



HONG KONG'S JOHN LEE HAD FORMALLY REGISTERED HIS CANDIDACY IN THE ELECTION FOR THE TOP JOB AFTER SECURING 786 NOMINATIONS

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US REPORT ACCUSES MACAU GOVERNMENT OF 'INTERFERENCE'

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SHANGHAI RELEASES MORE FROM VIRUS OBSERVATION

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AP PHOTO



Ukraine The presidents of four countries on Russia's doorstep headed to Kyiv in a show of support for Ukraine, after Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to continue his bloody seven-week offensive until its "full completion." The presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — all NATO countries that worry they may face Russian attack in the future if Ukraine falls — were due to meet the Ukrainian leader, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

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AP PHOTO



Philippines As search and rescue efforts increased with the arrival of equipment, the death toll has risen to at least 56, with 28 others missing, after a summer tropical depression that unleashed days of pounding rain caused landslides and floods in the central and southern Philippines, officials said yesterday. Nearly 200 villagers were injured mostly in the landslides in the hard-hit city of Baybay in central Leyte province over the weekend and early Monday.

AP PHOTO



USA Police hunted late into the night for the gunman who opened fire Tuesday on a subway train in Brooklyn, an attack that left 10 people wounded by gunfire and once again interrupted New York City's long journey to post-pandemic normalcy. The search focused partly on a man who police say rented a van possibly connected to the violence.

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IMF REPORT

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EDUCATION

CE CONFIRMS TWO INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS ON THE WAY

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**DRONE GALA
2022 IN MAY**

The Light up Macao Drone Gala 2022 will dazzle the city in early May with a total of eight drone shows to take place at Nam Van Lake on four upcoming nights. The shows will be held during Labor Day Holidays (May 1 and 2) and the ensuing weekend (May 7 and 8), according to the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO). The drone gala is themed as "Macao for All Seasons," weaving together different elements such as festivals, events and unique architecture. In every show, a constellation of 880 drones is choreographed to present captivating 3D patterns, compared with the use of 300 drones last year. New outreach activities will unfold in tandem with the drone gala, with details to follow at a later date.

**LOW HOTEL RATES
OFFSET TPI GROWTH**

The Tourist Price Index (TPI) for the first quarter of 2022 grew by 1.02% year-on-year to 116.96, on account of higher prices of local food products, fireworks and firecrackers. However, lower hotel room rates and reduced prices of handbags offset part of the increase, according to the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). In comparison with the fourth quarter of 2021, TPI for the first quarter of 2022 dropped 1.77%. Price indices of Accommodation and Clothing & Footwear fell 18.96% and 4.74%, respectively, owing to lower hotel room rates and seasonal sales of winter clothing.

**RED MARKET
CONSTRUCTION TO
COMMENCE IN MAY**

The reorganization and renovation works of Almirante Lacerda Municipal Market (Red Market) will be initiated in May, with a work period of about 657 days. The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said it has actively carried out pre-construction preparatory works, while a third-party has been commissioned to carry out the supervision of the construction quality and control of work duration and supervised the construction contractor's implementation of the construction plan. The Red Market has been in use for more than 80 years.

US REPORT: MACAU GOV'T INTRUDES FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

STAFF REPORTER

THERE were significant human rights issues in Macau in 2021, including an increase in censorship, according to a report issued by the United States (US) Department of State.

In the US' 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: China (Includes Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet) – Macau, it is said that Macau provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media. However, "government encroached upon this right."

The US department stated the presence of credible reports of "substantial interference with the right of peaceful assembly; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious restrictions on political participation, including the disqualification of prodemocracy candidates in elections; and trafficking in persons" in Macau.

In the report's Censorship or Content Restrictions category, the US recalled the Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng's announcement that the government would uphold press freedom – yet the press must adhere to a "love of the motherland and love of Ma-



No vigil or other civil assembly took place at the Senado Square, June 4, 2020

cau" principle.

However, in March, "public broadcaster TDM's executive committee warned its English- and Portuguese-language reporters that they must toe the patriotic editorial line and promote 'respect and love for mainland China' in response to the CE's announcement," the report stated, citing a Macau-based academic.

As a consequence of the announcement, some 10 journalists resigned from the public state news station.

The report also recalled that ci-

vil rights advocates criticized the "seemingly arbitrary rules for restricting peaceful assembly," noting that, in June, the SAR courts upheld a decision to disallow the annual public June 4 Tiananmen Square vigil.

"Unlike a similar case in 2020, when Covid-19 health restrictions were cited, the courts denied permission based on the conclusion that slogans and banners that were 'provocative, defamatory, and contrary to the truth' would slander the PRC government."

The US mentioned the foreign

worker from Burma who sent the SAR government a request to hold an assembly to protest the military coup in March. However, the government denied the request.

The Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak later defended the principle that "equal rights are not absolute for migrant workers," citing the Article 43 of the Basic Law, which also confirms the Public Security Police Force's (PSP) argument that non-resident workers (TNR) do not have freedom of political assembly in public places.

GBA

Tax office for Lusophone countries set up in Hengqin

THE tax cooperation office for Portuguese-speaking countries and regions has officially been established as part of the taxation bureau of Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin under the approval of the State Taxation Administration and the guidance of Guangdong Provincial Tax Service.

"The office aims to further strengthen taxation cooperation among members under the tax administration cooperation mechanism of the

Belt and Road Initiative, especially that with Portuguese-speaking countries and regions. It is a major 'going global' move taken by the Guangdong Provincial Tax Service to offer inclusive and targeted services," said Liu Li, director of the Department of International Tax Management within the Guangdong Provincial Tax Service, State Taxation Administration.

As the first of its kind in the country, the office will focus on promoting appropriate economic

diversification in Macau SAR, enhancing cooperation with the SAR's financial and taxation departments, fully implementing the nation's opening-up policy, and creating new prospects for mutually beneficial partnerships.

In addition, the office will mainly serve the needs of Macau-invested enterprises and residents and, by relying on contactless platforms like V-tax, constantly improve the new cross-boundary tax service model to attract more Macau businesses



and residents to come to work and live in Hengqin.

Tax reforms will promote more innovative measures and reduce the tax burden involved in cross-border trade.

Currently, there are

more than 4,800 Macau-funded companies in Hengqin. From 2019 to 2021, the annual growth of those companies has increased by 47.3%, with annual tax revenue up by 13.5%. **MDT/NEWSGD**

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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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LYNZY VALLES

ECONOMY

IMF: Recovery to continue with 15% growth in 2022

THE Macau SAR's economic recovery is expected to continue, but it will take time before the economy fully regains its losses from the pandemic, according to a report issued by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The city's recovery is forecasted to continue this year, with IMF projecting a 15.5% GDP growth in 2022, driven by the gradual return of foreign tourists and the recovery of domestic demand.

After a 54% decline in GDP in 2020, the economy expanded by 18% in 2021, supported by the partial recovery of the gaming sector.

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

“The gradual return of foreign tourists and the strengthening of domestic demand will support the nearterm recovery, while increasing investment, linked to the issuance of new gaming concessions, and further integration with the GBA will boost medium term growth,” the IMF stated. “Howe-

MDT ARCHIVE



ver, given the depth of the economic losses during the pandemic, the level of GDP is expected to surpass its precrisis level only in 2025,” the report read.

Due to the absence of rapid

progress towards economic diversification, the current account balance is set to return to pre-pandemic levels as tourists return to the region.

