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Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre

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AP PHOTO



Indonesia Thousands of students marched in cities around the country yesterday to protest against rumors that the government is considering postponing the 2024 presidential election to allow President Joko Widodo to remain in office beyond the two-term legal limit, calling it a threat to the country's democracy. They demonstrated in front of the Parliament building in Jakarta where police used tear gas and water cannons to try to disperse the crowds, and in large cities all over Indonesia.

Pakistani lawmakers from the party of ousted Premier Imran Khan collectively resigned from Parliament yesterday ahead of the vote to elect a new prime minister. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, or Pakistan Justice Party, withdrew the nomination of former foreign minister and seasoned politician Shah Mahmood Qureshi as its candidate and more than 100 lawmakers walked out of the National Assembly.

AP PHOTO



Sri Lankan protesters occupied the entrance to the president's office for a second day, demanding Gotabaya Rajapaksa resign over the debt-ridden country's worst economic crisis in memory. Hundreds of demonstrators weathered heavy rain with raincoats and umbrellas and chanted anti-government slogans. Some called for the entire Parliament to disband to make way for a younger leadership. "We will stay on, we will leave only when we have chased them out," a protester said.

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AP PHOTO



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ANTHONY LAM



H. COLLEEN SINCLAIR
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

THAT OSCARS NIGHT

WILL SMITH'S SLAP SHOWS 'HONOR CULTURE' IS ALIVE AND WELL

AFTER witnessing the “slap heard around the world” during the 2022 Oscars, I wasn't surprised when the internet split into two camps: #TeamWill and #TeamChris.

As a social psychologist who studies aggression, I also wasn't surprised to see support for Will Smith – who slapped comedian Chris Rock after Rock joked about Smith's wife's alopecia – involve similar justifications: namely that the actor was “doing what needed to be done” to protect his wife, and that doing so made him “a real man.”

These defenses contain elements of what social scientists call a “culture of honor,” which is prevalent in certain regions, ethnic groups and subcultures around the world.

HOW CULTURES OF HONOR FLOURISH

Cultures of honor require men to aggressively defend their reputations against insults or threats, and this imperative extends to protecting their spouses, children and property. To not lash out at slights makes one less of a man.

This concept can be confused with “toxic masculinity” – which is a brand of anti-feminist hypermasculinity that promotes independence, emotional blunting and aggression to establish dominance over men and women. In fact, recent research finds the two concepts are distinct, with a culture of honor more closely tied to benevolent attitudes toward women and notions of chivalry. However, these two concepts can overlap, particularly in more traditional cultures.

Researchers argue that cultures of honor flourished in communities where law enforcement was inconsistent or nonexistent – such as the 19th-century American frontier and herding communities that lived in Africa and Latin America. This work has also been used to understand violence in certain inner-city communities where the police are less trusted.

In these places, a man's reputation becomes his first line of defense. If it becomes known that slights against him or his family won't go unpunished, it makes transgressors less likely to push their luck.

AP PHOTO



WHEN SOME SEE VIOLENCE AS ACCEPTABLE

Research on this topic can be traced to the work of social psychologists Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen, who sought to explain why homicide rates were significantly higher in the U.S. South and West than in the rest of the country.

Comparing crime statistics, Nisbett was able to show that the difference in homicide rates was due to the South and West having a higher rate of homicides tied to arguments. The country's different regions were similarly intolerant of violence, more generally, on questionnaires. However, respondents in the South were more likely to say violence was justified when a man – or his family – was insulted.

In subsequent studies, Cohen and Nisbett randomly sent one of two job applications to businesses throughout the U.S.

Accompanying each application was a cover letter in which

the applicant sought to explain a felony conviction, chalking it up to a misspent youth. In half of the letters, that felony conviction was a car theft. In the other half, it was manslaughter spurred by an insult. When the employer was from states where a culture of honor is more predominant, the researchers found that the hypothetical murderer actually received more responses – and with a far more understanding tone – than the car thief.

In the same study, Cohen and Nisbett recruited college journalists from around the country and randomly assigned them to write up a story about either an insult-related murder or a felony-related murder. Researchers found that the journalists cast the insult-related murder in a more favorable light when the journalist was writing for a paper in a state with a culture of honor – places like Texas, Alabama and Montana.

In other experiments, research-

ers have been able to show that after being insulted, people who adhere to an honor ideology register higher levels of testosterone and cortisol – two hormones tied to aggression and stress. They were also less willing to forgive a transgressor and had a tougher time calming down after being slighted. Finally, in questionnaires they were more likely to exhibit anger and shame when recalling a recent insult.

NO REMORSE

In the real world, places that adhere to the honor belief system are more likely to have school shootings. In these same states, convicted murderers were less likely to express remorse ahead of their executions. It's important, however, to exercise caution around making definitive conclusions about statistically rare events like school shootings and executions.

After Will Smith accepted his Best Actor Oscar for his role in

“King Richard,” he praised Richard Williams for doing everything he could to protect his family. To many viewers, Smith was summoning virtues like honor and chivalry to justify his actions earlier in the night.

Off the Oscars stage, you can also see a culture of honor being used to explain the Ukrainians' dogged defense of their country against a more powerful Russian invader, with Ukrainians praised for honorably defending home and hearth.

Certainly, cultural differences aren't the only factor influencing the way people responded to the slap. For instance, you'd expect fellow comedians to defend Chris Rock out of solidarity. And racist reactions were bound to emerge.

But while many people were quick to declare that “violence is never the answer,” for others violence can, in fact, be the answer – and that's due, in part, to the fact that honor culture is alive and well. **MDT/THE CONVERSATION**

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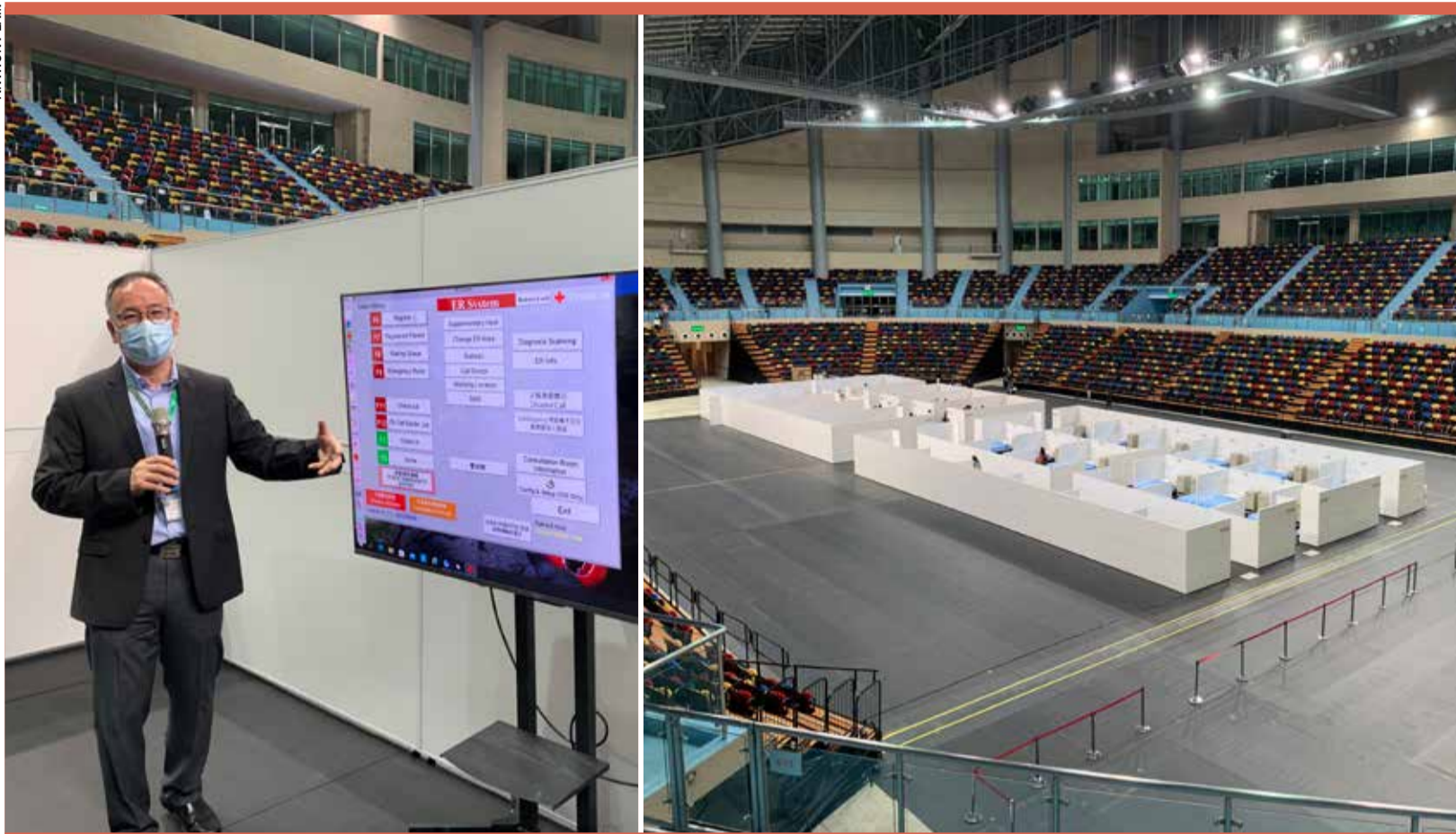
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ANTHONY LAM



