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LOCAL PARLIAMENT HAS FINALLY GREENLIT THE BILL THAT AIMS TO ENFORCE GREATER RESTRICTIONS IN ADDRESSING CITY'S ILLEGAL HOSTELS P4

GAMING REVENUE REBOUNDS FOLLOWING BOOST IN TOURIST ARRIVALS P2

LAWMAKERS CALL FOR ECONOMIC SUPPORT TO FACE ZERO-TOLERANCE HARDSHIPS P4



AP PHOTO



Australia Tens of thousands of people had been ordered to evacuate their homes by yesterday and many more had been told to prepare to flee as parts of Australia's southeast coast are inundated by the worst flooding in more than a decade that has claimed at least 10 lives. Scores of residents, some with pets, spent hours trapped on their roofs in recent days by a fast-rising river in the town of Lismore in northern New South Wales state.

AP PHOTO



Myanmar Ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi pleaded not guilty Monday to a corruption charge that alleged she had accepted \$600,000 and seven gold bars from a former political ally, a legal official said. The case is one of 10 in which she is being prosecuted under the anti-corruption law. She is accused of receiving the money and gold bars in 2017-18 from Phyo Min Thein, the former chief minister of Yangon, the country's biggest city. He was also a senior member of her National League for Democracy party.

AP PHOTO



Nepal Hundreds of thousands of devotees crowd to worship at a revered Hindu temple in Nepal's capital yesterday as coronavirus cases drop and life returns to normal. Around 1 million devotees were expected to visit the temple of Hindu god Shiva on Shivaratri, one of Nepal's most cherished festivals, as temples, schools and markets have all begun to open up in recent weeks after the number of COVID-19 cases dropped in Nepal.

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XINHUA

INT'L HIGH

Pui Ching expected to run international school in Coloane P3



AP PHOTO



PUTIN'S WAR

RUSSIAN MISSILE HIT MAJOR CITY CAUSING MAYHEM P7

GAMING REVENUE REBOUNDS FOLLOWING BOOST IN TOURIST ARRIVALS

LYNZY VALLES

GROWTH in gross gaming revenue has been recorded for the month of February, with casino operators generating a total of MOP7.7 billion compared to the MOP6.34 billion amassed in January.

Data from the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau shows that the 22.3% month-on-month surge, even if the figures represent a 69% decline from pre-pandemic levels, is a strong indication of the sector rebounding with the help of Lunar New Year visitors.

The figure, however, was slightly lower than the forecast of Bernstein Research, which expected

the results to "likely be up 29% from January."

However, due to the stability of case numbers, Bernstein Research said that the average daily revenue during the Chinese New Year (from February 1 to 6) stood at MOP333 million, compared with MOP205 million in January.

Brokerage J.P Morgan described the Lunar New Year figures as "very respectable" considering there are "no more junket businesses," which formerly accounted for 75% of the city's VIP gaming revenue.

Macau has also seen the continuous rise of visitors since the Chinese New Year holidays, which had up to 28,000 arrivals on a single day despite expectations

falling short during the week-long holiday. Initially, authorities forecast up to 30,000 visitors per day during the Golden Week.

Gaming operators were positive about the outcome of the Chinese New Year as many of them have said they reached 99% hotel occupancy.

Analysts are expecting VIP revenue to plunge this year by up to 47% amid the junket turmoil in the city following the arrest of two junket moguls.

The pandemic, particularly the fifth wave of Covid-19 in Hong Kong, also remains a concern as the neighboring region is facing its worst outbreak yet, recording up to 34,466 cases on Monday, a record high.



GAMING

MELINDA CHAN REAPPOINTED AS CEO OF MACAU LEGEND

LYNZY VALLES

MELINDA Chan has been reappointed as the chief executive officer of Macau Legend Development Ltd., the company announced in a filing.

This announcement came a month after junket mogul Levo Chan, a major shareholder and co-chairman of Macau Legend, was arrested on suspicion of operating illegal online gambling and side-betting activities.

Melinda Chan has been the executive director since March 26, 2020 and served as the company's chief executive officer between March 26, 2020 and December 29, 2020.

Previously, she said that Macau Legend is aiming to operate its casinos under the company with their own gaming concession soon.

Macau Legend currently operates their casinos under a service agreement scheme, using the license owned by the concessionaire SJM Holdings Ltd, a situation the company hopes to change.

In a statement following the arrest of Levo Chan, the company said that its daily



operations would not be affected.

The shares of the group plunged by 20% to an all-time low following the arrest.

The arrest came nearly two months after the arrest of another junket mogul, Alvin Chau, leading to the closure of Suncity, which once saw HKD180 billion in bets by high rollers in its VIP rooms in a single month.

These arrests underscore China's intensifying crackdown in the world's biggest

gaming hub.

Also, in the filing, Macau Legend further announced that Li Chun Tak has been appointed as non-executive director while Patrick Mak Ka Wing has been appointed as an independent non-executive Director.

Li Chu Kwan, an executive Director, has been appointed as chairman of the board, who, together with David Chow, a non-executive director, serves as the co-chairman of the company.

SJM RESORTS REVENUE AT HKD9.6B IN 2021

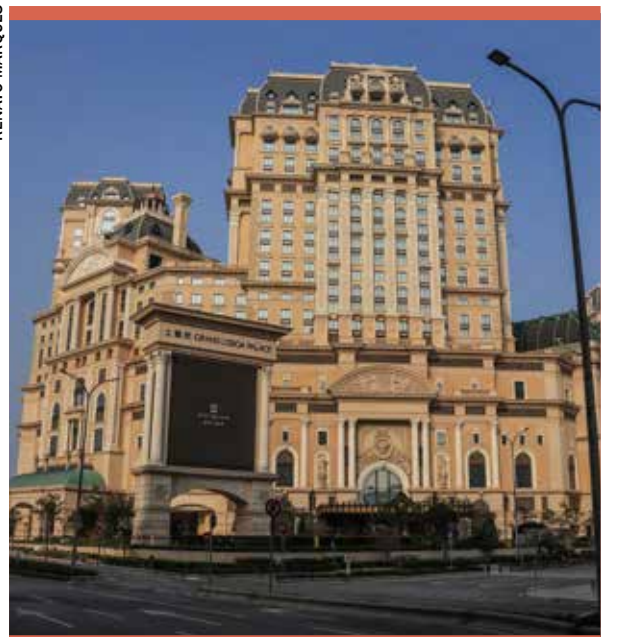
THE net gaming revenue earned by SJM Resorts was HKD9.608 billion in 2021, compared to HKD7.304 billion for 2020, according to a recent financial report.

The company lost HKD4.144 billion, compared to a loss HKD3.025 billion for 2020. Gross revenue of the Grand Lisboa Palace was HKD370 million, including gross gaming revenue (GGR) of HKD200 million and non-gaming revenue of HKD170 million.

Meanwhile, Grand Lisboa's gross revenue was HKD2.322 billion, including GGR of HKD2.152 billion and non-gaming revenue of HKD170 million, compared to GGR of HKD2.067 billion and non-gaming revenue of HKD111 million for the year 2020.

Ambrose So, vice-chairman and CEO of SJM Holdings Limited, commented, "During 2021 SJM achieved annual increases in business volumes, although subject to the challenges

RENATO MARQUES



of the pandemic for the full year. Since July 30 our Grand Lisboa Palace Resort has been welcoming patrons with a premium array of new attractions."

The group has a revolving credit facility of HKD1.3 billion, of which HKD1.3 billion was undrawn as of December 31, 2021.

On February 28, the group extended the maturity of its syndicated banking facilities until February 28, 2023. These

originally consisted of a HKD15 billion term loan and a HKD10 billion revolving credit, of which HKD13.3 billion was outstanding. According to the announcement, the group expects to complete a refinancing of these facilities in the coming quarter.

SJM had a 12.3% share of Macau's GGR, including 16.3% of mass market table gaming revenue and 4.9% of VIP gaming revenue. LV

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Pui Ching expected to run international school in Coloane

ANTHONY LAM

LOCAL Pui Ching Middle School will operate its international or English section in the plot of land beside Block 10 of the One Oasis residential estate, the Times has learned.

The land plot is officially registered as Lot 12a is shaped like a sickle. It is adjacent to the western tip of the One Oasis residential development.