While the effective control of

the pandemic and faster-than-envisaged integration with the GBA could contribute to stronger growth than currently envisaged, a re-intensification of the pandemic, tighter regulation of the gaming

industry, and an increase in Macau SAR's financial sector stress could slow down the pace of the recovery.

These remain the SAR's most significant risks, particularly in the gaming sector, as uncertainty is still present regarding the proposed amendments to Macau's gaming law, which – in combination with the recent ban on the gaming services' marketing in the mainland – are clouding the outlook of the gaming sector.

Also, the IMF stated that potential largescale defaults in mainland China's real estate sector and a sudden growth slowdown in mainland China are posing risks to Macau SAR's economy and financial system.

Recently, a forecast from Fitch Ratings stated that Macau's economy would only expand by 19% in 2022, based on the assumption that gaming revenue would recover to about 44% of its pre-pandemic levels, far lower than the initial expectation in relation to overall economic expansion of 36%.

The city's gaming sector is expected to tumble again this month as analysts forecast a 13% drop in gross gaming revenue (GGR) from March, which was MOP3.67 billion – a 55.8% tumble from figures recorded in February.

These are due to the Covid-19 cases in the mainland and the city's tight border restrictions.

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

THE CASINO INDUSTRY MUST ADAPT: CE

ANTHONY LAM

WE [have seen] three licenses [reduced] to six, we can't afford to license all satellite casinos," Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng said while replying to lawmaker Ron Lam's question regarding economic revival plans.

Lam asked the head of the government for specific plans and timetables so that small and medium enterprises would have time to prepare in advance.

Commencing his reply, Ho spoke on economics, saying that, as he has observed, the city has experienced two major economic downfalls in recent decades, namely the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 and the Global Financial Tsunami in 2008, besides the current hit, which started in 2020.

"The three incidents were each 12 years apart," Ho highlighted. "In 2013 and 2014, our economy was at its peak, then it went down."

The head of the government asked the public to be confident that a recovery is on the horizon, given the previous economic cycle, the information he obtained from mainland expert epidemiologists and current epidemiologist data from abroad, specifically the milder

symptoms associated with the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2.

He even restated his confidence in Macau's recovery in his nearly 15-minute answer.

To support his claims, he cited international rating entities that had retained Macau's relatively high ratings. The ratings, he remarked, are strong pillars from the perspective of the banking and financial industries.

Meanwhile, the government's financial prudence has led to rigid and careful disposal of income.

Suddenly, he changed the subject and started blaming some casino operators for committing "foul acts, which have affected the industry's healthy development."

The situation of the "satellite casino," non-legal referral to casinos located on properties not owned by licensees, has rocked the city recently. The casino at the Grand Emperor Hotel announced its closure in June.

The need to "correct" the situation comes from the fact that the model is not legal, he said, emphasizing that the original law stipulates that the casino must be owned by a licensee.

He believes that the acquisition of these casino areas should not be too difficult because it

only concerns gambling areas but not supportive elements, such as back-of-house. He also believes negotiation and cooperation will be able to solve the problem.

On the matter of junket operations, the head of the government stressed that it has not forced these businesses to close. It is only proposed in the draft amendment that junkets should be licensed so as to avoid complications and troubles.

He said that junkets may operate even after the draft amendment becomes law in the future. However, these VIP gambling rooms can only derive income from commissions. The existing practice that some have adopted, involving taking a cut from the debtors' winning bets, should be eradicated.

"Current law prohibits this practice. What is worse is that gamblers are betting both on and off the table [side betting], which leads to tax evasion and money laundering," he said. "I believe all present today do not and should not support these illegal acts."

Lawmaker Angela Leong is a manager of the SJM Resorts, S.A.

Ho added that the Gambling Law must be amended according to the mainland law that governs gambling activities, unless Macau wants to constrain its development.

ANTHONY LAM



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CE confirms two int'l schools on the way

ANTHONY LAM

TWO international schools have been approved and will soon be presented to the public, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng disclosed to a parliamentary plenary session on Tuesday.

"Macau not only needs schools for foundational education, which is supported by the government, but also international schools that are capable of attracting talent," Ho said at the plenary meeting.

"In the near future, we will have two new international schools," the head of the government elaborated. "In terms of talent acquisition, such facilities are essential."

The piece of information revealed by the head of the government echoes an earlier report by the Times, unveiling plans for an international school in Coloane. Prior to Ho's comment, the Education and Youth Development Bureau confirmed that the land will be home to a school.

His comment was part of the response to lawmaker Ma Io Fong's question.

Ma had asked the head of the government about plans to relocate schools held within residential estates, commonly and colloquially known as "platform campuses" or "carpark campuses."

These campuses are the results of an economical mindset of so-



cial facility inauguration under a relatively depressed economic cycle. Decades ago, when Macau needed more schools, it was decided that they would be built in indoor carpark levels, podiums or atria of residential estates, mainly in the northern part of the city, such as Fai Chi Kei, Iao Hon and Areia Preta.

Due to the small area and the lack of space for expansion, many of these schools only have a little to no spaces for activities, obstructing the multi-directional development of their students.

There have long been plans to relocate these campuses to open land, but still many relocations have not taken place.

Furthermore, the lawmaker

also asked the head of the government how his team will secure land for campus use, under the Master Urban Plan.

The lawmaker works in the education sector as a teacher at the Premier School Affiliated to Hou Kong Middle School.

In response, Ho disclosed that, basically, construction for educational needs is the responsibility of the government. Such properties will then be under the government's ownership. Plans to resolve the platform campus problems will be available soon.

"School operators have been in the loop and many of them have already [have an idea] about where their new campuses will be," Ho said.

GOV'T: MANY JOBS PAY MORE THAN MINIMUM WAGE, THOUGH THERE IS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

WHILE admitting that there is room for improvement on the minimum wage level, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng has highlighted that many jobs, even low-paying ones, do pay higher than minimum wage.

According to the current laws, the minimum wage level applies to all jobs, except for household workers and disabled workers. The minimum wage levels are at MOP6,656 per month for monthly paid workers, MOP1,536 per week for weekly paid workers, MOP256 per day for daily paid workers, as well as MOP32 per hour for hourly rates and workers paid per task or per commission.

Ho pointed out that the minimum wage level is only

the salary floor and many jobs do pay more than that, "even [among] the lowest-paid jobs," the head of the government said.

Meanwhile, on the matter of support for the employment of disabled groups, the Social Welfare Bureau is offering much assistance, said Ho. He added that the government has constructed a safety net to protect and support groups that are at more disadvantage, or in less advantaged positions.

Ho's comments were made in response to lawmaker Pereira Coutinho's question in parliament, which was about raising the level of the minimum wage, amid increases recorded in the price of many consumables. **AL**

KIT THOMPSON RECEIVES ACCOLADE FROM SINO PHIL ASIA FOUNDATION

THE Sino Phil Asia International Peace Awards Foundation has awarded Professor Kevin "Kit" Thompson of the University of Macau with a peace award for a "lifetime of dedication to Education, Fine Arts and Youth Development."

Thompson was honored as a musician, conductor and educator and has promoted cultural exchange between China and the West.

He was also the director of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and the founding principal of the Birmingham Conservatoire in the United Kingdom.

Currently, he is the Master of the University of Macau's Moon Chun Memorial College.

"Professor Thompson is one of those rare individuals

who has made it their life mission to enrich humanity through leveraging their own talents and abilities to bring the joy of learning and personal growth to others," said Manson Fok, chairman emeritus of the foundation, as cited in a statement.