COVID-19

Non-local medical staff may be invited to help in makeshift hospital

ANTHONY LAM

IF there is an outbreak in Macau necessitating the use of the makeshift hospital, non-local medical staff may be called upon to help, A&E doctor Lei Wai Seng, medical director of the public Conde São Januário Hospital, noted yesterday.

However, the medical doctor is confident about the capabilities of local medical practitioners, and hinted that non-local support will only be arranged when it is critically necessary.

He added that if there is a massive outbreak of Covid-19 in Macau, the situation in nearby regions may not be any better. Their medical capabilities will very likely run tight too, meaning that it will be difficult for them to give any support to Macau.

Officially referred to as the Novel Coronavirus Community Treatment Center, the makeshift hospital is located in and around the Macao East Asian Games Dome and in the Athletes Training and Internship Center.

The provisional facility is set to have a maximum capacity of 6,700 patients at full capacity. Lei stressed that the facility will only take in patients with mild to no symptoms. Those in a more severe condition – regardless of whether the condition worsens inside or outside the provisional facility – will be sent directly to the hospital.

He disclosed that in the Health Bureau's (SSM) plan, 20 doctors

and 40 to 50 nurses will be assigned to the facility in the early phase, adding that the WHO-classified Emergency Medical Team of Macao, China will be the first to attend to patients there because its members are familiar with outbreak responses.

Lei revealed that if the epicenter of the outbreak is among senior citizens, the makeshift hospital will be equipped with a larger medical team, as some elderly patients may have lower mobility and need closer attention.

By contrast, if young people are the majority of patients, a smaller medical staff may be assigned to the provisional facility.

If the situation becomes too intense, home or hotel quarantine may be considered for less severe patients.

The current version of the makeshift hospital has 50 partitioned wards installed and has cost the government about MOP200,000. Lei explained that, although all the equipment is usable, the current scale is too small for an actual mass outbreak. The current setup is only for training purposes.

Following data demonstrating that the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 has milder symptoms but higher transmissibility, transporting patients to the remote facility may be of concern. Lei said that other entities, such as the Public Security Police Force, are assigned to handle this matter in the gover-

ment's contingencies.

When asked whether the Hong Kong mode of taxi transport will be considered, Lei said that the government will make appropriate decisions if that happens.

A new mode of prescription and medicine distribution will also be introduced at the makeshift hospital, Lei said. Packs of medication, including the famed Lianhua Chinese medical capsules, may be prescribed to users according to their need.

The provisional facility is set to have a maximum capacity of 6,700 patients at full capacity

For example, close contacts will be required to wait for their test results at a designated area in the makeshift hospital. They may be prescribed with relevant medications while they wait because, if symptoms develop during this time, a medical doctor may not be able to see them right away.

The Community Treatment Center is divided into a hospital inside two coliseums, namely the Pavilion A of the Macao East Asia Games Dome and the Athletes Training and Internship Center, as well as a field hospital outside the coliseums, which include the Phase II of the Training and Inter-

ship Center and the parking lot of the Dome.

In addition, there are health inspection posts that carry out epidemiological research, sample collection, screening and sorting of contact and people with risks of all types. The Dome will also house makeshift laboratories that can handle nucleic acid tests.

At the Community Treatment Center there are areas for activities, rest, food and drinking water, offering meals, clothes and other consumables. Medical consultation services by telephone and videoconference will also be available.

The SSM have already prepared the necessary requirements for accommodation at the Community Treatment Center, including a list of recommended materials that patients are recommended to bring.

At the same time, to keep the Community Treatment Center functional, procedures have been developed for the management of materials, environmental disinfection and cleaning, IT technical support, food and waste treatment.

The selection of the provisional facility's location took into account the remoteness of the venue, as well as the capacity to provide one-stop services such as screening, nucleic acid testing, care and treatment, the SSM highlighted.

CE TO ATTEND PLENARY SESSION TODAY

The Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng will attend a plenary session of the Legislative Assembly (AL) at 3 p.m. today to answer AL members' questions on government policy and social issues. The CE attends question-and-answer sessions at the AL in order to enhance "communication with AL members, optimise administrative transparency and update the public [on] the progress of Government work," said the Government Information Bureau. The session will be broadcast live on the television and radio channels of public broadcaster TDM.

PHILIPPINE CONSULATE TO HOLD 30TH REPATRIATION FLIGHT APR. 21

The Philippine Consulate General in Macau SAR will facilitate its 30th repatriation flight on April 21, the Times has learned. The consulate has enabled the return home of 5,761 people in 29 flights to date since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. Usually, each flight has carried about 200 Filipinos. The most recent flight last month brought home the remains of three Filipinos who died in Macau of non-Covid related causes.

GRAND PRIX MUSEUM DEBUTS ONLINE VIRTUAL TOUR

The Macau Grand Prix Museum has debuted the new feature of a 360-degree panoramic view for residents and visitors to enjoy an online virtual tour to the museum. The zones, installations and exhibits in the Museum are brought to life in this new feature. Also, the "Museums and their Collections VI – Macau Grand Prix Museum" themed stamp series is now on display at the Macau Grand Prix Museum. The museum is also partnering with Air Macau to launch the promotional offer "Macau Grand Prix Museum x Air Macau Boarding Pass Promotion." As part of this promotion, until June 30, travelers can enjoy the buy-one-get-one-free offer when they purchase admission tickets to the museum by showing their Air Macau boarding pass from the previous seven days.

GAMING

THE STAR UNDER FIRE FOR ONGOING RELATIONSHIP WITH ALVIN CHAU

LYNZY VALLES

The Star Entertainment Group general counsel Andrew Power was quizzed on Monday about why the gaming operator has continued dealing with junket operator Suncity after it became aware, via an internal report, of the group's alleged links to organized crime.

The inquiry was told that Power was presented, in October 2020, with a report from Star's due diligence officer containing "four important strands of information" related to Suncity, including the alleged "triad antecedents" of its backer Alvin Chau, as cited in a report issued by the Australian Associated Press.

Last week, the casino's chief financial crime officer, Skye Arnott, acknowledged the relationship, despite being aware that Chau had "very unsavory business associations" linked to the drug trade, money laundering and organized crime.