Originally leased for industrial purposes, the land plot has had its lease and use modified several times since 1993. According to the latest urban planning details, which are now available, the 14,462 sqm of land has been designated for use as a social facility.

According to other sources,

the school emblem has been installed on one of the buildings on the land plot. A construction plan posted on the external partition of the construction site has indications relating to sports grounds and buildings.

However, a recruitment notice has been posted on the secondary school's website claiming that extra staff are needed for the coming academic year. The school claims to be in search of a relatively large amount of high caliber teaching staff to "further improve teaching [capabilities]." Considering its size of teaching staff currently working at the campus on Avenida de Horte e Costa, the recruitment seems excessive, unless it is for a new campus.

Teachers for primary and secondary levels are being recrui-

ted. The requirements are specific, including knowledge of the Python programming language for primary school mathematics and general studies teachers.

Requirements for the ability to teach in English are also listed as mandatory in the recruitment for secondary school mathematics, commerce and data science, as well as design and science teachers.

Conversational and written English capabilities are also required for consultative staff.

Several alumni of the Pui Ching Middle School said they had no idea about the supposed plan of their alma mater, when they were asked by the Times.

The Christian school has a large population of influential alumni, such as former Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Alexis Tam, Joseph Lee Kok-long, former member of the Hong Kong SAR Legislative Council, Lam Sio Meng, national first-class actor and Kou Kam Fai, incumbent lawmaker of the Macau SAR Legislative Assembly. Kou is also the current principal of the school.

RENATO MARQUES



Tanzhou Covid patient banned from entering Macau for one year

ANTHONY LAM

ACovid-19 patient who traveled back and forth between Zhuhai and Macau has admitted to conducting parallel trading, Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak disclosed yesterday.

According to government announcements, the female mainland resident regularly traveled between Zhuhai and Macau during the period February 22 to 27. Wong confirmed that she was on travel endorsement on the basis that she was visiting relatives.

As punishment, the woman will be banned from entering Macau for a year.

Parallel trading is a form of smuggling goods using a large number of people who are not necessarily connected. Goods transported are usually consumables, luxury goods or daily necessities.

Wong stressed that the police did not find her proclaimed purpose of visiting relatives convincing. He described the punishment as "relatively heavy." More work on interrupting parallel trading



will be done, the official added.

He also admitted that the Covid-19 pandemic, which has brought on an economic downturn, has escalated the practice of parallel trading, from which "traders" can get an attractive sum of money.

The type of "traders" more difficult to block is those who legitimately travel frequently between mainland and Macau, such as commuters, because the law prohibits apprehension based on the mere frequency of

border-crossing. Another challenge, according to Wong, is that the issuance of travel endorsements is within the authority of mainland China.

With the announcement that a Covid-19 patient in Zhuhai's Tanzhou District was a regular traveler to Macau, it was revealed that at least 8,000 people would be affected by additional disease-control measures.

OVER 5,400 TEST NEGATIVE FOR COVID-19
As of 12 p.m. yesterday,

all 5,473 Covid-19 test results obtained in Macau were returned negative.

After the detection of the Covid-19 case in Tanzhou, Macau authorities carried out mandatory nucleic acid testing for those who live or work in key areas near Portas do Cerco.

Individuals who have left or entered Macau more than four times on any of the days - February 25, 26 and 27 must perform a nucleic acid test every 24 hours between 6 p.m. on March 1 and 6 p.m. on March 4, for a total of three tests.

Also, individuals who may have had a common path with the Tanzhou case need to declare the coincident path and must also perform a test of nucleic acid every 24 hours between 6 p.m. on March 1 and 6 p.m. on March 4, for a total of three tests.

As of 12 p.m. yesterday, a total of 30,503 tests had been carried out at other nucleic acid test stations. Persons living or working in the areas targeted for testing who do not undergo the nucleic acid test within the specified time will see their health code turn yellow.

IC TO TO RETAIN THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURES OF IEC LONG

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) recently reiterated that it will restore the former firecracker plant of Iec Long (Iec Long) in an authentic fashion, so as to preserve the structure's original features.

The IC officially acquired the site in December 2020.

In order to do so, the IC promised to retain the original structures, plan and ecology of the site during its rejuvenation project. The IC expects to open part of the site for public use this year.

An area will be designated for sightseeing, the IC revealed, where circumnavigation walkways will be installed. The interior will be transformed into meeting and exhibition venues, a tourism information center and souvenir shop, as well as a café.

Meanwhile, an entity has been commissioned to conduct studies on the site's na-

tural environment. The result will be used as the foundation for the long-term refurbishment of the site, which will eventually be converted into a leisure site that presents the firecracker manufacturing history of the city.

Lying vacant for the last two decades or so, the Iec Long site has not been formally used for any purpose after it ceased operations, except for some occasional use as a war game venue in the first decade of the Special Administrative Region.

The site measures 20,000 sqm in area and has become part of the national land reserves after acquisition by the government. It is the largest and most representative remaining past firecracker manufacturing site in the city.

The first phase of work, which included site clearing and flattening, has been concluded. **AL**



SECURITY SECTOR CALLS FOR CIVIL PROTECTION VOLUNTEERS

The Unitary Police Service (SPU) is now recruiting up to 100 volunteers to work in civil protection missions, such as those that provide support during typhoons or rainstorms. Local residents aged between 18 and 55 years are eligible. Applications will be received from now until March 30, either at the SPU's office on 7/F, Civil Plaza or via its website. Lot-drawing will be conducted should the number of applicants surpass 100. Training and examinations must be passed on order to qualify as certified volunteers. The police did not say whether proficiency in either of the official languages is mandatory.

IAS TIGHTENS VISITOR ELIGIBILITY AT ELDERLY HOMES

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) has mandated the tightening of visitor management protocols at elderly homes. From March 3, visitors of elderly residents who are not vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2 must present negative nucleic acid test (NAT) results of the virus issued within 48 hours preceding the visit. In contrast, visitors of vaccinated elders will need negative NAT results issued within seven days prior to the visit, or certification of two doses of Covid-19 vaccines having been received. In the past year, the government has been pressing for vaccination, by such means as recording names of unvaccinated students on a weekly basis.

OUTBREAK OF GASTROENTERITIS RECORDED AT ZAPE KINDERGARTEN

The Health Bureau announced that a case of group gastroenteritis has been recorded on Monday at the Kao Yip Kindergarten in ZAPE District. The case concerned five male and two female students, all aged five years. On February 26, they developed symptoms, such as vomiting and then diarrhea. Some of them sought medical support by their own initiative. None of the students was hospitalized. The bureau indicated that the illness had been caused by viral infection. The bureau reminds members of the public, specifically workers in catering and nursing sectors, that they should avoid going to work if they develop similar symptoms.

LAWMAKERS CALL ON GOV'T REVISION OF SUPPORT MEASURES, BETTER EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION

RENATO MARQUES

A group of lawmakers, namely those linked to the Macau Federation of Trade Unions, have urged the government to review the support measures for the population and companies to help them cope with the economic downturn resulting from the Covid-19 crisis.

The separate spoken inquiries were delivered in the period before the agenda at the Legislative Assembly session on Monday, with the lawmakers urging the government to do more to protect employment and guarantees for local workers.

The employment survey carried out in the last quarter of 2021 by the Statistics and Census Services revealed that the unemployment rate of residents rose to 4.1%, the unemployed population reached 11,900 and the underemployed population reached 15,000.

According to lawmaker Ella Lei, such figures show that the situation of unemployment needs to be solved as a matter of urgency.

The lawmaker added the recent problems with gaming and civil construction workers being considered redundant are further aggravating the pressure on the job market.

The lawmaker considers that the economic recovery announced by the government is progressing in a very slow manner which does not suit a population in distress and facing urgent problems.

"The government launched, in October last year, eight support



Ella Lei

Leong Sun lok

measures to alleviate the pressure of SMEs (Small and Medium-size Enterprises) in business and the difficulties of workers, contributing to the continuity of many of the shops and guaranteeing the employment of locals," she said.

Nonetheless, it is "expected that the authorities review the effectiveness of these measures, define a response plan and constantly assess the impact resulting from the pandemic situation for the market, launching, on time, measures to increase the confidence of the market in general to stabilize the access to employment."