The foundation's chairman, Billy Chan, added that Thompson is a "worthy recipient of the peace award for a life spent selflessly enriching others through music and education, particularly the next generation of youth."

The Sino Phil Asia International Peace Awards Foundation was founded by healthcare professionals, academics, artists, journalists, policymakers and philanthropists from around the world to recognize and empower leaders of peace. **LV**



EMPLOYMENT

Ella Lei calls for number of unskilled non-local workers to be controlled

THE government will press businesses further to release more positions originally held by non-technical non-local workers, lawmaker Ella Lei said on the sidelines of a parliamentary plenary meeting.

Despite acknowledging Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng's promise on offering unemployed local workers subsidized training or employment programs, as well as on encouraging local employers to hire a larger local workforce, the lawmaker added.

She agrees with the head of the government's views on sub-



sidized employment. However, what is difficult about the current situation, so she says, is that some vacancies are not filled. Instead, they are simply eliminated, meaning that the scale

of business is shrinking. To this, the lawmaker suggests the government make policies to encourage employers to release non-technical posts currently held by non-resident workers.

At the same time, the government can encourage local people to fill these positions by the means of subsidized training or salary compensation.

This will help promote local employment, Lei said. Meanwhile, companies will have the opportunity to nurture in the local workforce qualities appropriate for their businesses.

The Chief Executive said at the same occasion that the past consumption stimulus plans had helped many local small and medium enterprises retain employment of local people. **AL**

SHANGHAI RELEASES MORE FROM VIRUS OBSERVATION AMID LOCKDOWN

SHANGHAI released 6,000 more people from the central facilities where they were under medical observation to guard against the coronavirus, the government said yesterday, though the lockdown of most of China's largest city was being maintained in its third week.

About 6.6 million people in the city of 25 million were allowed to leave their homes Tuesday, but some were restricted to their own neighborhoods. Some housing compounds also appeared to still be keeping residents locked inside, and no further lifting of restrictions was apparent yesterday.

Officials warn Shanghai still doesn't have the latest surge in cases of the omicron variant under control, despite its "zero-tolerance" approach that has seen some residents confined to their homes for three weeks or longer.

China also requires anyone who tests positive or is a close contact of such a person to spend at least a week in centralized observation centers in pre-fabricated buildings or gymnasiums and exhibition halls to limit the spread of the virus.

The city's health bureau said



that 6,044 people had been allowed the day before to leave observation centers and return home, although health monitoring will continue.

The number of newly detected daily cases in the city edged upward to 26,338, all but 1,189 of them in people showing no symptoms. With more than 200,000 total cases, the ongoing outbreak is China's biggest of the pandemic. But the mass testing has caught many asymptomatic cases, and no deaths have

been reported in Shanghai.

The lockdown has led to frustration among residents in Shanghai about running out of food and being unable to get deliveries. Censors have diligently scrubbed such material from social media, while state-controlled outlets describe a successful campaign to provide food and other supplies and counseled residents that "persistence is victory."

Shanghai is also home to China's busiest port and main

stock market, and concerns have been rising about the lockdown's economic impact.

Figures released yesterday showed China's exports rose 15.7% in March over a year earlier while imports were flat due to disruptions from coronavirus outbreaks.

Customs data show exports rose to \$276.1 billion despite anti-virus controls in Shanghai and other industrial centers that caused factories to reduce output. **MDT/AP**

TRADE CHINESE MARCH EXPORTS GROW DESPITE VIRUS; IMPORTS FLAT

CHINA'S exports rose 15.7% over a year ago in March while imports were flat amid disruption due to coronavirus outbreaks as the ruling Communist Party enforces a "zero-COVID" strategy to isolate every case.

Exports rose to \$276.1 billion despite anti-virus controls in Shanghai and other industrial centers that are causing factories to reduce production, customs data showed yesterday. Imports rose less than 1% to \$228.7 billion.

China's infection numbers are relatively low, but the "zero-COVID" strategy has confined most of Shanghai's 25 million people to their homes since late March and suspended access to other manufacturing centers.

The anti-virus curbs have prompted fears global trade might be disrupted. Chinese officials say they are taking steps to keep ports functioning, but automakers and other factories have cut production due to supply disruptions.

Consumer demand also has been dampened by an economic slowdown triggered by an official campaign to cut debt in China's vast real estate industry. Economic growth slid to 4% over a year earlier in the final quarter of 2021, down from the full year's 8.1%.

Exports to the United States rose 22.4% over a year earlier to \$47.3 billion despite lingering tariff hikes in a feud over Beijing's technology ambitions. Imports of American goods rose 11.5% to \$15.2 billion.

China's politically volatile trade surplus with the United States widened by half over a year earlier to \$32.1 billion. It was one of the factors that prompted then-President Donald Trump to hike tariffs on Chinese goods in 2019.

With almost no growth in imports, China's global trade surplus surged by 243% to \$47.4 billion.

Imports from Russia, a major gas supplier, fell 26.4% from a year earlier to \$7.8 billion. Exports to Russia edged down 7.7% to \$3.8 billion.

Managers of the port of Shanghai, the world's busiest, say operations are normal. But the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China has said its member companies estimate the volume of cargo handled by the port every day is down 40%.

Exports to the 27-nation European Union fell 9.1% from a year ago to \$44.4 billion while imports tumbled 41.6% to \$24.3 billion. China's surplus with Europe jumped 179.3% to \$20.1 billion. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

John Lee secures nominations for leadership race

HONG Kong's former No. 2 official John Lee said yesterday he had formally registered his candidacy in the election for the top job after securing 786 nominations to enter the race.

Lee, who resigned as chief secretary last week before declaring he would run for chief executive, is the only candidate formally entered so far for the May 8 vote. He is considered Beijing's favored candidate and a sign of the central government further tightening its control over the territory.

Lee's 786 nominations are well over 50% of the 1,454-member Election Committee that will select the next chief executive. The nomination period ends Saturday and the committee will elect the winner by absolute majority.



"It is not easy, as I have been working very hard to explain to various members what my election platform will be like," Lee told reporters.

He reiterated that he will focus on a results-oriented approach to solve problems, keeping Hong Kong competitive and setting a firm foundation for the development of Hong Kong.

Current Hong Kong

leader Carrie Lam is not seeking a second term, following a rocky five years in power that spanned the COVID-19 pandemic, a crackdown on political freedoms and Beijing's rapid and growing influence over the territory.

The four chief executives selected since Hong Kong's handover have all been candidates seen as favored by Beijing.

Lee told reporters Tuesday that enacting Article 23 of the Basic Law — which stipulates that Hong Kong enacts its own security law — will be a "priority." Enacting such a law was temporarily shelved after mass protests against the government in 2003.

Hong Kong's own security law should prohibit acts of treason and the theft of state secrets,

as well as other offences including secession, sedition and subversion.

Beijing in 2020 imposed its own national security law in Hong Kong. Lee is a staunch advocate of the national security law, which has been used against pro-democracy activists, supporters and media, diminishing freedoms promised to Hong Kong during Britain's handover to China in 1997.

Lee, 64, rose in the civil service ranks after years in the police force. He previously said he was running for the No. 1 position out of his loyalty and love for Hong Kong, as well as a "sense of duty to the Hong Kong people."

He also said loyalty was the "basic requirement" to run as a leader of the city — comments made after Hong Kong's electoral laws were amended last year to ensure that only "patriots" loyal to Beijing can hold office.

The new Hong Kong leader will take office on July 1. **MDT/AP**

New Zealand court rules suspect can be extradited to China

NICK PERRY, WELLINGTON

NEW Zealand's top court yesterday ruled a man can be extradited to China to face a murder charge — a landmark judgment that goes against the trend set by most democratic nations.