The report pertained to the Hong Kong Jockey Club report,



where it noted that Suncity laundered about AUD2 million per day in cash from 2013 to 2015, adding that the junket mogul was a "threat" and would pose "tangible criminal [and] reputational risks" for the club.

In an inquiry yesterday, the counsel asked whether the only appropriate decision was to ex-

clude Chau from dealing with The Star as part of the duty of an anti-money laundering and counter terrorism financing compliance officer.

The inquiry was also told that Power later provided a "marked up" version of the report to the casino's due diligence officer, which had removed criticisms of the way

The Star dealt with Suncity and Chau in order to "sanitize" the document, according to the Australian news agency.

Power admitted that there was no recommendation about whether it was suitable for The Star to deal with Chau up until his arrest in November 2021.

The inquiry also questioned

the official about the controversial deployment of China Union Pay cards for VIP patrons to purchase gambling chips at The Star. Although Power said he was not aware of "dummy invoices" related to the cards, he admitted that there was "a practice of dummy rooms being assigned."

Last month, the inquiry heard that casino disguised AUD900 million worth of Chinese debit card gambling transactions as hotel expenses, and then misled banks in an attempt to conceal the massive instance of fraud.

An inquiry in late March revealed that Chinese high-rollers were allegedly encouraged to deposit millions of dollars into a junket operator's Macau bank account, where a middle man was present. Clients would deposit tens of millions in cash into his Macau bank accounts, which would later be transferred to The Star from an Australian bank account.

As executive has admitted that at least AUD76 million (around MOP460 million) had been transferred to the casino through a back channel over a period of nine months in 2018 and 2019.

The inquiry is ongoing as part of a regular review of The Star's casino license. The inquiry, slated to continue today, is determining Star's suitability to run its flagship casino in Sydney.

COMMERCIAL PROPERTY LOANS INCREASED BY 200%

COMMERCIAL real estate (CRL) loans approved by Macau banks increased by 210.1% month-to-month to MOP10.02 billion in the month of February, according to data provided by the Monetary Authority of Macao.

The monthly average of new CREs approved between December 2021 and February 2022 was MOP8.1 billion, down by 10.0% compared with the previous period (November 2021 to January 2022).

Realtor JLL noted earlier this year that the commercial property market is seeing better days.

Last year, the firm said that 392 retail property transactions were recorded, up 15.0% year-on-year. The majority of the transactions involved below MOP 50 million.

"Some landlords hedging mortgage repayments with rental income have left their properties vacant" since offering their properties at low rents may lead to decreased valuations, the firm previously stated.

Meanwhile, the new residential mortgage loans



(RML) dropped by 41.5% month-to-month to MOP2.05 billion, of which new RMLs to residents, representing 99.0% of the total, fell by 41.6% to MOP2.03 billion.

The monthly average of new RMLs approved between December 2021 and February 2022 was MOP2.7 billion, down by 12.7% from the previous period (November 2021 to January 2022).

The non-resident component decreased by 19.6% to MOP19.7 million.

Due to the repeated Co-

vid-19 infections, economic downturn, and high unemployment rate in Macau, property demand decreased, as most of the potential buyers decided to wait and see.

Last year, the overall residential sales transaction volume shrank significantly, as a total of 5,970 residential sales transactions were registered in 2021, down 6.6% year-on-year. Presale transactions totalled 467, accounting for only 7.8% of the total residential sales volume, lower than the average levels recorded in the past. **LV**

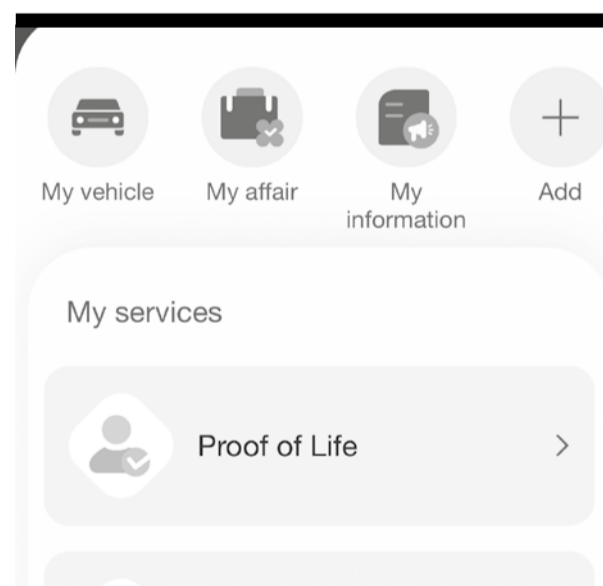
ENGLISH NOT AVAILABLE IN ALL SERVICES DESPITE GOV'T APP UPGRADE

DESPITE getting an upgrade and being dubbed Macao One Account 2.0, the government's centralized service app still does not offer all services in English.

Services with English menus available include proof-of-life for social security funds, utility bill registrations, Covid-19 vaccination appointments, non-resident domestic worker applications, as well as queuing systems for certain public services.

However, for example, once in the queuing system for the Transport Bureau, the Municipal Affairs Bureau, or the Government Service Centers, not even the names of the departments are available in English.

The front page of the app has a sliding bar atop with several icons signifying different types of services. The icon named "My Affair" may be confusing to some users. The government actually means "my portfolio" or "my experiences".



Pursuant to local laws, English is not mandatory in the provision of public services, but Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng has added English interpretation in his and the Executive Council's press conferences.

Yesterday, the government held a cross-departmental press conference to reveal the upgraded app. The government has tried to include as many types of services as possible into the app. Although

it will give greater convenience to users, it also means that a user's personal data is centralized on the app.

The upgrade was conducted with the support of AliCloud, a branch of China's internet mogul Alibaba.

Users can process as many as 127 types of services using the app, such as checking the registration status of the user's vehicle, and using e-membership cards. **AL**

Filipinos begin casting votes for presidential election

JING WU

OVERSEAS voting for the upcoming Philippine Presidential Election kicked off Sunday, with several Filipino voters expressing that they wish for a better country under new leadership.

More than 65 million Filipinos have registered to vote in the country and another 1.8 million have done so overseas.

During the last Philippine senate elections held in 2019, around 9,000 voters were registered in Macau. However, a statement from the Philippine Consulate General in Macau indicated that voter turnout was only 39%.

Speaking to the Times, Marivic Aurora, a domestic helper who has been in Macau for six years, is a first-time overseas voter. Back home, she votes in every election because she wants the country to "progress once again" under a new president.

"We have our right to choose our president," she told Times, "We want to have a peaceful country like Macau."

Aurora said that she is satisfied with life in city, because the "people are peaceful here" and she has a "kind employer."



However, she also wishes that the Macau government were more inclusive of the Filipino community, who are currently excluded from the welfare system, meaning that medical care is unaffordable for anyone working as a domestic helper.

In April of 2020, the government announced stimulus packages to drive domestic spending. The beneficiaries of the e-voucher scheme extended to all people residing in Macau, including all Macau ID holders, blue card holders, and students with foreign nationalities.

However, the government made a U-turn just a few days after the announcement and excluded non-Macau ID hol-

ders from the e-voucher scheme, causing lament among migrant groups.

A 47-year-old Filipina, who identified herself as Rowena, has been working as a domestic helper in Macau for "half of her life." According to her, Macau has been her "second home," adding, "My only wish in Macau is [for] my family [to stick] together," Rowena, who has four sons, said.

She added that she goes back to the Philippines to vote in every election and votes for a "better leader."

Another voter, Marilyn Rovillos, said that she "must stay" in Macau, due to the salary being competitive against other countries, meaning she is able to send money back to her family, even though she

has not been able to see them for over two years.

The polling station is at the Harborview Hotel for the first time. Back in the 2016 Presidential Election, only around 5,000 out of nearly 30,000 Filipino workers were registered to vote. This time, there are some 14,600 registered voters. However, turnout is unpredictable due to the large number of Filipinos who returned home since the onset of the pandemic.