Preceding Lei's address, lawmaker Leong Sun lok had noted the same problem, stating that, among the newly unemployed, "more than half have involuntarily lost their jobs due to dismissal, termination of temporary employment or company closures," and noting that sectors such as gaming, food and beverage, civil construction, tourism, and fishing have suffered, not only with unemployment but also with an added "deterioration in the employment conditions."

Leong reminded the govern-

ment that the philosophy of people accepting jobs while "earning less" is "just a temporary measure" on a long-term path that needs to point to more assertive measures "striving for progress".

The same lawmaker also noted that, while locals have been losing their job posts or are being forced to accept lower salaries for the same job, there are still a large number of non-resident workers (TNR) in Macau, which he claimed had been less affected by the crisis.

Leong called on the government to "carry out a detailed analysis and improve the TNR management mechanism so that residents can access good jobs, guarantee their priority in access to employment and optimize their space for professional development."

CALL FOR ANOTHER MOP5,000 E-VOUCHER

Going even further in the calls for more support for residents and local companies, lawmaker Song Pek Kei has called upon the government to issue another round of stimulus measures for

consumption cards by giving 5,000 patacas to each resident via electronic consumption methods.

"The government must increase the measures to stimulate the internal economy, implementing, once again, the electronic consumption card with 5,000 patacas, to directly stimulate the internal economy, maintain its vitality and promote investment and domestic consumption to support the gradual recovery of Macau's economy," she said, while also calling for added measures such as the waiving of water and electricity bill payments for three months.

"The government can learn from the support measures adopted in the past, for example, the waiving of payment of water and electricity for three months, to reduce the burdens on both businesses and residents," Song remarked, calling also for the creation of a special fund (Risk Fund for SMEs) that would provide direct economic support to SMEs and micro companies, "guaranteeing their resilience against unpredictable risks."

Illegal accommodation bill finally approved

RENATO MARQUES

THE lawmakers of the Legislative Assembly (AL) have greenlit the bill that aims to enforce greater restrictions in addressing illegal hostels in Macau.

At the AL on Monday afternoon the bill passed on its final reading without any remarks from lawmakers.

Among the changes is the prohibition of renting housing units or rooms to people with a visa or permit to stay in Macau for less than 90 days, making it mandatory for all short-

term visitors to stay in registered hotel units. The only exception to this rule is people staying at the homes of friends or relatives in which they are being lodged for free.

Among the added restrictions to be enforced by the new bill is the authority for the Macao Government Tourism Office inspectors to request the suspension of the electricity and water supply to housing units suspected of being involved in an illegal practice, in the instance that the owners of such units refuse to cooperate with the au-

thorities.

Penalties have also been imposed on real estate agents or companies that rent housing units to an illegal accommodation facility.

According to figures released by the MGTO, over the past 11 years of law enforcement related to illegal accommodation, a total of 2,309 fines were issued to offenders. From these, 91.5% remain unpaid due to difficulties in prosecuting the offenders as they had already left Macau, or do not have any residency status in the region.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



Artist Xu Lei leads guests of honour on a tour of his exhibition



Guests of honour at the ceremony for the official launch of Sands Gallery

Permanent gallery at Four Seasons continues Sands' long-time support of art and culture

SANDS China Ltd. has long pledged to invest more resources into inviting renowned local and international artists of different art forms in order to enrich the cultural experience of Macau residents and visitors.

Echoing the government's policy of Tourism+, which pushes forward diversification in the city, Sands China has officially launched the new Sands Gallery and unveiled its debut exhibition, *The Innovation of Ink: Transformation and Reinvention of Oriental Aesthetics – Featured Exhibition of Wang Dongling & Xu Lei*.

Curated by Julia F. Andrews, a specialist in Chinese art, *The Innovation of Ink* features over 30 imaginative works of world-renowned Chinese artists Wang Dongling and Xu Lei, and runs from February 24 to March 20, 2022.

As a large integrated resort operator, the company has been supportive of the development of art and culture in Macau. The company therefore opened Sands Gallery: a permanent art space on the 6th floor of The Grand Suites at Four Seasons, which provides an opportunity for guests to explore an ever-changing variety of art exhibitions.

The gallery was born out of Sands China's desire to help cultivate an environment that nurtures creativity and art appreciation in Macau. It also aims to support the development of art and culture and bring a greater diversity of experiences to the city, while promoting and encouraging professional artists in Macau and across the region.

"In opening Sands Gallery, Sands China's ultimate objective has always been to help Macau establish itself as a multicultural exchange and cooperation base with an emphasis on Chinese culture,"



said Dr. Wilfred Wong, president of Sands China Ltd., at the gallery's opening ceremony on February 23.

"We are truly convinced that a permanent and high-class exhibition space – equipped with advanced software and hardware resources, and targeting international audiences – will, through regularly introducing high-level art exhibitions, play an active role not only in enriching the city's art and cultural activities and propelling artistic diversity, but also in promoting the extensive exchange and cooperation among artistic groups from Macau, mainland China and other countries."

Just as Macau represents the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures, the exhibition features the works of two artists whose styles are striking examples of East meets West. Each artist has developed an undisputed mastery of traditional

Chinese ink techniques – calligraphy in Wang's case and painting in Xu's – and then expertly applied them in ways that are original, inventive and contemporary.

For Dr. Wong, the East meets West notion of the exhibition, which fits well with Macau's character, is what the firm is trying to promote in the future.

"We are hoping to organize four to five major or significant exhibitions annually. When the border opens, we hope to invite international artists to come," said the president.

The imagery in Xu Lei's artwork at the exhibition presented his demonstration of the correlation between Western and Chinese culture, and how they affect and penetrate each other.

"It's my pleasure to be partnered with master Wang to showcase both of our works in a city that

combines Chinese and Western cultures with a rich art atmosphere. I felt impressed when I saw my works displayed in an art space

with sophisticated and subtle details. It is my hope that viewers can travel on a journey during their visits and emotionally interact with my works," said Xu Lei.

One of his pieces at the exhibition is related to Matteo Ricci, who tried to promote the West's relationship with China.

In a visit to the Macao Museum of Art, Xu Lei commented, "Macau has borrowed some masterpieces from mainland China and its authorities have been rendering full support to the development of a culture of art in Macau."

For Xu Lei, the current exhibition at Sands Gallery contains "academic value that has a meaningful collaboration with an important academic in art history."

Wang Dongling, meanwhile, said in a pre-recorded video message: "I would like to express my appreciation to Sands China for inviting me to exhibit my works together with Xu Lei in an exhibition curated by Julia F. Andrews at Sands Gallery. The important element of Chinese calligraphy lies within the refinement of lines, as every brush expresses the feeling, aesthetics, and spirit of an artist. As a calligrapher, it is my hope that calligraphy will evolve from its traditional roots into a modern art form that fits in today's world."

Wang, Xu and Andrews have collaborated with some of the most well-known art institutions in the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Guggenheim Museum, the National Art Museum of China in Beijing, and the British Museum in London.

MESSAGE FROM THE CURATOR

It is of great significance that we are exhibiting the work of both artists, Wang Dongling and Xu Lei, for the official launch of Sands Gallery, as it demonstrates Sands China's continued commitment to art and culture. The theme of this exhibition can be portrayed in two aspects: 'Ink' emphasises the importance of Chinese ink painting, and 'Innovation' implies that Chinese calligraphy will be transformed from its traditional roots into a modern art form. Chinese calligraphy has undergone the processes of deliberation, revolution and innovation

over the past century. Both of these artists have devoted their careers to investigating and expanding the language of ink, in the hope of presenting to audiences that modern Chinese calligraphy is an art form targeted to the world and created for the future. It is also an important expression of sharing the value of Chinese culture to the world and an artistic way of expressing the confidence of Chinese culture.

JULIA F. ANDREWS
Specialist in Chinese art, professor at Ohio State University

DIPLOMACY

BEIJING DISMISSES US FORMER OFFICIALS VISIT TO TAIWAN AS 'FUTILE'

A delegation of former U.S. defense officials arrived in Taiwan yesterday in a sign of stepped-up communication between the two sides while China considers it a "futile" exercise.

Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen is leading the five-person delegation that is to meet with Tsai Ing-wen and other top officials during the two-day visit. They were greeted at Taipei's Songshan Airport by Taiwanese minister Joseph Wu, who bumped elbows with the group members.

Tsai's office said the delegation had been appointed by U.S. President Joe Biden and the visit would permit "an in-depth exchange of views on Taiwan-U.S. cooperation issues in various fields."

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin dismissed the U.S. delegation's visit, saying it was "futile for the U.S. to send anyone to demonstrate its so-called support for Taiwan."

Wang told a daily briefing that China urges the U.S. to honor past communiqués signed with China, "stop all forms of official exchange



Minister Joseph Wu (right) greets former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Adm. Mike Mullen as he arrives at Taipei Songshan Airport

with Taiwan, and handle Taiwan-related issues with caution so as to avoid further serious damage to the overall situation of China-U.S. relations."

Taiwan hopes the sides will "continue to deepen the steady development of Taiwan-U.S. rela-

tions, continue to jointly maintain regional peace and stability, and continue to jointly contribute to global peace and prosperity," it said in a statement.

Separately, former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is to arrive in Taiwan today. Pompeo,

who earlier led the Central Intelligence Agency, will also meet with Tsai and address a forum, according to the Foreign Ministry.

"Former Secretary of State Pompeo's visit displays fully U.S. bipartisan backing for its 'rock solid' support" for Taiwan, the mi-

nistry said.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has drawn fresh attention to China's threat to use force to annex self-governing democratic Taiwan, which it claims as its own territory.

Circumstances are very different, however. Taiwan lies 160 kilometers across the Taiwan Strait from mainland China and enjoys strong support from the U.S., which is legally bound to ensure the island can defend itself and to treat all threats to it as matters of "grave concern."

China has not condemned Russia's war against Ukraine and its criticism of sanctions leveled against Moscow is widely seen as a sign of commitment to the two countries' mutual defiance of Washington and the West, despite Beijing's longstanding defense of the principle of national sovereignty.

China has been sending military aircraft into Taiwan's air defense identification zone on a near-daily basis, and on Saturday, its Defense Ministry protested as provocative the passage of the guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson through the Taiwan Strait.

The strait is in international waters and the U.S. Navy said the ship's passage "demonstrates the United States' commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific." **MDT/AP**

COVID-19

Hong Kong considers lockdown as daily infections reach tens of thousands

HONG Kong reported a record 34,466 new coronavirus infections Monday as deaths continued to climb, as authorities assess the possibilities of locking down the city.

Hong Kong is grappling with a coronavirus surge driven primarily by the omicron variant. Daily cases have more than quadrupled from a week ago, when the city reported over 7,500 infections.

"Once every three days the case number will double," said Albert Au, principal medical and health officer of the city's Centre for Health Protection during a daily virus briefing. "We think that the number will continue to climb."

The city also reported 87 deaths Monday, including 67 people who were unvaccinated.

Health authorities said the government could implement measures that

may involve "asking people to stay at home," and that it remains to be seen whether it would be done via legislation or other means.

Hong Kong health minister Sophia Chan said during a radio program Monday that the government is "still discussing" the matter of a lockdown to reduce the flow of people and maximize the effectiveness of mass testing.

Hong Kong officials last week announced citywide universal testing slated for March, with more than 7 million of the city's residents required to undergo testing three times.

Some supermarkets had their shelves wiped bare as residents stockpiled daily necessities after rumors circulated on social media that there was a vote in the legislature to lock down the city for a week.

The legislature denied that such a matter was

being discussed.

"The Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat is aware of various recorded voice and text messages being widely spread in the society, claiming that LegCo is undergoing legislative work and counting votes for imposing lockdown which prohibits members of the public from leaving home for seven days," it said in a statement Monday.

"The Secretariat clarified today (February 28) that LegCo and its committees have not conducted any discussion on the matter, and reiterated that all meetings of LegCo are open, transparent and broadcast live."

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam, who visited the Shenzhen Bay Port on Monday night to welcome a group of mainland experts into the city, said to reporters that the government was

still assessing whether a lockdown will be implemented to prevent residents from leaving their homes during the upcoming mass-testing exercise.

She also said that residents need not panic and urged them not to be misled by rumors. Lam also said that food supplies to Hong Kong were normal.

Lam had previously said a citywide lockdown was unrealistic as certain groups still needed to go out and work during the epidemic.

Authorities have extended social distancing measures, such as a ban on restaurant dining after 6 p.m., to April and brought forward summer holidays for students to March so that schools can be turned into testing centers, isolation facilities and vaccination premises. Students who have their holidays moved forward are likely to



attend school through the summer, though international schools in the city are not affected.

Since the beginning of the current COVID-19 wave at the end of 2021, the city has reported 193,149 infections.

Mainland authorities have sent expert teams and medical resources to Hong Kong, as the city rushes to build temporary isolation facilities to cope with the surge in infections.

Hong Kong is still aligning itself with mainland China's "zero COVID" poli-

cy to totally stamp out outbreaks, even as most of the world has opted to live with the virus.

Authorities have taken drastic measures over the last two months, including locking down residential estates where clusters of infections have been detected and quarantining and mass-testing close contacts of infected patients.

Hong Kong has reported 205,780 infections so far, with 744 deaths. Nearly 94% of the city's total case count has come from its current wave. **MDT/AP**



A burnt car is seen in front of a damaged City Hall building in Kharkiv, Ukraine

PUTIN'S WAR

Russia bombs Kharkiv as convoy nears Kyiv

YURAS KARMANAU, KYIV

RUSSIAN shelling pounded civilian targets in Ukraine's second-largest city again yesterday and a 40-mile convoy of tanks and other vehicles threatened the capital — tactics Ukraine's embattled president said were designed to force him into concessions in Europe's largest ground war in generations.

With the Kremlin increasingly isolated by tough economic sanctions that have tanked the ruble currency, Russian troops attempted to advance on Ukraine's two biggest cities. In strategic Kharkiv, an eastern city with a population of about 1.5 million, videos posted online showed explosions hitting the region's Soviet-era administrative building and residential areas.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the missile attack on Kharkiv's main square "frank, undisguised terror," blaming a Russian missile and calling it a war crime. "Nobody will forgive. Nobody will forget. ... This is state terrorism of the Russian Federation."

Throughout Ukraine, many civilians spent another night huddled in shelters, basements or corridors.

The casualty toll mounted as Ukraine faced Day 6 of a Russian invasion that has shaken the 21st century world order. Hopes for a negotiated solution to the war dimmed after a first, five-hour session of talks between Ukraine

and Russia yielded no stop in the fighting, though both sides agreed to another meeting in coming days.

With Western powers sending weapons to Ukraine and driving a global squeeze of Russia's economy, President Vladimir Putin's options diminished as he seeks to redraw the global map — and pull Ukraine's western-leaning democracy back into Moscow's orbit.

"I believe Russia is trying to put pressure (on Ukraine) with this simple method," Zelenskyy said late Monday in a video address, referring to stepped-up shelling. He did not offer details of the talks between Ukrainian and Russian envoys, but he said Kyiv was not prepared to make concessions "when one side is hitting another with rocket artillery."

As the talks along the Belarusian border wrapped up, several blasts could be heard in the capital, and Russian troops advanced on the city of nearly 3 million. The convoy of armored vehicles, tanks, artillery and support vehicles was 25 kilometers from the center of the city and stretched about 65 kilometers, according to satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies.

"They want to break our nationhood, that's why the capital is constantly under threat," Zelenskyy said, saying that it was hit by three missile strikes on Monday and that hundreds of saboteurs were roaming the city.

Kharkiv, near the Russian bor-

der, is another key target. One after the other, explosions burst through a residential area of the city in one video verified by AP. In the background, a man pleaded with a woman to leave, and a woman cried.

Determined for life to go on despite the shelling, hospital workers transferred a Kharkiv maternity ward to a bomb shelter. Amid makeshift electrical sockets and mattresses piled up against the walls, pregnant women paced the crowded space, accompanied by the cries of dozens of newborns.

The Russian military has denied targeting residential areas despite abundant evidence documented by AP reporters around Ukraine of shelling of homes, schools and hospitals.