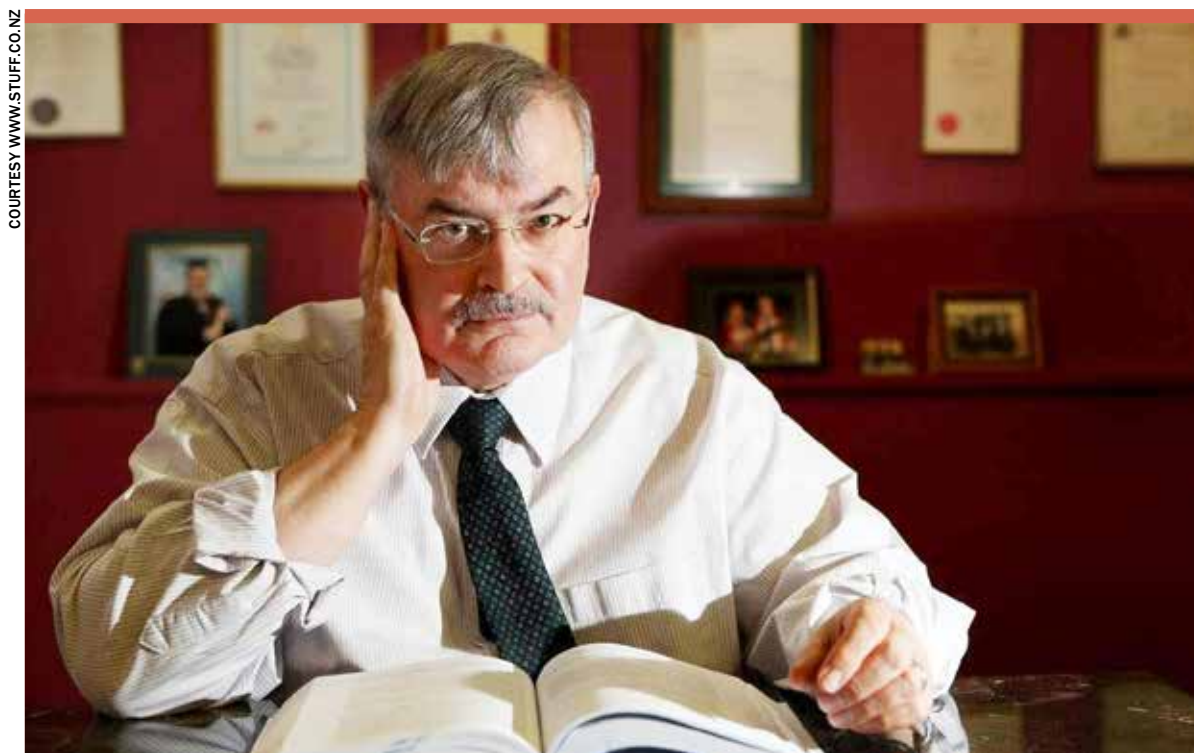
In a 3-2 decision, the Supreme Court found that China was able to give New Zealand officials sufficient assurance that the accused, Kyung Yup Kim, could get a fair trial and wouldn't be tortured.

Concerns over those issues have been enough to stop most democratic countries from extraditing suspects to China in recent times. Like many other nations, New Zealand doesn't have a formal extradition treaty with China.

The decision is sure to be celebrated by China's ruling Communist Party as not only a legal victory but also a diplomatic and public relations success.

But Kim's lawyers said they would try to stop the extradition, first by filing a complaint with the U.N. Human Rights Committee and then, if needed, by filing a fresh judicial review based on Kim's poor health.

Lawyer Tony Ellis said Kim was very disappointed by the judgment. He said his client is in a suicidal state due to his health issues, which include severe depression, a small brain tumor, and liver and kidney disease.



Lawyer Tony Ellis

Ellis said he had trouble understanding the decision given that for the past 10 years, most countries had stopped extraditing people to China. He said almost every suspect in China pleads guilty before going to trial, because they know that if they don't they'll be tortured.

He said China might see the ruling as encouragement to start extradition cases against people who have fled the country and been accused of economic crimes.

New Zealand's Minister of Justice Kris Faafoi declined to comment on the case, which has dragged on for 11 years.

In making its decision, the Supreme Court overturned an earlier appeals court ruling.

In an odd twist, two judges on the Supreme Court had recused themselves because before being promoted to the top court they had sat on the appeals court — where both had ruled against the extradition.

The Supreme Court found

that China was able to give sufficient assurance that Kim would be jailed in Shanghai, where New Zealand consulate staff could monitor him before and during his trial. That would include visits at least every second day before his trial and at other times he requested.

China also told officials that Kim would serve his prison sentence in Shanghai if convicted.

The court found that "if no substantial grounds exist for believing an individual accused is at

risk of torture because of the assurances provided, the individual should not avoid prosecution for a serious crime."

Kim's lawyers unsuccessfully argued that consular staff couldn't adequately monitor Kim while he was in jail, particularly if he was subject to torture that was hard to detect, like forced drugging.

Kim was arrested in 2011 after China asked to extradite him on one count of intentional homicide.

He was incarcerated in New Zealand jails for more than five years, and spent another three years on electronic monitoring, making him the longest-serving prisoner not to face a trial in modern New Zealand.

According to court documents, Kim is a South Korean citizen who moved to New Zealand more than 30 years ago with his family when he was 14.

He is accused of killing a 20-year-old waitress and sex worker, Peiyun Chen, in Shanghai after traveling to the city to visit a different woman who was his girlfriend at the time.

Chen was found in a Shanghai wasteland on New Year's Eve 2009. An autopsy concluded she had been strangled to death, and that she'd also been hit in the head with a blunt object.

Chinese police say they have forensic and circumstantial evidence linking Kim to the crime, including a quilt found with the body. Police say a distraught Kim told an acquaintance he may have "beaten a prostitute to death."

Kim says he is innocent. Ellis said his defense case would be that his former girlfriend, who has Communist Party connections, is responsible for the crime. **MDT/AP**

Australian minister tries to end Solomons-China pact

ROD MCGUIRK,
CANBERRA

AUSTRALIA'S Minister for International Development and the Pacific Zed Seselja has flown to the Solomon Islands in a bid to prevent a "possible Chinese military presence" in the South Pacific island nation.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday confirmed Seselja's visit, which occurred a day earlier, after the Solomon Islands announced on April 1 it had initiated a security pact with China.

Two top Australian intelligence officials, Australian Secret Intelligence Service boss Paul Symon and Office of National Intelligence Director-General Andrew Shearer, have since met Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare.



A display case of photos is seen outside the Chinese Embassy in Honiara, Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands government has said it won't allow China to build a military base there and China has denied seeking a military foothold in the South Pacific.

Australia has a bilateral security pact with the Solomon Islands and Australian police peacekeepers have

been in the capital, Honiara, since riots in November.

Morrison said Australia was respectfully and directly communicating with the Solomon Islands on the Chinese security deal.

"The suggestion that somehow, some seem to be making that the Solomon Is-

lands is somehow under the control of Australia I think is offensive to the Solomon Islands," Morrison said.

"They are a sovereign nation. I respect their independence and they will make their own decisions about their own sovereignty," he said.

"What we have been doing is ensuring that they are fully aware of the risks and the security matters that are not only of concern to Australia but islands, Pacific nations across the Pacific," he added.