In a letter to the public, the Consul General Porfirio M. Mayo Jr told the public to vote and not wait for the last day to avoid long queues, noting, "Your vote is important. Discipline and cooperation will lead to victory in our presidential elections held here in Macau."

DSAL pledges prioritizing local workers over TNRs

THE Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) has reiterated the Macau government's consistent adherence to the policy of resorting to the provision of work by non-resident workers (TNRs) only to temporarily make up for the lack of local workers.

In a statement, the bureau said that, in any situation, whenever there are suitable residents willing to fill a position, it is the obligation of the employing company to give priority to hiring such workers.

This comes after a me-



dia report about the low ratio of local workers to TNRs hired by an integra-

ted resort.

Data from DSAL shows that by the end of Fe-

bruary 2022, the number of TNRs was 168,442, a number that has decreased by 28,096 compared to the period before the pandemic.

The reduction of this number of TNRs mainly covers the following sectors: 12,641 workers in hotels and restaurants, 4,806 workers in cultural and recreational activities, 2,677 workers in wholesale and retail trade, 1,623 workers in transport, storage and communications, 1,475 in other sectors and 4,874 in domestic work.

DSAL pledged that it will continue to pay attention to the types of work and sectors of Macau residents and adjust the number of bluecard holders. LV

GOV'T HALTS QTSAS APPLICATIONS PROCESS

THE tourism bureau's Quality Tourism Services Accreditation Scheme (QTSAS) will not process new applications from the catering sector in 2022.

According to a statement released by the Macao Government Tourism Office, as part of its contingency arrangements, supervision and appraisal will be conducted on accredited catering businesses according to the adjusted assessment criteria this year.

The scheme halted submissions of applications and assessment for travel agencies in 2022, but pertinent accreditations remain valid for awarded merchants. As for the retail sector, MGTO will continue its collaboration with the Consumer Council, which brings together QTSAS and the Certified Shop Scheme.

MGTO pledged that it would carry on QTSAS's

work to support the trade's advancement of tourism service quality overall, while encouraging members of the tourism and related industries to join hands in offering "excellent trip experiences."

QTSAS now groups catering businesses into four applicable subcategories: "Restaurant (hotel)," "Restaurant (non-hotel)," "Food and Beverage Establishment" and "Simple Dining Establishment."

The "Special Theme Award" is newly available in the award mechanism, while some of the existing accolades have been renamed.

As the MGTO suspended QTSAS's application program for the catering sector in 2022, the assessment and conferment of the new award will begin only once the scheme resumes full operation. LV

CRIME

DRUNK MAN STORMS DELTA BRIDGE WANTING TO SWIM

A mainland man has been caught breaking into the Zhuhai Border Area of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge wearing only underwear. He has subsequently been fined 2,000 Chinese yuan.

The man told law enforcement personnel that he wanted to go swimming under the bridge.

While citing mainland news reports, local media Macao Daily News noted that the man, who was in a state of undress, entered the border area illegally on the evening of April 6. Law

enforcement personnel attempted to stop him, but he did not respond and instead tried to flee the scene.

After a 600-meter chase, members of law enforcement managed to intercept him by running at him from two directions.

The man told law enforcement entities that he, a tourist in Zhuhai, saw and became overwhelmed by the scale of the bridge after drinking beer that evening. Suddenly wanting to swim below the bridge, he undressed and rushed into the border area. AL



COVID-19

GUANGZHOU CLOSES TO MOST ARRIVALS AS CHINA'S OUTBREAK GROWS

THE manufacturing hub of Guangzhou closed itself to most arrivals yesterday as China battles a major COVID-19 surge in its big eastern cities.

Shanghai has taken the brunt of the rise, with another 26,087 cases announced yesterday, only 914 of which showed symptoms. The city of 26 million is under a tight lockdown, with many residents confined to their homes for up to three weeks and concerns growing over the effect on the economy of China's largest city.

The financial hub has seen international events canceled because of the crackdown, and local football club Shanghai Port has been forced to withdraw from the Asian Champions League because travel restrictions prevented it from attending games in Thailand.

No such lockdown has yet been announced for Guangzhou, a metropolis of 18 million northwest of Hong Kong that is home to many top companies and China's busiest airport. Just 27 cases were reported in the city yesterday.

However, primary and middle schools have been switched to online after an initial 23 local infections were detected last week. An exhibition center was being converted into a makeshift hospital after authorities said earlier they would begin citywide mass testing.

Only citizens with a "definite need" to leave Guangzhou can do so, and only if they test negative for the virus within 48 hours of departure, city spokesperson Chen Bin said in a social media

AP PHOTO



announcement.

China has stuck to its "zero-COVID" strategy of handling outbreaks with strict isolation and mass testing, despite complaints in Shanghai over shortages of food and medical services.

China's government and the entirely state-controlled media are growing increasingly defensive about complaints over the COVID-19 prevention measures, censoring content online and rebuking foreign critics.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Sunday said China had "lodged solemn representations with the U.S." after the State Department advised Americans to reconsider traveling to China due to "arbitrary enforcement" of local laws and COVID-19 restric-

tions, particularly in Hong Kong, Jilin province and Shanghai. U.S. officials cited a risk of "parents and children being separated."

China was "strongly dissatisfied with and firmly opposed to the U.S. side's groundless accusation against China's epidemic response," Zhao said.

China has rejected any notion that its response is political in nature. Communist Party leader Xi Jinping has demanded social stability above all else in the runup to a key party congress later this year at which he is expected to commence an unprecedented third-term as party leader.

The English-language China Daily acknowledged that Shanghai's measures are "far from perfect," and pointed to the firing last

week of three local officials for failing in their duties. But it said that shouldn't become an "excuse to politicize the event and blame China."

Zhao issued a further defense of China's virus controls, saying they have "proven to be effective and in line with its national conditions and needs, and have made an important contribution to the global fight against the epidemic."

Shanghai has brought in thousands of additional health workers from other cities, provinces and the military. Despite the large number of cases, no new deaths have been reported in the Shanghai wave, possibly because the omicron variant is less deadly than older variants.

City authorities also say they

have secured daily supplies for residents, following complaints about deliveries of food and other necessities.

Residents have resorted to group buying of groceries because they are not allowed to leave their buildings, with only partial success in obtaining needed items.

Officials say they will begin relaxing restrictions beginning with areas where no new infections have been detected for two weeks. Residents will be allowed to move around their districts while remaining socially distanced.

A second category will be allowed to move around their neighborhoods, while others will remain isolated in their homes.

Chinese club Shanghai Port has been forced by the city's COVID-19 lockdown to withdraw from the Asian Champions League, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said yesterday.

Due to travel restrictions in the city, Port was unable to make the trip to Thailand for six Group J games.

Its first game was scheduled on Saturday against Vissel Kobe of Japan.

"The AFC acknowledged the travel restrictions faced by Shanghai Port FC as a result of the recent lockdown measures enforced in Shanghai," the AFC said in a statement.

The capital, Beijing, has seen relatively few restrictions, although the Erjiefang neighborhood including the famed 798 art district has been cordoned off and classified as high risk after eight infections were reported there over the past two weeks.

China is facing one of its worst local outbreaks since the pandemic began. China is still mostly closed to international travel, even as most of the world has sought ways to live with the virus.

MDT/AP

HONG KONG

Media mogul Jimmy Lai appeals to UN over cases

LAWYERS for Hong Kong media mogul and pro-democracy activist Jimmy Lai are asking the United Nations to investigate his imprisonment and multiple criminal charges as "legal harassment" that punish him for speaking out.