The International Criminal Court chief prosecutor has said he plans to open a Ukraine investigation and is monitoring the conflict.

Regional administration chief Oleh Sinehubov said that the administration headquarters in the city center also came under Russian shelling. Images posted online showed the building's facade and interior badly damaged by a powerful explosion that also blew up part of its roof. The state emergency agency said that attack wounded six people, including a child.

Sinehubov said that at least 11 people were killed and scores of others were wounded during Monday's shelling of the city.

Meanwhile, flames shot up from a military base northeast of Kyiv, in the suburb of Brovary, in footage shot from a car driving past. In another video verified by AP, a passenger pleads with the driver, "Misha, we need to drive quickly as they'll strike again."

And Ukrainian authorities released details and photos of an attack Sunday on a military base in Okhtyrka, a city between Kharkiv and Kyiv, saying more than 70 Ukrainian soldiers were killed along with some local residents. The attack could not be immediately confirmed.

The Russian military's movements have been stalled by fierce resistance on the ground and a surprising inability to dominate Ukraine's airspace.

In the face of that resistance, the Kremlin has twice in as many days raised the specter of nuclear war and put on high alert an arsenal that includes intercontinental ballistic missiles and long-range bombers. Stepping up his rhetoric, President Vladimir Putin denounced the United States and its allies as an "empire of lies."

Western nations have increased weapons shipments to Ukraine to help its forces defend themselves — but have so far ruled out sending in troops. Still, the embattled country moved to solidify its ties to the West by applying to join the European Union — a largely symbolic move for now, but one that won't sit well with Putin, who was already infuriated by Ukraine's desire to join the NATO alliance.

Messages aimed at the advancing Russian soldiers popped up on billboards, bus stops and electronic traffic signs across the capital. Some used profanity to encourage Russians to leave. Others appealed to their humanity.

"Russian soldier — Stop! Remember your family. Go home with a clean conscience," one read.

Fighting raged in other towns and cities. The strategic port city of Mariupol, on the Sea of Azov, is "hanging on," said Zelenskyy adviser Oleksiy Arestovich. An oil depot was reported bombed in the eastern city of Sumy.

In the seaside resort town of Berdyansk, dozens of protesters chanted angrily in the main square against Russian occupiers, yelling at them to go home and singing the Ukrainian national anthem. They described the soldiers as exhausted young conscripts.

"Frightened kids, frightened looks. They want to eat," Konstantin Maloletka, who runs a small shop, said by telephone. He said the soldiers went into a supermarket and grabbed canned meat, vodka and cigarettes.

"They ate right in the store," he said. "It looked like they haven't been fed in recent days."

For many, Russia's announcement of a nuclear high alert stirred fears that the West could be drawn into direct conflict with Russia. But a senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the United States had yet to see any appreciable change in Russia's nuclear posture.

As far-reaching Western sanctions on Russian banks and other institutions took hold, the ruble plummeted, and Russia's Central Bank scrambled to shore it up, as did Putin, signing a decree restricting foreign currency.

But that did little to calm Russian fears. In Moscow, people lined up to withdraw cash as the sanctions threatened to drive up prices and reduce the standard of living for millions of ordinary Russians.

The economic sanctions, ordered by the U.S. and other allies, were just one contributor to Russia's growing status as a pariah country.

Russian airliners are banned from European airspace, Russian media is restricted in some countries, and some high-tech products can no longer be exported to the country. On Monday, international sports bodies moved to exclude Russian athletes and officials from international events, including soccer's World Cup.

The U.N. human rights chief said Monday at least 102 civilians have been killed and hundreds wounded — warning that figure is probably a vast undercount.

More than a half-million people have fled the country since the invasion, another U.N. official said, many of them going to Poland, Romania and Hungary.

Among the refugees in Hungary was Maria Pavlushko, 24, an information technology project manager from a city west of Kyiv. She said her father stayed behind to fight the Russians.

"I am proud about him," she said, adding that many of her friends were planning to fight, too. **MDT/AP**

PUTIN'S WAR

At rare UN session, Russia is pressed to stop war in Ukraine

JENNIFER PELTZ
& EDITH M. LEDERER,
UNITED NATIONS

AMBASSADORS from dozens of countries yesterday [Macau time] backed a proposal demanding that Russia halt its attack on Ukraine, as the U.N. General Assembly held a rare emergency session during a day of frenzied and sometimes fractious diplomacy surrounding the five-day-old war.

"If Ukraine does not survive ... international peace will not survive," Ukrainian Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya said at the assembly's first emergency meeting since 1997. "Have no illusions. If Ukraine does not survive, we cannot be surprised if democracy fails next."

Reflecting escalating global alarm, both of the U.N.'s major bodies — the 193-nation assembly and the smaller, more powerful Security Council — took the unusual step of holding simultaneous, hastily scheduled meetings on the war. In Geneva, the U.N. Human Rights Council voted to hold its own urgent session.

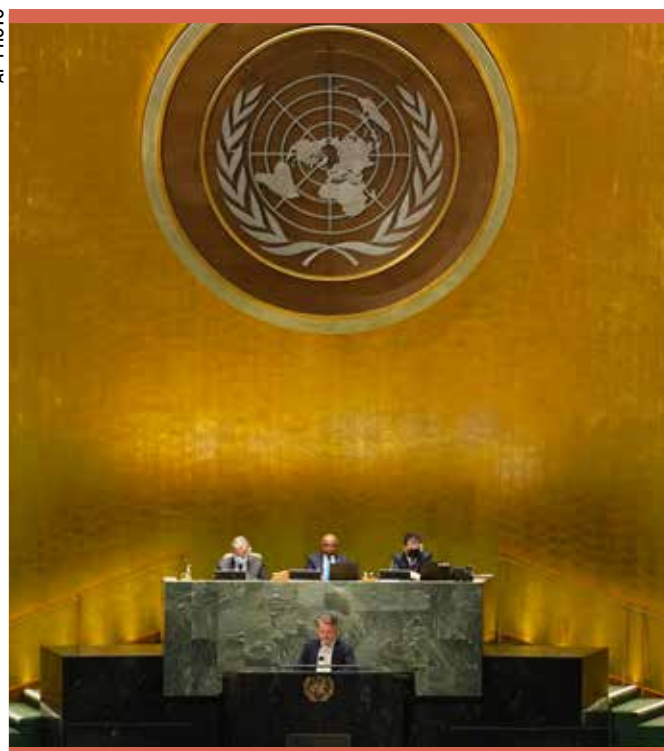
Tension permeated the diplomatic discourse: The Security Council meeting opened with the news that the United States was kicking out 12 Russian U.N. diplomats whom Washington accused of spying.

Meanwhile, Russian and Ukrainian officials held talks on the Belarus border, agreeing only to keep talking.

"The guns are talking now, but the path of dialogue must always remain open," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the assembly. "We need peace now."

Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia reiterated his country's assertions that what it calls a "special military operation" in defense of two breakaway areas in eastern Ukraine was being misrepresented.

"Russian actions are being distorted and thwarted," he complained. Russia has repeatedly sought to blame Ukraine for what



Moscow claims are abuses of Russian speakers in the eastern enclaves.

"The Russian Federation did not begin these hostilities that were unleashed by Ukraine against its own residents," he said. "Russia is seeking to end this war."

The assembly session came three days after an attempt to condemn and stop Russia's attack ran into a Russian veto in the Security Council.

The assembly will give all U.N. members an opportunity to speak about the war. More than 110 signed up to do so, with speeches to continue Tuesday. The assembly, which allows no vetoes, is expected to vote later in the week on a resolution coordinated by European Union envoys, working with Ukraine.

The draft resolution, obtained by The Associated Press, demands that Russia immediately stop using force against Ukraine and withdraw all troops. It urges an "immediate peaceful resolution" through dialogue and negotiations, and it deplores what it calls Russia's "aggression" and the "involvement" of Belarus, which is siding with Moscow.

Assembly President Abdulla Shahid opened yesterday's session by asking all envoys to stand for a moment of silence. In hours of speeches afterward, dozens exhorted their colleagues to vote yes.

"With the Security Cou-

ncil having failed to deliver against its responsibilities, we, the General Assembly, must now stand up to play our part," said New Zealand's ambassador, Carolyn Schwalger.