Seselja said he had asked Sogavare to abandon the Chinese agreement.

"We have asked Solomon Islands respectfully to consider not signing the agreement and to consult the Pacific family in the spirit of regional openness and transparency, consistent

with our region's security frameworks," Seselja said in a statement.

"We welcome recent statements from Prime Minister Sogavare that Australia remains Solomon Islands security partner of choice, and his commitment that Solomon Islands will never be used for military bases or other military institutions of foreign powers," Seselja added.

Seselja's mission is unusual in that Morrison announced on Sunday that an election will be held in Australia on May 21. Morrison now leads a caretaker government and any policy decisions must be made in consultation with the opposition.

Opposition spokeswoman on foreign affairs Penny Wong said the Australian government had fai-

led on the Solomon Islands.

"This is happening on Mr. Morrison's watch — the warnings have been there for months, the draft agreement public for weeks — but he has failed to front up and explain how Australia is responding," Wong said in a statement.

"We need to work with the Pacific family and allies to build a region where sovereignty is respected — and where Australia is the partner of choice," she added.

Under the terms of the draft agreement, China could send police, military personnel and other armed forces to the Solomon Islands "to assist in maintaining social order" and for a variety of other reasons. It could also send warships to the islands for stopovers and to replenish supplies. **MDT/AP**



PUTIN'S WAR

For Jews fleeing Ukraine, Passover takes on new meaning

DEEPA BHARATH

GOOD morning! Happy morning!" Rabbi Avraham Wolff exclaimed, with a big smile, as he walked into the Chabad synagogue in Odesa on a recent morning.

Russian missiles had just struck an oil refinery in the Ukrainian city, turning the sky charcoal gray. Hundreds were lining up outside his synagogue hoping to receive a kilo of matzah each for their Passover dinner tables. The unleavened flatbread, imperative at the ritual meal known as a Seder, is now hard to find in war-torn Ukraine amid the war and a crippling food shortage.

But the rabbi wanted no challenge to get him down — be it the lack of matzah or that he was missing his wife and children who had fled the Black Sea port for Berlin days ago.

"I need to smile for my community," Wolff said. "We need humor. We need hope."

Tens of thousands of Ukrainian Jews have fled while about 80% remain in Ukraine, according to estimates from Chabad, one of the largest Hasidic Jewish organizations in the world. Inside and outside Ukraine, a nation steeped in Jewish history and heritage, people are preparing to celebrate Passover, which begins sundown on April 15. It's been a challenge, to say the least.

The holiday marks the

liberation of Jewish people from slavery in ancient Egypt, and their exodus under the leadership of Moses. The story is taking on special meaning for thousands of Jewish Ukrainian refugees who are living a dramatic story in real time.

Chabad, which has deep roots and a wide network in Ukraine, and other groups such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Jewish Federations of North America, have mobilized to help Ukrainian Jews celebrate Passover wherever they have sought refuge. In Ukraine, Chabad plans 52 public Seders welcoming about 9,000 people.

In Odesa, Wolff is preparing to host two large Seders — one in early evening at the Chabad synagogue for families with young children and a later Seder at a hotel where participants can stay the night, obeying a 9 p.m. curfew.

He's been waving in trucks loaded with Passover supplies — matzah from Israel, milk from France, meat from Britain.

"We may not all be together, but it's going to be an unforgettable Passover," Wolff said. "This year, we celebrate as one big Jewish family around the world."

JDC, which has evacuated more than 11,600 Jews from Ukraine, has shipped more than 2 tons of matzah, over 400 bottles of grape juice and over 700 pounds of kosher Passover food for refugees in Poland, Moldova, Hungary and

Romania, said Chen Tzuk, the organization's director of operations in Europe, Asia and Africa. In Ukraine, their social service centers and corps of volunteers are distributing nearly 16 tons of matzah to elderly Jews and families in need, she said.

"Passover is something familiar and basic for Jewish people," Tzuk said. "For refugees who have left everything behind, it's important to be able to celebrate this holiday with honor and dignity."

JDC is organizing in-person Seders in countries bordering Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe, she said, and is facilitating online Seders where it's too dangerous to gather in person.

The Jewish Federations of North America has set up a volunteer hub in support of refugees fleeing Ukraine; it's a partnership with the Jewish Agency for Israel, the JDC and IsraAID. Russian-speaking volunteers, such as Alina Spaulding, will help organize a Seder for 100 refugees at a hotel in Budapest.

Spaulding, a resident of Greensboro, North Carolina, fled Kharkiv, Ukraine, as a 5-year-old in the 1970s with her parents. She said the war has rekindled strong connections to Ukraine.

"My mom showed me a photo of me with my grandpa on a street that was recently bombed," Spaulding said. "We talked about the university in Kharkiv whe-

re my mom and dad went, which was also hit. Suddenly, it all felt so personal."

Spaulding believes spending Passover with refugees will be "an experience to remember."

"Part of the magic of Passover is finding your own story," she said. "We're in the middle of a modern-day exodus. I can't even imagine the stories I will hear."

Celebrating a holiday can give people a rush of hope and happiness even in grim situations, said Rabbi Jacob Biderman, who leads Chabad activities throughout Austria, including a center in Vienna that is sheltering about 800 Ukrainian Jews. Days after refugees reached his center, Biderman led a joyous celebration of Purim, a festival commemorating the deliverance of Jews from a planned massacre in ancient Persia.

"The look on their faces changed from sorrow to joy... Their eyes lit up," Biderman said. "It gave them a sense of normalcy, dignity and the belief that their spiritual life is something no one can take away from them."

That fueled Biderman's determination to provide a memorable Passover Seder for the refugees.

Dr. Yaacov Gaissinovitich, his wife, Elizabeth, and their three children — ages 11, 8 and 4 — will be part of that celebration. They fled the Ukrainian city of Dnipro by car on Friday, March 4. Gaissinovitich, a urologist and mohel who performs the Jewish rite of circumcision, said it pained him, as an observant Jew, to drive on Shabbat — a forbidden act on the day of rest and prayer except when lives are at stake.

"I drove nonstop for 12 hours to Moldova to save us all," he said. "We sang all the Shabbat songs in the car. It was very, very hard."

In Dnipro, Gaissinovitich had his offices in the sprawling Menorah Center, which serves as a center of Jewish life, housing a synagogue, shops, restaurants, museums and the office of the city's chief rabbi.

After a month of being severed from everything familiar, the Chabad center in Vienna has been a blessing, Gaissinovitich said.

"We've been accepted here very warmly," he said. "After being disconnected for days, the children have been able to see that our life hasn't stopped." **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1988 USSR PLEDGES TO LEAVE AFGHANISTAN

The Soviet Union has signed an agreement pledging to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

The pact, drawn up in negotiations between the United States, the USSR, Pakistan and Afghanistan, was signed in a United Nations ceremony in the Swiss capital, Geneva.

It ends nine years of occupation by the Soviet Union, who intervened in 1979 to prop up the struggling communist government.

The subsequent confrontation has drawn in the United States and Afghanistan's neighbours.

Today's agreement provides for a gradual Russian withdrawal, phased over nine months.

But critics have pointed out that it still allows the Soviet Union and the United States to continue arming the two sides in the Afghan civil war.

Today's signing ceremony was itself fraught with complications and required some delicate negotiations to get all four parties around the table.

The Pakistan and Afghanistan groups have so far never met face to face.

One UN official commented, "Getting them to agree where to sit is almost as difficult as getting the agreement in the first place."

In the end, an elaborate and precise 21-minute schedule was drawn up.