The publisher of the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper was one of the most prominent activists arrested in Hong Kong's crackdown on virtually all political criticism since mass pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The crackdown conti-

nued early yesterday with the arrest of another veteran journalist, Allan Au Ka-lun, a teaching consultant who'd worked for a number of Hong Kong media outlets.

The actions by Lai's lawyers in Britain followed that country's announcement last month it would withdraw its judges from Hong Kong's top court because keeping them there would "legitimize oppression" in the former British colony.

Lai, 74, has been charged under Hong Kong's national security law and is serving 20 months in pri-

son. His assets have been frozen and the raft of legal cases against him include four separate criminal prosecutions related to attending and joining various protests, his legal team at Doughty Street Chambers in the U.K. said in a statement.

Lai faces "the risk of spending the rest of his life in prison simply for speaking out, and for seeking to defend freedom of the press, democracy and the rule of law in Hong Kong," Lai's counsel, Caoilfhionn Gallagher, said in the statement.

In a follow-up email, Gallagher said the appeal had been filed with the U.N. special rapporteurs for freedom of opinion and expression, counter-terrorism and human rights, rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and human rights defenders.

"We are awaiting a response," she wrote.

Lai's son, Sebastien Lai, was quoted as urging U.N. special rapporteurs to investigate Chinese and Hong Kong authorities' actions against Hong Kong residents.

While the U.N. has a number of special rapporteurs, their powers are limited mainly to seeking information from government agencies and possibly seeking real steps to end violations.

Hong Kong authorities had no immediate comment on the request. When Britain withdrew its judges, China reacted furiously, accusing Britain of flagrant interference and harm to Hong Kong's judicial system.

Police issued a brief statement on the arrest of Au, saying a 54-year-old

man had been arrested for "conspiracy to publish seditious publication" and was being detained for further investigation.

Au had been a teaching consultant at Chinese University's journalism school and had previously worked for Hong Kong media outlets TVB and RTHK. He had also written a column for outspoken pro-democracy platform Stand News, which shut down last year after police raided it and arrested staff.

In a statement, the Hong Kong Journalists Association said Au had been a mentor to young journalists and expressed its "deep concern" his arrest would "further damage the freedom of the press in Hong Kong." MDT/AP



People visit Kusha Kisaldar Shiite Mosque, the site of March 4 suicide bombing, to offer prayers for victims, in Peshawar

ANALYSIS

Islamic State morphs and grows in Pakistan, Afghanistan

KATHY GANNON, JALALABAD

BASHEER was a young Taliban fighter barely out of his teens when the Islamic State group took over his village in eastern Afghanistan, nearly eight years ago. The militants rounded up villagers identified as Taliban and killed them, often beheading them, forcing their families to watch.

Basheer escaped and lived in hiding during the following years when IS controlled several districts in Nangarhar province. Over time, he rose in the Taliban ranks.

Now known as Engineer Basheer, he is the Taliban intelligence chief in eastern Afghanistan, with a leading role in the campaign to crush IS. He hasn't forgotten the atrocities he saw in his home district of Kot.

"I can't explain their cruelty in words, whatever comes into your mind, they have done more than that," he told The Associated Press in a recent interview at his headquarters in Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar.

Since coming to power in Afghanistan eight months ago, the Taliban have touted their success in repressing the Islamic State group, but the militants have expanded into neighboring Pakistan, stepping up attacks there. Analysts say IS has morphed into a borderless terrorist group, one of the deadliest in a region that has spawned many violent, radical organizations.

In northwest Pakistan, the impact is brutally clear. The remains of an IS suicide bomber are still

visible on the once ornate walls of a mosque, weeks after he blew himself up, killing more than 60 worshippers as they prayed. IS identified the bomber as an Afghan from Kabul.

The March 4 bombing at the Kusha Kisaldar Shiite mosque in the old city of Peshawar stunned Pakistanis, deepening their fear of the resurgence of terror attacks in their country, after a steady decline in the past decade.

The rise in attacks began last year and is accelerating, said Amir Rana, executive director of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies, an independent think tank that monitors militant activity in Pakistan.

By late March this year, Pakistan had seen 52 attacks by militants, compared to 35 in the same period last year, according to the institute's data. The attacks have also gotten deadlier. So far this year in Pakistan, 155 people have been killed in such attacks, compared to 68 last year.

The worst have been claimed by a ruthless Islamic State affiliate, known as Islamic State in Khorasan Province or IS-K.

Meanwhile, IS attacks appear to have declined in Afghanistan.

IS-K first emerged in 2014 in eastern Afghanistan. By 2019, it held significant territory in Nangarhar province and had pushed into neighboring Kunar province. The U.S. military waged a massive air campaign against it, including targeting a suspected IS hideout with America's largest conventio-

nal bomb, known as the "mother of all bombs."

But IS survived, and it presented the greatest security challenge to the Taliban when they seized power in Afghanistan last August.

IS-K is a longtime enemy of the Taliban. The Taliban espouse a harsh interpretation of Islamic law and often used suicide attacks in their nearly 20-year insurgency against the United States and its Afghan allies. But they often blend tribal traditions with religious edicts and have reached out to Shiites. IS, meanwhile, opposes any group that does not accept its more radical, deeply anti-Shiite ideology and is notorious for atrocities meant to spread fear. IS, unlike the Taliban, see their battle as one to establish a unified Muslim world under a caliphate.

"I can't explain their cruelty in words, whatever comes into your mind, they have done more than that."

ENGINEER BASHEER

The Taliban responded with their characteristic heavy hand, sweeping through suspected IS strongholds. In October and November, residents reported bodies hanging from trees. They were told they were IS militants.

Basheer says the Taliban have succeeded in reining in the group. "We got control of all those areas ... Right now, there might

be some people who hid in houses (but) they don't have any area under their control. There is no Daesh," he said, using the Arabic acronym for IS.

He said IS-K fighters are at a disadvantage because the Taliban are longtime masters of guerrilla warfare. The IS-K has no tactics that the Taliban don't already know or haven't used, he said.

Some militant watchers also say the Taliban's deep reach inside Afghan villages and links to mosques and madrassas in even the smallest hamlets have reduced the space for IS to operate.

Since the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan last year, Washington's ability to gather intelligence on IS has been drastically degraded, according to senior U.S. military officials.

The region is also increasingly inhospitable to America. Political turmoil has fueled anti-U.S. sentiment in Pakistan. In Afghanistan, the Taliban are imposing a rule that harks to their harsh government of the late 1990s. China is a major player in the region, quickly outstripping U.S. influence.

IS-K is not the only extremist group in the region. Others include Lashkar-e-Taiba, which is largely India-focused, China's Uyghur rebels of the East Turkestan group and Central Asia's rebel Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

The threat from IS has only become more fluid and difficult to control.

Dr. Amira Jadoon, assistant professor at the Combating Ter-

rorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, said IS-K is weaker than it was in 2019. But it has morphed from an insurgency to a typical terrorist group, a subtle but important difference, she said.

"It's now a stronger terrorist group than it was in 2019, but perhaps a weaker 'insurgency' compared to its earlier peak years, since it lacks the same level of territorial control and is not controlling any civilian populations," Jadoon said.

A February U.N. report estimated the number of IS-K fighters at around 4,000 and said it "enjoys more freedom than at any time in recent history."

Not everyone agrees. Bill Roggio, whose Long War Journal tracks militant movements, said the Taliban sweep to power prompted some former member of the group who had defected to IS-K to return to the Taliban fold.

"The Taliban received a major boost after its victory in Afghanistan," said Roggio, who is also a senior fellow at the conservative Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

Unlike in Afghanistan, IS-K has not tried to lay claim to territory in Pakistan.

Instead, it has often piggy-backed on well-established anti-Shiite groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which has claimed scores of brutal attacks on Pakistan's Shiite Muslim minority. In both countries, the extreme Sunni Muslim group reviles Shiites as heretics and has targeted them mercilessly.

