge Boulos Fahmy is the 19th person to preside over the Supreme Constitutional Court since it was established in 1969. President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi picked the 65-year-old Fahmy from among the court's five oldest of 15 sitting judges, as is prescribed by law.



Britain's top diplomat headed to Moscow yesterday to try to defuse tensions raised by Russia's military buildup near Ukraine, warning that an invasion would bring "massive consequences for all involved." "Russia has a choice here. We strongly encourage them to engage, de-escalate and choose the path of diplomacy," Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said ahead of departing on the first visit to Moscow by the U.K.'s top envoy in more than four years.

AP PHOTO



Slovakia's parliament yesterday approved a defense military treaty with the United States. The Defense Cooperation Agreement passed 79-60 in the 150-seat legislature in a vote split between lawmakers from the four-party ruling coalition and the opposition. The treaty allows the U.S. military to use two Slovak air force bases — Malacky-Kuchyna and Sliac — for 10 years while Slovakia — a NATO member — will receive \$100 million from the U.S. to modernize them.