The UN Secretary-General, Javier Perez de Cuellar, came in first, followed by the Afghan and Pakistani foreign ministers who entered the room simultaneously from separate doors.

They sat either side of Mr Perez de Cuellar.

There was then a similar arrangement for the US Secretary of State and his Soviet counterpart, Eduard Shevardnadze.

Resistance leaders are furious that they were excluded from the Geneva talks.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, chairman of the seven-party mujahideen alliance, attacked the accord as defective, unpracticable and ineffective.

He dismissed the entire UN-sponsored peace process as a waste of time, saying the agreement would ensure that what he called "an illegitimate puppet regime" would remain in place in Kabul.

Critics believe Afghanistan will slip into anarchy after the Russians leave, as war continues between the Soviet-backed Communist government of President Sayid Mohammed Najibullah and the seven mujahideen rebel groups.

But UN mediator Diego Cordovez was confident the pact would hold, and rejected fears that a bloodbath would follow the departure of the Soviet army.

"Things will start changing now," he said. "There will be a fundamental change of attitude among all the people."

Courtesy BBC News



IN CONTEXT

The last Soviet troops left Afghanistan in February 1989. As predicted, a long period of civil war followed.

The mujahideen overthrew President Najibullah in 1992. Rival mujahideen factions then spent the next four years vying for control, until the Pashtun-dominated Taliban seized control of Kabul in 1996.

They instituted a hardline version of Islam, banning women from work and introducing punishments such as amputation and stoning.

Following the September 11 attacks in America in 2001, the Taliban refused to hand over the man believed to be responsible, Osama bin Laden.

Their stand meant Afghanistan became the first battleground in the so-called war against terror.

The US and Britain launched airstrikes against Afghanistan later that year, and the Taliban was driven from power within months. An interim government under Hamid Karzai was sworn in in December 2001.

In presidential elections in 2004, he was elected president with 55% of the vote.

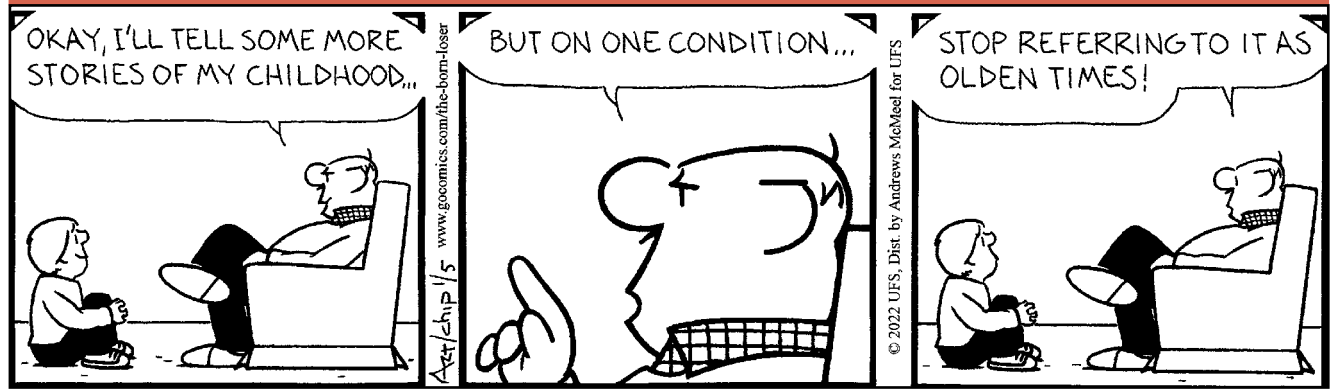
He leads a country whose economy and infrastructure are in ruins.

Many parts of the country are still controlled by regional warlords and their private militias, while attacks by Taliban remnants and militant groups continue.

YOUR STARS

 ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 You can't help everyone. You may have a rather hectic day due to events that children are involved in. You might be a tad overindulgent today.	 TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Discuss your objectives with peers or lovers. Opportunities may come up at prestigious affairs. Don't be too quick to judge.
 GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Travel will promote romantic connections. You might want to spend some time by yourself in order to decide exactly how you feel. Jealous colleagues may try to undermine you.	 CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Any attractions toward clients will be one sided and must be put right out of your head. Minor accidents could occur if you don't take precautions. Unrealistic promises will only get you in trouble.
 LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 You need some excitement in your life, and meeting new people in exotic destinations will certainly satisfy your desires. Don't volunteer private information about yourself.	 VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Put your time and energy into travel, philosophy, and soul-searching. Be careful if a friend asks you for advice. Try not to be too harsh with your mate.
 LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 If you have treated coworkers equitably, you might be able to count on their loyalty. Investments that deal with property will be lucrative; however, upsets with family members may be likely.	 SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Take time to deal with authority figures or government agencies. Take time to listen to the problems of family members. Don't bother retaliating, just walk away.
 SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Anger will prevail if you expect help from others. Some time spent with that special someone should be your intent. Relatives may not be telling you the whole truth about a family situation.	 CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Don't neglect these problems; deal with them once and for all, then move on to more pleasurable tasks. You need to mingle with people who can spark enthusiasm and confidence in you.
 AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Uncertainties regarding your love life will surface if you have neglected your mate. Your high energy and discipline will enable you to complete any seemingly insurmountable tasks.	 PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 You may be thinking of starting your own business. You can make changes to your living quarters that should please family members. Education may be the answer.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	8	19	cloudy
Changchun	0	14	cloudy
Chengdu	17	24	overcast
Chongqing	14	25	cloudy
Fuzhou	19	30	rain
Guangzhou	20	27	thunderstorms
Guiyang	10	23	fine
Haikou	23	28	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	15	26	rain
Harbin	-2	13	cloudy
Hefei	11	20	rain
Nanjing	12	20	rain
Shanghai	18	23	rain
Taipei	20	24	fine
Wuhan	13	21	cloudy
Hong Kong	22	29	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	1	12	clear
Frankfurt	8	21	showers
Paris	11	22	fog
London	8	19	overcast
New York	11	27	rain

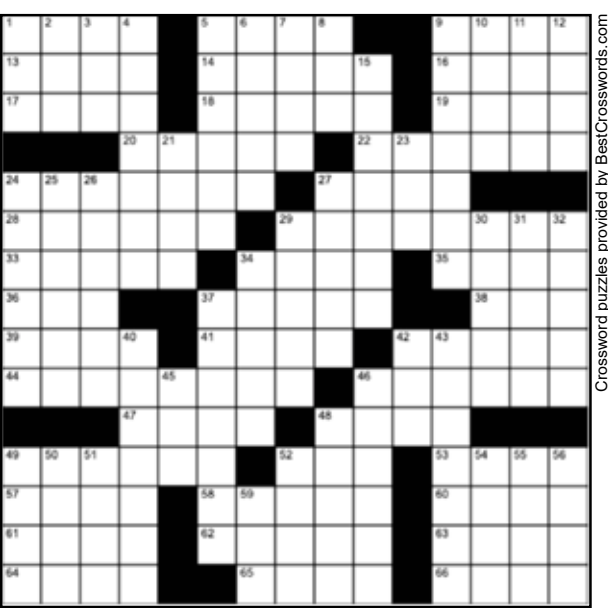
CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Assns.; 5- I've Got ___ in Kalamazoo; 9- Related by blood; 13- Overgrown with ivy; 14- Falls; 16- ___-majesté; 17- Son of ___; 18- Parsonage; 19- Sly look; 20- Martini garnish; 22- Uttered gratingly; 24- Make obsolete; 27- Radiate; 28- Characteristics; 29- Paunchy; 33- Bring forth from the egg; 34- Env. notation; 35- She played Carla on "Cheers"; 36- Med. specialty; 37- Brainstorms; 38- Abby's twin; 39- Monetary unit of Cambodia; 41- Farrow and Hamm; 42- Child's building cube; 44- Economized; 46- Comes to mind; 47- Boyfriend; 48- High time?; 49- Discovers; 52- At a great distance; 53- Being, to Brutus; 57- Soprano Gluck; 58- Fortune-telling cards; 60- Clublike weapon; 61- ___-do-well; 62- Accumulation of fluids; 63- Chemical used on trees; 64- New Orleans is The Big ___; 65- Elevator man; 66- Roman emperor;