Rana, from the Pakistani militancy monitoring group, said IS likely aims to stir up tensions between Islamabad and Kabul. But he said Pakistani authorities still consider the Pakistani Taliban, a homegrown anti-government group, the main threat.

"This is quite a naïve and simplistic view," he said, warning that IS attacks are likely to only increase. **MDT/AP**



FRENCH DUEL

Macron vs Le Pen fight for presidency

SYLVIE CORBET, PARIS

FRENCH President Emmanuel Macron may be ahead in the presidential race so far, but he warned his supporters that “nothing is done” and his runoff battle with far-right challenger Marine Le Pen will be a hard fight. And she’s ready for it.

The duel started yesterday, after the two came out on top in Sunday’s first-round vote. The centrist Macron is heading to an economically depressed area of northern France where a majority of voters chose Le Pen, close to her electoral stronghold of Henin-Beaumont.

Meanwhile, Le Pen’s National Rally officials will meet today [Macau time] to plan strategy for the second round, scheduled on April 24. Le Pen summed up the standoff by saying voters are faced with “a fundamental choice between two opposing visions of the future.”

Macron already faced Le Pen in the presidential runoff five years ago. But all opinion polls show the leader of the National Rally is much closer this time to a potential win.

Macron said he wants to court those who voted for the “extremes” or op-

ted to stay at home. That’s what he sought to do in the northern town of Denain by campaigning on his rival’s home ground. Le Pen garnered over 41% of votes there as opposed to 14% for Macron.

Macron met with area residents, many of whom criticized his proposed pension changes which include raising the minimum retirement age from 62 to 65.

Denain’s mayor, Anne-Lise Dufour-Tonini, told reporters she will vote for Macron “with no hesitation” in the second round, but intends to push for him to adopt more “leftist proposals.”

On her third attempt to become France’s first woman president, Le Pen was rewarded Sunday for her years-long effort to rebrand herself as more pragmatic and less extreme. Macron has accused Le Pen of pushing a dangerous manifesto of racist, ruinous policies. Le Pen wants to roll back some rights for Muslims, banning them from wearing headscarves in public, and to drastically reduce immigration from outside Europe.

In his speech on Sunday evening, Macron said his project would protect all religions and the freedom “to believe, or not.”

The rise of food and energy prices is at the core of Le Pen’s campaign, but Macron’s team argue she wouldn’t have the financial means to meet her promises.

“Our focus is now on the project and the values,” Senator Francois Patriat, a member of Macron’s party, said. The strategy consists in being “proud” of what has been done over the past five years, showing “a bit of humility,” and “above all, some fighting spirit,” he said.

Macron will use the next days to “go in the field,” he said. Prior to Sunday’s first round, Macron was absent from most of the electoral campaign as he spent most of his time focusing on diplomatic efforts over the war in Ukraine.

Le Pen’s camp, meanwhile, is hoping to capitalize on anger at Macron over policies seen as favoring the rich.

“Now everything is possible,” Aurélien Lopez Liguori, a municipal councillor with Le Pen’s party in the southern city of Sete, told The AP. Compared with 2017, “now Macron has a record, a bad record.” He credited Le Pen’s proximity to the French during the campaign for closing the gap with Macron.

Le Pen party heavywei-

ght Louis Aliot told news broadcaster France Info that the party would strive to “speak directly to the French about their problems” and how Le Pen would lead the country if elected president.

Aliot accused Macron of stirring up millions of French to take to the streets during the yellow vest protests over perceived economic injustice and of having dismantled public hospitals despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

“There are plenty of issues on which he will need to explain himself,” Aliot said.

French Minister for European Affairs Clément Beaune told the AP “we should not think that it’s done.”

The battle will go “project against project,” he said.

Noting Macron’s “pro-European” project, Beaune recalled that five years ago “Le Pen was proposing — must not forget it — to leave the euro (area), to break Europe when Brexit and Frexit were trendy.”

Le Pen has dropped earlier threats to pull France out of the EU and abandon the euro if elected, but some of her proposals, including setting up a national border control, are contrary to EU rules.

Macron and Le Pen are to debate on national television next week.

With most votes from the 12-candidate first round counted by yesterday, Macron had more than 27% and Le Pen had 23%. Hard-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon was third with close to 22%.

Macron improved on his first-round showing in 2017, despite his presidency being rocked by the yellow vest movement, the pandemic and Russia’s war in Ukraine.

The election outcome will have wide international influence as Europe struggles to contain the havoc wreaked by that war. Macron has strongly backed European Union sanctions on Russia while Le Pen has worried about their impact on French living standards. Macron also is a firm supporter of NATO and of close collaboration among the EU 27 members.

The euro rose yesterday following the results, indicating general investor relief that Macron came out on top in the first round.

MDT/AP

this day in history

1961 SOVIETS WIN SPACE RACE



The Soviet Union has beaten the USA in the race to get the first man into space.

At just after 0700BST, Major Yuri Alexeyevich Gagarin was fired from the Baikonur launch pad in Kazakhstan, Soviet central Asia, in the space craft Vostok (East).

Major Gagarin orbited the Earth for 108 minutes travelling at more than 17,000 miles per hour (27,000 kilometres per hour) before landing at an undisclosed location.

The Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev has congratulated Major Gagarin on his achievement.

He sent the cosmonaut a message from his holiday home on the Black Sea.

“The flight made by you opens up a new page in the history of mankind in its conquest of space,” Mr Khrushchev said.

The Soviet news agency, Tass, made the first official announcement of Major Gagarin’s flight at just before 0800BST.

Radio Moscow then interrupted its schedule to give details to a jubilant nation.

Major Gagarin’s safe return has laid to rest worries that space flight would be fatal for humans.

It is also a blow to the Americans who had hoped to be the first to launch a man beyond Earth’s atmosphere.

However, President Kennedy has congratulated the Soviets on their achievement.

It would be some time before the United States caught up with the Soviets in the fields of rocket boosters, the president added.

Rumours that a Soviet launch attempt was imminent began some days ago.

It was the culmination of two years of highly secretive training for Yuri Gagarin, 27, who beat off thousands of other hopefuls.

The previously obscure army major has returned to earth a national hero.

He has already been awarded the title of “Master of Radio Sport of the Soviet Union” and a big reception for him at the Kremlin in Red Square is being planned.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The USSR notched up a series of space firsts beginning with the launch of the world’s first man-made satellite, Sputnik, in 1957.

Later the same year they sent a dog called Laika into space.

Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman cosmonaut in 1963 and two years later Alexei Leonov became the first man to perform a space walk.

However, the Americans did beat the Soviets to the Moon with the flight of Apollo 11 in July 1969.

Yuri Gagarin became an international icon but was disappointed to be banned from more space missions because the Soviet state considered him too valuable a propaganda asset to risk his life.

In 1968 he was killed in a plane crash just outside Moscow in what some people believed were suspicious circumstances.

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Your charm will attract members of the opposite sex.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Don't put limitations on yourself. Mingle with those who have similar interests.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Be discreet about your personal life or whereabouts. Be mysterious. You may be frustrated by the way situations are being handled.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 You need to be careful not to make promises that you can't fulfill. One-sided relationships are likely.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 You can expect to face opposition on the home front. You need to pamper yourself for a change.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 You will easily blow situations out of proportion. Communication must be open, precise, and honest.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 You are best to work behind the scenes on projects that require detail or precision.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 You may find yourself mixed up in a triangle of sorts. You need to sit back and enjoy.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Try to keep your cool; you may be a tad frazzled by all the rushing around.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 You can help a close friend find solutions to personal problems.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Travel will promote new romantic encounters and additional cultural knowledge.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Your lover will be annoyed with your participation. Try to keep your opinions to yourself.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

Sudoku puzzles in EASY, EASY+, MEDIUM, and HARD categories with grid numbers.