Austrian Ambassador Alexander Marschik appealed to those who have good relations with Russia, saying that "a good friend, an honest friend, will speak up and say what needs to be said and what needs to be done when a friend commits an illegal and evil act."

But Russian ally Syria accused the West of a "politics of hypocrisy," noting that various other conflicts over the years haven't gotten such special attention.

"This historic emergency session on the situation in Ukraine completes the anti-Russian campaign that finds its origins in the provocative and hostile rhetoric towards Russia, propagated by the West to stoke tensions in Ukraine" and compromise Russia's security, Syrian Ambassador Bassam Sabbagh said.

China, another Russian ally, called for respecting all countries' sovereignty and internationally recognized borders but didn't directly address the resolution.

Instead, Ambassador Zhang Jun encouraged fostering a conducive atmosphere for Russian-Ukrainian talks and frowned on "any approach that may exacerbate tensions."

"Nothing can be gai-

ned from stirring up a new Cold War, but everyone will stand to lose," he said.

The Security Council meeting later on was focused on the humanitarian impact of Russia's invasion, but the session began with a prickly exchange about the Russian diplomats' expulsion from the U.S.

Nebenzia bristled to the council that the expulsions were "yet another hostile step" by Washington. U.S. Deputy Ambassador Richard Mills said the dozen diplomats were engaged in undiplomatic activities.

Olivia Dalton, a spokesperson for the United States' U.N. mission, later said in a statement that the 12 were "intelligence operatives" who were "engaging in espionage activities that are adverse to our national security." Nebenzia, in remarks to The Associated Press, dismissed the assertion as a pretext.

With the U.N. saying the war is creating an already alarming and potentially massive humanitarian and refugee crisis, France and Mexico planned to propose a humanitarian-focused Security Council resolution. French Ambassador Nicolas de Riviere said Sunday it would "demand the end of hostilities, protection of civilians, and safe and unhindered humanitarian access to meet the urgent needs of the population."

U.N. humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said there has been "alarming" scale of civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure in the war's early days, pointing to aerial attacks and fighting in urban areas disrupting essential services, including health, electricity, water and sanitation.

U.N. refugee chief Filippo Grandi said 520,000 refugees from Ukraine are in neighboring countries and the number keeps rising. The U.N. is planning for up to 4 million refugees in the coming weeks if the conflict doesn't end, he said.

"We know that we are not even scratching the surface to meet the needs of Ukrainians," Grandi said. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

2000 PINOCHET ESCAPES TORTURE TRIAL CHARGES



Former Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet is heading home after being told the UK would not extradite him on torture charges.

After 16 months of legal wrangling, General Pinochet was told earlier today by UK Home Secretary Jack Straw that he was free to leave.

A Chilean Air Force jet took off from RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire at 1315 GMT with the 84-year-old general on board.

General Pinochet was arrested in London in October 1998 at the request of Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon who is seeking to put him on trial for human rights abuses during his 17-year rule in Chile.

He is expected to arrive in Chile to a hero's welcome from supporters.

But campaigners for alleged victims of his regime were bitter about the decision.

Chile Democratico, a group of Chilean exiles in Britain, said the Home Secretary had "failed the cause of human rights" and accused the British and Chilean governments of a "stitch-up".

Only a last-minute legal challenge could have delayed the general's departure.

But Spain, Switzerland, Belgium and France - the countries seeking his extradition - said they would not, or could not, appeal.

Mr Straw made his decision after re-examining a medical report filed on General Pinochet in January.

Speaking to MPs in the House of Commons shortly after General Pinochet's departure Mr Straw said he was aware the general was now unlikely to stand trial.

"I was driven to the conclusion that a trial of the charges against Senator Pinochet, however desirable, was simply no longer possible," Mr Straw said.

The Conservatives have welcomed today's decision, but leader William Hague accused Labour of incompetence.

He said £4m of public money had been wasted on "moral posturing" which had achieved nothing.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Augusto Pinochet never stood trial. In July 2002 Chile's Supreme Court upheld a controversial verdict that found him mentally unfit to stand trial for human rights crimes. A few days later General Pinochet resigned his post as senator-for-life in Chile's parliament citing health reasons. General Pinochet died aged 91 in Santiago in December 2006. Despite his human rights record, many Chileans loved him and said he saved the country from Marxism. But even many loyal supporters abandoned him after it became clear in 2004 that he had stolen about \$27m in secret offshore bank accounts that were under investigation at the time of his death.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Don't overspend to impress someone who interests you. Call siblings or old friends to catch up on recent news. Friends from your past may come back into your life.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Focus on what's important rather than spreading yourself too thin and accomplishing little. Spend some time with the one you love. Pleasure trips will be satisfying. Don't let your partner put you down.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You can ask for favors or run your ideas by those who will be able to support your objectives. Stomach problems could prevail if you haven't been watching your diet. Strong willpower will come to your rescue.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Let others know what your intentions are and be honest in your approach. Be careful not to reveal private information. Involvement in fitness clubs will be conducive to engaging romantic connections.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Spend time with youngsters today. Be sure not to reveal private information to the wrong individuals. Join a club to work off that excess energy; but consider ways of doing that without spending the money.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
You may have ignored or neglected your mate lately. Communication will be your best bet. They may cost you dearly. Secret affairs will eventually backfire on you.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Set your goals and stick to your guns. Someone may be trying to damage your reputation. Valuable information can be yours if you listen to those with experience.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Your social activity should be conducive to finding love. Do not get upset over trivial matters. You will be able to pick up on future trends if you keep your eyes peeled for unique ideas.

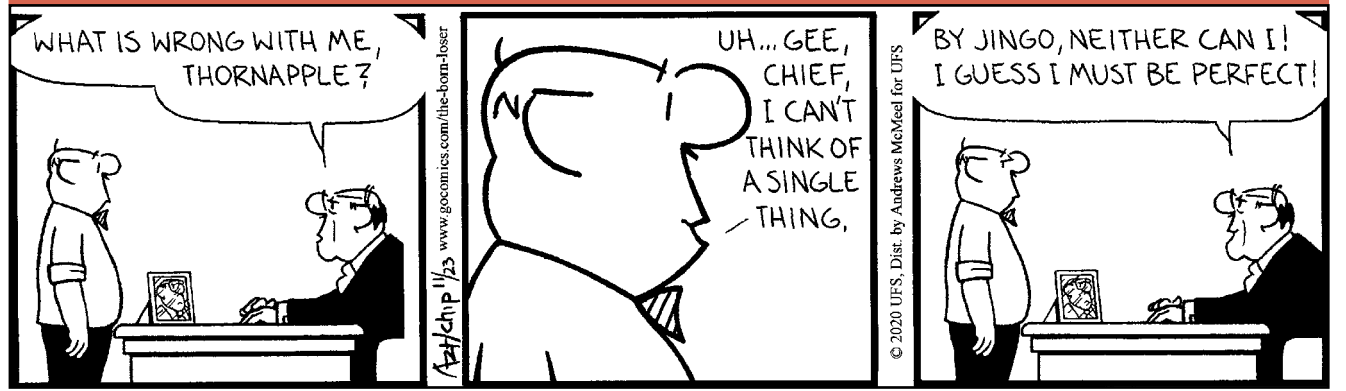
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Friends from your past may come back into your life. Think about taking the time to complete unfinished domestic chores. In sincere gestures of friendliness are likely to occur.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
You will be able to find the perfect outfit, and the greatest new accessory for your house. Losses could occur if you haven't been careful when dealing with joint financial ventures.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
You may want to take another look at the investment you are about to make. Try to put your money away for a rainy day. Do not lend money or belongings to friends.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Go over your finances and figure out a solid budget. Travel and entertaining conversation will be informative and uplifting. Try looking into new ways to make extra money.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-1	14	fine
Harbin	-5	4	cloudy
Tianjin	5	17	cloudy
Urumqi	8	15	cloudy
Xi'an	9	18	cloudy
Lhasa	2	9	fine
Chengdu	13	20	overcast
Chongqing	10	20	cloudy
Kunming	6	15	cloudy
Nanjing	18	24	cloudy
Shanghai	7	16	cloudy
Wuhan	10	17	cloudy
Hangzhou	-8	0	snow
Taipei	2	16	fine
Guangzhou	15	24	cloudy
Hong Kong	16	21	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-9	2	overcast
Frankfurt	-3	9	overcast
Paris	7	13	rain
London	6	8	rain
New York	4	12	overcast