DOWN 1- Reproductive cells; 2- Semi; 3- Bearded beast; 4- Pertaining to a church council; 5- Lets in; 6- Tomb; 7- Tops; 8- CD precursors; 9- Premier player; 10- Retain; 11- Ahal; 12- Square; 15- Religious discourses; 21- Narrow strip of wood; 23- Goal, intention; 24- Catchall category; 25- Pertaining to a rare element; 26- Shred; 27- Kett and James; 29- Lieu; 30- Total disorder; 31- Therefore; 32- Jerks; 34- Old French expression meaning "goodbye"; 37- Cover with a viscous substance; 40- Collection of books; 42- Friend in the 'hood; 43- Person who repairs telephone wires; 45- Game pieces; 46- Main arteries; 48- Model Campbell; 49- Alley; 50- Zeno's home; 51- Iowa city; 52- Worry; 54- Cut-price retail event; 55- "The Lion King" villain; 56- Architect Saarinen; 59- Flurry;


Yesterday's solution

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



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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DRIVE IN

A PORTRAIT OF A PUTIN OPPOSITION LEADER IN 'NAVALNY'

LINDSEY BAHR,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

N“NAVALNY” is so taut and suspenseful you’d think John le Carré had left behind a secret manuscript that’s only just coming to light now.

This spellbinding portrait of a Russian opposition leader following an attempt on his life has all the makings of a Hollywood thriller. It has shadowy operatives, truth-seeking journalists, conspiracy theories, Soviet-era poisons and, at its center, a handsome, altruistic family man risking his life to fight a would-be despot.

But “Navalny” is not fiction. And it’s somehow even more chilling and prescient now than it was just three months ago when it premiered at the Sundance Film Festival hours after Russian authorities officially added Alexei Navalny to their registry of terrorists. Thanks to Fathom Events, audiences can see it in theaters starting Tuesday. It’ll be broadcast on CNN and streamed on HBO Max later this year.

For the uninitiated, Alexei Na-



AP PHOTO

Alexei Navalny appears in a scene from the documentary “Navalny”

valny is a media savvy, anti-corruption campaigner in his mid-40s who has for many years been a headache for Russian President Vladimir Putin. He’s released numerous reports about corruption in Russia and the Putin administration and become a popular and

rallying figure among like-minded Russians. The media has called him the Kremlin’s fiercest critic. And he is seemingly undaunted by the intimidation and the arrests he’s endured.

The fame, he thought, might even make it more problematic

for him to be killed, he tells director Daniel Roher in the documentary.

“Boy, were you wrong,” Roher says off camera.

“Yes, I was wrong,” Navalny says.

Roher was able to sit down with Navalny during his brief stay in Berlin in 2020 and early 2021, while recovering from being poisoned and seeking the truth behind the unsuccessful murder attempt.

In August 2020, he’d fallen violently ill on flight from Siberia to Moscow. The pilot staged an emergency landing in Omsk where he was immediately hospitalized. His wife and supporters helped make the case for him to be treated elsewhere and he was soon transported to Berlin for care. After emerging from a coma, the German government determined that he’d been poisoned by a lethal, Soviet-era nerve agent. The Kremlin denied the allegation.

Though eager to get back to Russia (Navalny says at the outset that he’s not in Berlin by choice), it’s there that he is able to team up with investigative journalists

Christo Grozev and Maria Pevchikh, who help track down his suspected poisoners. In one jaw-dropping scene, Navalny calls the suspects one by one on speakerphone. It’s a testament to Roher and his editors just how exciting this is on screen. And it all culminates with Navalny’s January 2021 flight back to Russia where he knows that he will be immediately arrested and imprisoned.

The film captures these episodes and this unbelievable saga extraordinarily well. Roher maintains a delicate balance of amplifying Navalny’s story, including moving testimonies from his wife and daughter, while also resisting full hero worship. Navalny is also a politician, after all, and Roher does not hold back in interrogating what he stands for outside of his opposition to Putin.

Blame history, but “Navalny” feels somehow unfinished despite many, many title cards and newsreels that precede the credits. With everything that has transpired in the past few months with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, perhaps its biggest flaw is that it has an ending at all.

“Navalny,” a Warner Bros., CNN Films and Fathom Events release in theaters Tuesday and streaming at a later date, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for “some language.” Running time: 98 minutes. ★★★★★

AD

- 合夥人 PARTNERS:**
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 山度士 Álvaro Rodrigues °
 馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata °
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TASTE OF EDESIA

Urban Paradise

IRENE SAM, MDT

THERE are not many local retail stores in Macau where you can sip a cup of tea, relax, and take your sweet time to choose your products. Even in big department stores where luxury branded items are offered, the space is often too busy and it's almost never possible to rest your mind. Taken this into consideration, serial entrepreneur and lifestyle expert Mickey Lo opened **Toff Home**, a shop where an exception ambience is created for customers to wind down while shopping.

"Modern life is very hectic and I feel like there is a lot of anxiety in the air of our city. So late last year I decided to create a brand that showcases sensorial skincare and wellness products in a very relaxed setting, with books, teas, plants, huge crystal and wood to transport our clients' mind out of the urban environment. The aim is to bring them back to nature," Lo explains.

Toff Home products are all handmade using mostly wild crafted organic ingredients from the Himalayas, where the brand's research team is well versed in the ancient healing

herbal tradition of Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine. A concept unlike any other in Macau, the shop hopes to influence individuals to prioritise self-care, as it is important element in a chaotic world, especially with the covid 19 pandemic where one cannot travel.

"When a customer walks in we welcome them with a selection of tea from our collection and some snacks. Our rose tea is one-of-a-kind as it is picked at an high altitude area in the mountains between Yunnan and Tibet. Customers are also free to meditate with our crystals available in the space and if one of them makes a connection, anyone can buy them and take them home," Lo says.

Making products only with the best organic ingredients, Lo endeavours to convince individuals to move away from using skincare products that are full of chemicals and artificial fragrance, as nature is the soul's best healer, and chemicals do more harm than good. "It is essential that we, as human beings, keep ourselves healthy and enjoy life to its fullest. The beauty of nature itself is worth our entire lifetime to explore and love and it is this joy that I would like to share with the world," she adds.



OPINION

China Daily
 Kang Bing, China Daily



GIFT EXCHANGES MUST BE MADE SIMPLER TO HELP END CORRUPTION

The Chinese people are finding it increasingly difficult to prepare gifts for friends and relatives on special occasions including festivals. If a gift is very expensive, it could become a burden on the recipient, as he or she would have to find a gift of the same value to gift in return. But it should not be overtly inexpensive either, for you could be considered a miser.

A gift worth a few hundred yuan is widely accepted as appropriate nowadays, and prudent businesspeople have designed gift packages accordingly. It could be two bottles of wine in a wooden box, a package of assorted nuts, a basket of fruits or a bouquet of flowers.