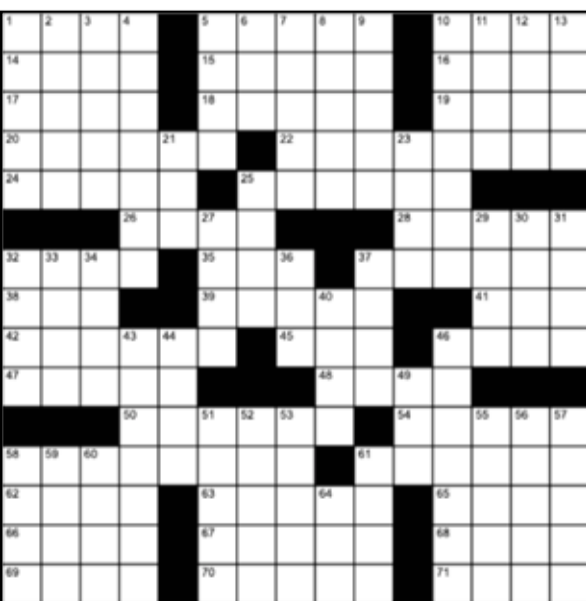
WEATHER

Weather forecast table with columns for MIN, MAX, and CONDITION for various cities in CHINA and WORLD.

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Jutting rock; 5- Visit habitually; 10- Basic unit of heredity; 14- Undoing; 15- Hardy equestrian creatures; 16- Old Testament book; 17- Magazine contents; 18- Author Alexander; 19- Fragments; 20- Boot part; 22- Sterile; 24- Construct; 25- Blues great Smith; 26- Roll call response; 28- Windows predecessor; 32- Dress often worn by Hindu women; 35- Bit of grain; 37- Sell directly to the consumer; 38- Flamenco cheer; 39- Trapshooting; 41- NATO member; 42- Courteous; 45- It's past due; 46- Mind; 47- Elegance; 48- Any of the Antilles; 50- Timmy's dog; 54- Borders; 58- Automobile; 61- Evening party; 62- Take down; 63- Idolize; 65- Graph prefix; 66- French actor Jacques; 67- Blathered; 68- Single entity; 69- Novelist Waugh; 70- Eye sores; 71- Canonized Fr. women;

DOWN 1- Orange container; 2- Gossip; 3- Actress Anouk; 4- Italian dumplings; 5- Briefcase closer; 6- Tough wood; 7- Grammarian's concern; 8- Hawaiian state birds; 9- Former Russian rulers; 10- Long conversation; 11- Chieftain, usually in Africa; 12- Brief letter, paper money; 13- Being, to Brutus; 21- Broke bread; 23- Silent performer; 25- Bill; 27- Red flower; 29- Paint unskillfully; 30- River to the Seine; 31- Kill; 32- Soaks (up); 33- Oodles; 34- Bank (on); 36- Asian holiday; 37- Hwys.; 40- Classic railroad name; 43- Lack of reason; 44- Drop of water expelled by the eye; 46- Legendary king of Thebes; 49- Regulus's constellation; 51- Surgery souvenirs; 52- Begin's co-Nobelists; 53- O. Henry device; 55- Give; 56- So spooky as to be frightening; 57- Chairs; 58- First name in spydom; 59- Iridescent gemstone; 60- Mal de; 61- Chamber workers; 64- Fish eggs;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999 Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222 Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993 Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775 Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333 Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944
S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
IAM 28 387 333
Tourism 28 333 000
Airport 59 888 88



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FINANCE

UK TREASURY CHIEF FIGHTS TO SAVE REPUTATION IN TAX STORM

DANICA KIRKA, LONDON

Britain's Treasury chief, once seen as a potential candidate for prime minister, is fighting to save his reputation by requesting an investigation of his own conduct after a series of news reports on his family's finances raised questions about his judgment.

Rishi Sunak, a 41-year-old former hedge fund manager, asked Prime Minister Boris Johnson to direct his adviser on ministerial standards to review all of the disclosures Sunak has made — such as his wife's tax exemption status and her connection to a company that received government contracts — since he became a government minister.

Sunak said he was confident all "relevant information" was appropriately declared, but he wanted an investigation to reassure the public.

"My overriding concern is that the public retain confidence in the answers they are given, and I believe the best way of achieving this is to ensure those answers are entirely independent, without



Rishi Sunak, Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer leaves 11 Downing Street in London

bias or favor," Sunak wrote in a letter to Johnson dated Sunday. Sunak's standing has been

damaged by revelations that his Indian-born wife took advantage of rules that allow many foreign-

ners to escape U.K. taxes on their overseas income. It came at the same time he was raising income taxes for most residents already facing a cost-of-living crisis tied to soaring energy prices.

Sunak defended his wife after the first reports that she had opted for "non-domiciled" tax status, saying she is a private citizen with her own career and independent investments and shouldn't be subject to the same level of scrutiny as a politician.

But by Friday, his wife, Akshata Murty, a fashion designer and the daughter of an Indian billionaire, said she didn't want the issue to become a "distraction" for her husband so she had decided to pay U.K. taxes on her worldwide income.

Married people in the U.K. file separate tax returns, unlike in the U.S. where many file joint returns.

But the brouhaha hasn't ended. Angela Rayner, deputy leader of the opposition Labour Party, wrote to Johnson on Sunday asking that his ethics adviser investigate six issues relating to Sunak's disclosures.

These include allegations that

he failed to reveal his wife's stake in Infosys, an information technology company that has won several contracts from the government, and concerns about the so-called blind trust Sunak established to allow him to maintain his holdings in an investment fund while giving up any role in their day-to-day management.

Steve Reed, Labour's spokesman on justice issues, said yesterday that he believes Sunak has violated government rules on ministerial conduct. Ministers sometimes resign if they break these rules.

"If the chancellor's household is benefiting from contracts of that kind, that should have been something that he declared in the register of interests, but he didn't," Reed told the BBC. "There's a whole list of areas where the chancellor appears to have failed to declare things he should have declared."

Sunak's Cabinet colleagues have defended him.

Environment Minister George Eustice rejected suggestions that Sunak was "too rich" to be chancellor of the exchequer or even potentially prime minister.

"I don't think it's right that we should have a rule that says you're too wealthy to be able to do a role," he told the BBC. "What matters is the knowledge, the technical expertise, that you have."

MDT/AP

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MOTORSPORT

Italy's Bastianini moves late to take Texas win in MotoGP

THE Beast is on top in MotoGP, with a win and the lead in the season championship.

Enea Bastianini of Italy, nicknamed "La Bestia," passed Australia's Jack Miller for the lead with five laps to go and pulled away to win the MotoGP Grand Prix of the Americas yesterday [Macau time], claiming his second victory of the season and the lead in the title chase after four races.

And he did it on a track long dominated by Spain's Marc Marquez, who made a valiant ride to sixth in his first race back after missing the past two after a violent crash in Indonesia.

"There's a new sheriff in town," Miller said, looking at Bastianini as the Italian donned the winner's black cowboy hat. "That's you."

That made the Beast's smile even bigger. No fan-

AP PHOTO



gs, just nearly perfect pearls, just nearly perfect pearls.

"It's amazing for me, and in Texas, one of my favorites," Bastianini said. "When I saw Jack in the first part of the race, I tried to win but didn't know if I can."

The 24-year-old Gre-

sini Racing rider won the Moto2 championship in 2020 and joined the top series in 2021 with two podium finishes his rookie season.

Bastianini called the breakthrough victory in Qatar a special one for the team. Standing on top in

Texas "is better for me because we know we are consistent and every race we are on the front."

Bastianini started fifth as a group of Ducati riders, including Miller, dominated the top five spots and battled each other through more than half the race at the Circuit of the Americas, a track built for Formula One cars.