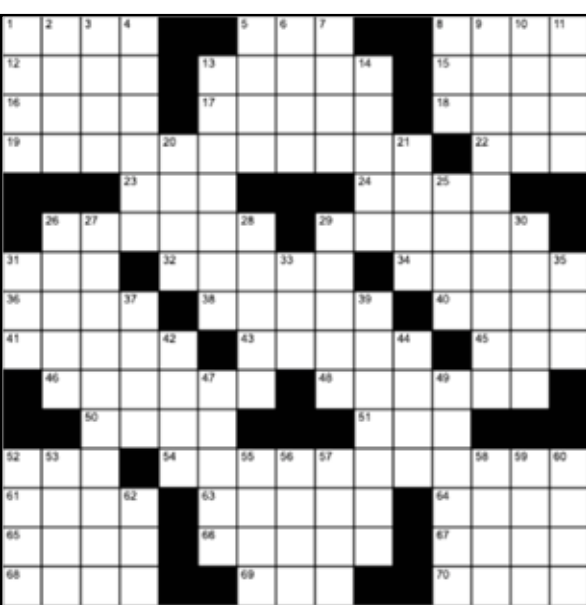
CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Nervous twitches; 5- Always, poetically; 8- Savvy about; 12- Tennis great Arthur; 13- Burdened; 15- Waterproof canvas; 16- Café au ___; 17- Muse of lyric poetry; 18- Draft classification; 19- Shipment; 22- Olive ___; 23- Essen exclamation; 24- Cereal grain; 26- Shooting star; 29- Out, in bed; 31- Corral; 32- Falls; 34- Foil maker; 36- Little biter; 38- Racket; 40- Forsaken; 41- Tin Pan Alley org.; 43- Scoff; 45- Bit of film, to a photog; 46- Corroborate; 48- General tendencies; 50- Waiter's offering; 51- Having four sharps; 52- Presidential nickname; 54- Concerning the appreciation of beauty; 61- Editor Wintour; 63- Band's sample tapes; 64- Full of energy; 65- Introduction to physics?; 66- Discharge; 67- Rime; 68- Cong. meeting; 69- "Wheel of Fortune" buy; 70- Nimble;

DOWN 1- Apply powder to oneself; 2- Golfer Aoki; 3- Lower jaw; 4- Attacks; 5- Acquire through work; 6- Dutch cheese, wrapped in red wax; 7- Network of nerves; 8- Siouan speaker; 9- Time in which light travels one foot, approximately; 10- Low card; 11- Iridescent gemstone; 13- Chicken breed; 14- Taboos; 20- Chilled; 21- Currency unit in Western Samoa; 25- Blab; 26- Brainy bunch; 27- Laws; 28- Fowl pole; 29- It's a plus; 30- Skin openings; 31- Links org.; 33- Slender metal fastener; 35- Film director Lee; 37- London gallery; 39- Most strange; 42- Clinton cabinet member Federico; 44- 1996 Tony-winning musical; 47- Glove material; 49- Equine sounds; 52- Alpo alternative; 53- Leg joint; 55- Nintendo rival; 56- Revenuers, for short; 57- Flexible tube; 58- Poultry enclosure; 59- Lab gel; 60- Australasian parrot; 62- Small batteries;

Yesterday's solution

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



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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INTERNET

BIG TECH GRAPPLES WITH RUSSIAN STATE MEDIA, PROPAGANDA

DAVID KLEPPER & AMANDA SEITZ, WASHINGTON

AS Russia's war in Ukraine plays out for the world on social media, big tech platforms are facing increased calls to bar Russian state media from using their platforms to spread propaganda and misinformation.

None of the U.S.-owned tech companies have responded with an outright ban of those outlets. Instead they've offered more modest changes: limiting the Kremlin's reach, labeling more of this content so that people know it originated with the Russian government, and cutting Russian state organs off from whatever ad revenue they were previously making.

The changes are a careful balancing act intended to slow the Kremlin from pumping propaganda into social media feeds without angering Russian officials to the point that they yank their citizens' access to platforms during a crucial time of war, said Katie Harbath, a former public policy director for Facebook.

"They're trying to walk this very



fine line, they're doing this dance," said Harbath, who now serves as the director of technology and democracy at the International Republican Institute. "We want to stand up to Russia but we also don't want to get shut down in the country. How far can we push this?"

Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, announced yesterday [Macau time] it would restrict access to Russia's RT and Sputnik services in Europe, following a statement by European Union President Ursula von der Leyen over the weekend that officials are working to ban the sites through

out the EU.

The U.S. has not taken similar action or applied sanctions to Russian state media, leaving the American-owned tech companies to wrestle with how to blunt the Kremlin's reach on their own.

The results have been mixed.

RT and other Russian-state media accounts are still active on Facebook in the U.S. Twitter announced that after seeing more than 45,000 tweets daily from users sharing Russian state-affiliated media links in recent days, it will add labels to content from the Kremlin's websites. The company also said it would not recommend

or direct users to Russian-affiliated websites in its search function.

Over the weekend, the Menlo Park, California-based company announced it was banning ads from Russian state media and had removed a network of 40 fake accounts, pages and groups that published pro-Russian talking points. The network used fictitious persons posing as journalists and experts, but didn't have much of an audience.

Facebook began labeling state-controlled media outlets in 2020.

Meanwhile, Microsoft announced it wouldn't display content or ads from RT and Sputnik, or inclu-

de RT's apps in its app store. And Google's YouTube restricted Russian-state media from monetizing the site through ads, although the outlets are still uploading videos every few minutes on the site.

By comparison, the hands-off approach taken by TikTok, a Chinese platform popular in the U.S. for short, funny videos, has allowed pro-Russian propaganda to flourish on its site. The company did not respond to messages seeking comment.

One recent video posted to RT's TikTok channel features a clip of Steve Bannon, a former top adviser to ex-President Donald Trump who now hosts a podcast with a penchant for misinformation and conspiracy theories.

"Ukraine isn't even a country. It's kind of a concept," Bannon said in the clip, echoing a claim by Russian President Vladimir Putin. "So when we talk about sovereignty and self-determination it's just a corrupt area where the Clintons have turned into a colony where they can steal money."

Already, Facebook's efforts to limit Russian state media's reach have drawn ire from Russian officials. Last week, Meta officials said they had rebuffed Russia's request to stop fact-checking or labeling posts made by Russian state media. Kremlin officials responded by restricting access to Facebook.

MDT/AP

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The houses are set in the heart of the World Heritage Site of the Douro Valley and its famous winery landscape where the world's 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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WINTER SPORTS

Russia excluded from skating as sporting sanctions increase

RUSSIAN athletes have been excluded from yet another sport that is extremely popular at home following the country's invasion of Ukraine.

Russia was banned from competing in international ice skating events yesterday, a day after being kicked out of soccer competitions and hockey — Vladimir Putin's favorite sport. The decisions follow the International Olympic Committee's request to keep Russian athletes out of sporting events around the world.

The International Skating Union, the body that runs the sport around the world, said no athletes from Russia or Belarus "shall be invited or allowed to participate" in events until further notice.

"The ISU Council reiterates its solidarity with all those affected by the conflict in Ukraine and our thoughts are with the entire Ukrainian people and country," the ISU said in a statement.

Belarus has been a key ally of



Russia in its attack on Ukraine.

The world figure skating championships are scheduled for later this month in Montpellier, France. The ISU decision means Olympic champion Anna Shcherbakova and 15-year-old teammate Kamila Valieva, who was the focus of a still-unresolved doping dispute at

last month's Winter Olympics, will be excluded from the competition.

Also yesterday, the International Volleyball Federation said it had stripped Russia of hosting the men's world championships in August and September and would seek another host country or countries.

"It would be impossible to prepare and stage the World Championships in Russia due to the war in Ukraine," the FIVB board said.

The sport of swimming, however, has so far chosen to ignore the recommendation from the IOC to ban Russians. The sport's governing body, known as FINA,

said Tuesday it would allow Russian and Belarusian swimmers to take part "as neutrals, competing under the FINA flag and with the FINA anthem."