Such gifts are popular among the youth, though the older ones might shrug them off as trivial or unnecessary. To them, wine is just not strong enough, nuts are hard to crack, fruits can be sour, and flowers neither edible nor durable.

The result: many people now have "gift selecting phobia".

Those who have deep pockets and are willing to gift more valuable gifts may choose expensive Chinese liquor brands, cigarettes or imported cosmetics even if they know the recipients are neither heavy drinkers nor smokers. The price of a carton of best quality cigarettes can be as high as 1,000 yuan (\$157.12) while a bottle of Moutai, Chinese liquor, can cost more than 3,000 yuan.

Moutai used to be a popular gift until a few years ago when a bottle cost less than 1,000 yuan. No longer.

Besides, many local governments have banned civil servants from drinking Moutai at official receptions. And accepting Moutai as a gift can be considered as taking a bribe.

Giving gifts is part of Chinese tradition. More than two and half millenniums ago, when Confucius took in new students, he would ask them to bring a few kilograms of dried meat as tuition fees. But the sage that he was, Confucius preferred calling them gifts, not tuition fees.

Even the poorest of Chinese families maintained the tradition. Visiting each other during Spring Festival, people prepared steamed buns as gifts. Rural residents visiting relatives in a town carried a bag of sweet potatoes or other farm produce as gifts.

Unlike today, gift selecting was a relatively easy job in the 1960s and 1970s. As an important festival approached, we would queue up to buy moon cakes. But despite the lure of the delicacies, we were barred from touching them. They were to be divided into three or four portions and wrapped, and then sent to relatives as festival gifts.

But on receiving such gifts, few would open the packet to savor the desserts. Instead, they would immediately send them to their relatives or friends. This sending-receiving-sending process lasted a few days sometimes the gift we had sent would return to us until the festival was over. If we were lucky enough to still have a gift or two, we would open the packets and enjoy the goodies.

People gift presents to each other to show love and gratitude. As a Chinese saying goes, "the gift is trifling but the feeling is profound". But there are people who have ruined the gift-giving tradition by turning it into a means of bribery.

According to a corruption case that came to light in January, Sun Lijun, former vice-minister of public security, was found to have taken bribes worth more than \$90 million from a subordinate over a few years. The subordinate would visit Sun four or five times every year, each time carrying a small box of "seafood" as gift. But instead of seafood, the box used to contain \$300,000.

While harsh punishments await bribe takers and givers, it is high time we standardized gift giving both in official and business circles, in order to eradicate corruption. While gift giving in official and business circles shouldn't be used as bribery, gift exchanges between friends and relatives should become simpler.

COVID PLUNGED 77 MILLION INTO POVERTY BEFORE UKRAINE WAR

THE BUZZ

The pandemic plunged 77 million more people into extreme poverty last year and many developing countries can't recover because of the crippling cost of debt repayments – and that was before the added impact of the war in Ukraine, a U.N. report said.

The report said rich countries could support their recovery from pandemic slumps with record amounts borrowed at ultra-low interest rates. But the poorest countries spent billions of dollars servicing their debts and faced much higher borrowing costs, preventing them from spending on improving education and health care, protecting the environment and reducing inequality.

According to the U.N., 812 million people lived in extreme poverty – on \$1.90 a day or less – in 2019, and by 2021 amid the pandemic the number had risen to 889 million.

The report is on financing to achieve U.N. development goals for 2030, including ending poverty, ensuring quality education for all young people and achieving gender equality.

U.N. Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said at a news conference that the effort "is coming at a critical moment for humanity, adding to the compounding crises of climate assaults on our natural systems and the protracted COVID-19 pandemic."



UKRAINE UPSET BY VATICAN INVITING RUSSIAN TO CARRY CROSS

FRANCES D'EMILIO, ROME

A close associate of Pope Francis yesterday defended the Vatican's decision to have a Russian woman and a Ukrainian woman carry the cross together during a Good Friday procession that will be presided over by the pontiff.

On Tuesday, both the Ukrainian ambassador to the Holy See and the archbishop of Kyiv blasted the choice given Russia's invasion and war in Ukraine. The women are both nurses who work together at a Rome hospital.

Ukrainian Ambassador Andrii Yurash tweeted that he "understands and shares general concern in Ukraine and many other communities about idea to bring together Ukrainian and Russian women" to carry the cross during part of the procession on Friday.

"Now we are working on the issue trying to explain difficulties of its realization and possible consequences," the ambassador said.

The torchlit procession at at Rome's Colosseum is a traditional part

of the Vatican's Holy Week observances.

The Vatican didn't immediately comment.

Responding to the criticism, the Rev. Antonio Spadaro, a Jesuit priest in Rome who is close to Francis, defended the pairing of the Russian and Ukrainian women for the solemn procession.

"You have to understand one thing" about the pope, Spadaro told Italian state radio network RAI yesterday. "He's a pastor, not a politician."

Spadaro ventured that the image of the two women carrying the cross together was upsetting "because they represent something that can't be obtained" now — "peace."

Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, who is based in Kyiv and heads the Greek-Catholic church in Ukraine, also denounced the pairing.

"I consider this idea inopportune and ambiguous," Shevchuk said, adding that it "doesn't take into consideration the context of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine."

Shevchuk also decried the wording of a medita-

tion that the Vatican had said would be read aloud as the nurses clutch the tall, lightweight cross. It reads, "We want our life back as before. Why all of this? What wrong did we do? Why have you forsaken us? Why have you forsaken our peoples?"

The words, combined with the cross-carrying gesture, "are incomprehensible and even offensive," the Greek-Catholic prelate said.

The meditation was scripted based on the experiences of the families of the Russian and Ukrainian women, whose families also plan to participate in the procession, the Vatican has said.

The women, interviewed on Italian state TV earlier in the week, have expressed satisfaction with their role in the procession and stressed their friendship.

The pope did not mention the controversy during his public audience yesterday. But he denounced "the armed aggression of these days" as "an outrage against God."

Francis has pressed for an Easter cease-fire in Ukraine. Easter falls on April 17 for many Christians this year. MDT/AP



USA Elon Musk's huge Twitter investment took a new twist yesterday with the filing of a lawsuit alleging that the colorful billionaire illegally delayed disclosing his stake in the social media company so he could buy more shares at lower prices. The complaint in New York federal court accuses Musk of violating a regulatory deadline to reveal he had accumulated a stake of at least 5%. Instead, according to the complaint, Musk didn't disclose his position in Twitter until he'd almost doubled his stake to more than 9%.

Internet Western law enforcement agencies have dismantled an online marketplace used to buy and sell hacked and stolen personal data belonging to millions of people, and have brought criminal charges against the platform's founder and chief administrator, officials announced. Authorities say the RaidForums website trafficked in hundreds of databases of sensitive data, including credit card and Social Security numbers and bank account information, that had been hacked or stolen from victims.



Music Critically acclaimed debut albums by Wu-Tang Clan and Alicia Keys, Ricky Martin's Latin pop megahit "Livin' La Vida Loca," and Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" are among the recordings being inducted this year into the National Recording Registry. The Library of Congress announced yesterday the 25 songs, albums, historical recordings and even a podcast that will be preserved as important contributions to American culture and history.

HOLIDAY TIMES

Macau Daily Times will not be published during the holiday. The Times will be back on the stands on Tuesday April 19. However the MDT website will be updated with breaking news during the recess period. We wish our readers, advertisers and friends the best of times.