He finally grabbed the lead from Miller while braking at the end of the long straight before pulling away for the win. Miller would eventually fall to third as he was passed by Spain's Alex Rins on the final lap to earn Suzuki its 500th podium finish in MotoGP.

MotoGP returns to its European homeland in two weeks in Portugal, the first of 12 consecutive races on the continent and Europe's tighter, twistier tracks. **MDT/AP**

FOOTBALL

SHANGHAI PORT OUT OF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DUE TO COVID LOCKDOWN

CHINESE club Shanghai Port has been forced by the city's COVID-19 lockdown to withdraw from the Asian Champions League, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said yesterday.

Due to travel restrictions in the city, which has experienced record levels of infection in recent weeks, Port was unable to make the trip to Thailand for six Group J games.

Its first game was scheduled to be on Saturday against Vissel Kobe of Japan.

"The AFC acknowledged the travel restrictions faced by Shanghai Port FC as a result of the recent lockdown measures enforced in Shanghai," the AFC said in a statement.

Port will not be replaced in its group, which leaves Kobe, Kitchee of Hong Kong and Chiangrai United of Thailand competing to reach the second round.

Port, a semifinalist in 2017, is the second Chinese team to pull out of the competition after Changchun Yatai withdrew last month.

No official reason was given for that decision but, according to local reports, Changchun was concerned about the financial costs involved in overseas travel.

Shandong Taishan and Guangzhou FC are China's remaining representatives, though both have sent weakened teams as the Chinese Super League season is scheduled to start later this month. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

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UNIFIED DOMESTIC MARKET WILL HELP NATION PROPEL HIGH-QUALITY ECONOMIC GROWTH

The central authorities on Sunday released a guideline on accelerating the building of a unified domestic market that is open, highly efficient, rules-based, and fair for all competitors.

The document, jointly issued by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, will serve as a major guide for the country's future development based on the new "dual circulation" development paradigm, which takes domestic development as the mainstay of the economy, with domestic and international development reinforcing each other.

Given the volatile international situation, as well as the uncertainties associated with the role that foreign trade now plays in driving China's growth, it is becoming all the more important for the country to tap the potential of its huge domestic market by building a unified domestic market.

According to the guideline, the government will work to foster a stable, transparent, and predictable business environment, with strengthened anti-monopoly efforts and a crackdown on practices of unfair competition, and it will endeavor to promote efficient circulation and expansion of the domestic market with reduced transaction costs, all for the purpose of further stimulating market vitality and social creativity to achieve sustainable and consolidated growth.

In the Government Work Report delivered by Premier Li Keqiang during the recently concluded annual session of the National People's Congress, the top legislature, the premier also said that the government would do more to "carry out a comprehensive pilot reform for the market-based allocation of production factors, and strive to accelerate the development of a unified domestic market", without elaborating further.

The guideline, however, specifies that the country will develop a unified domestic market of productivity factors and resources that include capital, technology, energy and the environment.

To achieve that, the government's market regulatory capabilities must be improved and impediments to the rational flow of production factors along all links of production, allocation, distribution, and consumption must be removed to promote and facilitate favorable circulation in the economy.

The document underscores the need of promoting the interconnectivity of market facilities, including building a modernized circulation network. Given that the share of total domestic logistics costs to the GDP was 14.7 percent in China in 2020, nearly two times the figure in the United States or Japan, there is a lot of room for the government to streamline the industry and standardize fees and charges to cut costs and increase efficiency, thus invigorating the sector.

Building a unified domestic market does not mean China is closing its doors. Rather, it marks a new stage in the country's pursuit of high-level opening-up as the move will help cultivate new advantages for China to participate in international competition and cooperation.

ZELENSKY ASKS SOUTH KOREA TO PROVIDE ARMS TO FIGHT RUSSIA

THE BUZZ

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged South Korea yesterday to provide his country with arms to help it fight Russia's military.

Zelenskyy made the request in a video address to South Korean lawmakers that came hours after Seoul's Defense Ministry confirmed it had rejected a Ukrainian request for anti-aircraft weapons during a call between the countries' defense ministers last week. The ministry cited the South Korean government's principle of limiting its military help to Ukraine to non-lethal supplies.

"The Republic of Korea has tanks, ships and various equipment that can block Russian missiles and we would be grateful

if the Republic of Korea could help us fight back against Russia," Zelenskyy said, using South Korea's formal name.

Joining U.S.-led international sanctions against Moscow, South Korea has already banned the export of strategic materials to Russia and ended transactions with key Russian banks and sovereign wealth funds.

Zelenskyy thanked South Korea for those efforts but said sanctions alone haven't been enough to meaningfully stop the Russian aggression.

"Russia doesn't care how many people die," he said.



A Y-20 transport aircraft of the PLA Air Force in display at an air show (2018)

BEIJING SAYS 'REGULAR MILITARY SUPPLIES' DELIVERED TO SERBIA

CHINA said yesterday its military planes delivered "regular military supplies" to Serbia, in its first comments on an operation in which six Chinese Air Force Y-20 transport planes landed in Belgrade early Saturday.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told reporters the operation was part of the two countries' annual cooperation plan, does not target any third parties and "has nothing to do with the current situation."

Zhao gave no further details.

The planes' arrival prompted heavy speculation they were carrying HQ-22 surface-to-air missiles under the terms of a previous deal signed between the sides. Serbia's defense ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic all but confirmed the delivery of the medium-range sys-

tems that was agreed to in 2019, saying on Saturday that he will present "the newest pride" of the Serbian military on Tuesday or Wednesday.

The operation this weekend came amid Western concerns that an arms buildup in the Balkans at the same time as war is raging in Ukraine could threaten the region.

Serbia and China have long shared strong ties, partly out of a common disdain for Washington. Serbians nurture resentment over NATO's 1999 air campaign during the Kosovo conflict, in which the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was hit. NATO called the incident, which sparked violent demonstrations in Beijing, a mistaken bombing, an explanation China and many others have long rejected.

Although Serbia has voted in favor of U.N. resolutions that condemn the Russian attacks in Ukraine, it has refused to join international sanc-

tions against its allies in Moscow or to outright criticize actions by the Russian troops there.

The apparent arms delivery to Serbia over the territories of at least two NATO member states, Turkey and Bulgaria, was seen by experts as a demonstration of China's growing global reach.

The weekend flights "could be the largest overseas operation by the Chinese domestically developed large transport plane yet, displaying the country's strategic transport capabilities," the Communist Party newspaper Global Times said yesterday, citing Chinese defense analysts.

The Y-20, which was first delivered to the People's Liberation Army Air Force in 2015, has been used in overseas missions before, including the dispatch of 105 members of the PLA honor guard to join the 2020 Russian Victory Day parade in Moscow, and in flights near Taiwan's air space. MDT/AP



India-USA President Joe Biden is set to speak with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi today as he presses world leaders to take a hard line against Russia's Ukraine invasion. India's neutral stance in the war has raised concerns in Washington and earned praise from Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who lauded India this month for judging "the situation in its entirety, not just in a one-sided way."



USA A shooting inside a crowded Cedar Rapids nightclub left a man and a woman dead and 10 people wounded Sunday, authorities said. Cedar Rapids police said investigators believe two men fired more than a dozen shots inside the Taboo Nightclub and Lounge just before 1:30 a.m. Sunday. He said officers who were just outside the club because of an earlier incident rushed inside just as 100-150 people streamed out of the bar and found the victims. Officers helped treat the people who were wounded and rushed several of the victims to hospitals in squad cars.



Olivier Awards An intimate, sold-out production of "Cabaret" was the big winner at Sunday's Olivier Awards, taking seven prizes including acting trophies for its high-voltage stars, Eddie Redmayne and Jessie Buckley. Literary adaptation "Life of Pi" took five awards including best new play. "Cabaret" was named best musical revival at the ceremony, which saw the Oliviers return to live collective prizegiving after a three-year break imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.