The FINA website still lists Russia as hosting the world short-course championships in December.

The swimming body, however, said it had withdrawn a federation honor awarded to Putin in 2014.

The International Ski Federation has also decided to allow Russians to continue to compete, but the Norwegian Ski Federation said Tuesday it would block Russians from competing in upcoming World Cup events in its country.

"We had hoped that FIS would reach the same conclusion on behalf of all ski nations, but now the Norwegian Ski Federation can no longer wait. The executive board has therefore today decided to notify FIS that Russian and Belarusian athletes will not be allowed to participate in the upcoming events in Norway," Norwegian Ski Federation president Erik Roste said.

It's unclear if Russian track athletes will be allowed to compete at the world indoor championships this month in Serbia. The country remains suspended from the sport for doping but many Russians compete as "neutral athletes" without a flag or national emblems. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily

Editorial, China Daily

**UKRAINE-RUSSIA TALKS
 MUST BE ENCOURAGED**

With the Ukraine crisis continuing into its fifth day on Monday, fighting between Russian and Ukrainian troops has become fiercer and the humanitarian disaster is worsening. An imminent refugee crisis is also looming as thousands of Ukrainians are trying to flee the country.

The magnitude of the Ukraine crisis would have been unimaginable to most people even just a week ago. Hence, any possibility of negotiations bringing an end to the crisis should have the full support of the international community.

But Western voices cannot be allowed to dominate the voice of the international community. Rather than seeking to mediate the crisis, Western powers, especially the United States and NATO leaderships, have been instigators and fuelers of the crisis.

Fully demonstrating their lack of impartiality, since the conflict began, Western countries, headed by the US, have imposed various sanctions aimed at debilitating Russia and rushed to provide Ukraine with weapons. The US and its European allies are making an unprecedented move to exclude Russia from the SWIFT interbank communication system.

Their efforts to exert extreme pressure on Russia are only aggravating the situation. It raises questions about the morality of these Western countries which are evidently willing to exploit the suffering of the Ukrainian people so long as Russia is mired in trouble, which they no doubt hope will lead to internal turmoil and regime change.

The international community needs to support direct talks in a neutral and fair way so that a longlasting solution to the problems can be found, that means not letting the West try to dictate how the talks play out from behind the scenes.

Even then it will not be easy for talks to yield a positive outcome, as Ukraine and Russia have to bridge the deep mistrust between them. Both will need to demonstrate sincerity and a spirit of compromise and diplomatic flexibility to achieve a solution that does not create grievances that may fester and erupt again at a later date.

China supports all diplomatic efforts conducive to a peaceful settlement of the Ukraine crisis and has steadfastly encouraged direct dialogue and negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. As State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said, Ukraine should function as a bridge between the East and the West, not as a frontier in big power confrontation.

Given that the Ukraine crisis has evolved from a complex historical context, China is also urging the European Union and Russia to enter into an equal-footed dialogue on European security issues with the aim of reaching a consensus of a balanced, effective and sustainable European security mechanism.

With talk of nuclear weapons being bandied about by various parties, the urgency for rational dialogue to restore a sense of perspective is clear.

Not only should the two belligerent parties seize the opportunity of negotiations, the West, too, should cherish the possibility of talks de-escalating tensions. All parties should refrain from stoking more confrontation and conflict through reckless moves or wild talk.

Chinese manufacturing activity grew weakly in February, hampered by supply disruptions, anti-virus controls and lackluster global demand, two surveys showed yesterday.

A purchasing managers' index issued by a Chinese business magazine, Caixin, improved to 50.4 from January's 49.1 on a 100-point scale on which numbers above 50 show activity increasing. A separate PMI issued by the Chinese statistics agency and an industry group edged up to 50.2 from 50.1.

Both surveys showed production accelerating while export or-

ders contracted.

"The job market remained under high pressure," said economist Wang Zhe of Caixin in a statement. "And we still need to keep an eye on inflationary pressure."

Official "zero tolerance" anti-disease measures starting in December have disrupted manufacturing and consumer spending. They have imposed restrictions as severe as confining families to their homes in areas with a total of as many as 20 million people.



AP PHOTO

**HOLLYWOOD HALTS
 RELEASES IN RUSSIA,
 INCLUDING 'THE BATMAN'**

JAKE COYLE, NEW YORK

WARNER Bros. is halting the release of "The Batman" in Russia, just days before it was to open in theaters there, as Hollywood moved to cease distribution plans in the country following Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Warner Bros., the Walt Disney Co. and Sony Pictures said yesterday [Macau time] that they would "pause" the release of their films in Russia. Each studio has significant upcoming releases that had been set to debut internationally in the coming weeks. "The Batman," one of the year's more anticipated films, launches Friday in North America and many overseas territories, including Russia.

"In light of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, WarnerMedia is pausing the release of its feature film 'The Batman' in Russia," a spokesperson for the studio said in a statement. "We will continue to monitor the situation as it evolves. We hope for a swift and peaceful resolution to this tragedy."

Warner Bros.' move closely followed a similar decision by the Walt Disney Co. The studio had planned to open the Pixar film "Turning Red" in Russia on March 10. That film is going straight to Disney+

in the U.S. Before Disney's announcement, Warner Bros. had been expected to proceed with the Russian release of "The Batman."

"Given the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and the tragic humanitarian crisis, we are pausing the release of theatrical films in Russia, including the upcoming 'Turning Red' from Pixar," a Disney spokesperson said in a statement. "We will make future business decisions based on the evolving situation. In the meantime, given the scale of the emerging refugee crisis, we are working with our NGO partners to provide urgent aid and other humanitarian assistance to refugees."

Hollywood scramble plans in Russia yesterday, as global pressure mounted to sever business ties with the country over the war in Ukraine. Western economic sanctions sent Russia's ruble plummeting as numerous nations sought to block Russian banks. On Saturday, the Ukrainian Film Academy called for an international boycott of the Russian film industry.

The Motion Picture Association said yesterday that it "stands with the international community in upholding the rule of law and condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine."

"On behalf of our mem-

ber companies, who lead the film, TV and streaming industry, we express our strongest support for Ukraine's vibrant creative community who, like all people, deserve to live and work peacefully," the MPA said in a statement.

Russia is not a leading market for Hollywood, but the country typically ranks in the top dozen countries globally in box office. Sony's recent smash hit "Spider-Man: No Way Home," which has totaled \$1.85 billion in ticket sales worldwide, has grossed \$46.7 million in Russia. Sony's most recent chart-topping release, the Tom Holland adventure "Uncharted," has amassed about \$20 million in Russia over the last two weeks.

After Disney and Warner Bros. made their announcements, Sony followed suit.

"Given the ongoing military action in Ukraine and the resulting uncertainty and humanitarian crisis unfolding in that region, we will be pausing our planned theatrical releases in Russia, including the upcoming release of 'Morbius,'" Sony said in a statement referencing the Spider-Man spinoff slated for early April. "Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have been impacted and hope this crisis will be resolved quickly." **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO

Hungary's right-wing nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orban (pictured), has for more than a decade nurtured close political and economic ties with Russia, giving him the reputation as the Kremlin's closest European Union ally. For weeks, as Russian President Vladimir Putin amassed tens of thousands of troops along the borders of Ukraine, Hungary's neighbor to the east, Orban avoided condemning the buildup and spoke emphatically against applying sanctions.



AP PHOTO

USA A man shot and killed his three daughters, their chaperone and himself during a supervised visit with the girls Monday at a church in Sacramento, California, authorities said. Deputies responding to reports of gunfire around 5 p.m. found five people dead, including the shooter, at the church in the Arden-Arcade neighborhood, said Sgt. Rod Grassmann with the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office. The victims included three girls ages 9, 10 and 13, Grassmann said.



AP PHOTO

USA Nevada's governor and his wife were accosted during the weekend by two men who followed them out of a Las Vegas restaurant shouting profanities, taunts and anti-government statements in an incident posted on the internet. In a statement released by his campaign for re-election, Gov. Steve Sisolak, a Democrat, characterized the Sunday evening incident as "racist threats." His wife is a former municipal finance specialist of Chinese heritage who was born in the Nevada town of Ely.