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**LIAISON OFFICE'S DIRECTOR FU ZIYING SAID THAT MACAU HAS SEEN PROGRESS AND EFFECTIVE MEASURES IN PLACE TO ENSURE ITS PART IN SAFEGUARDING NATIONAL SECURITY** P2

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**RUSSIAN STRIKES KILL AT LEAST SEVEN IN LVIV, MOSCOW PREPS ASSAULT ON THE EAST** P8



**South Korea** The U.S. special envoy for North Korea said that Washington and Seoul agreed on the need for a strong response to Pyongyang's recent spate of missile tests, though they remain open to dialogue with the country. Sung Kim flew to South Korea for talks two days after North Korea conducted a new type of missile test in its 13th round of weapons firing this year. Experts say North Korea wants to advance its weapons arsenal and wrest concessions like sanctions relief from its rivals.



**Turkey** has launched a new ground and air cross-border offensive against Kurdish militants in northern Iraq, that has left at least 19 suspected Kurdish rebels dead and has wounded at least four Turkish soldiers, Turkey's defense minister Hulusi Akar (pictured) said. Turkish jets and artillery struck suspected targets of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and commando troops — supported by helicopters and drones — then crossed into the region by land or were airlifted by helicopters.



**Jerusalem** Two Palestinian men were critically injured by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank yesterday, the Palestinian Health Ministry said, the latest incident in a wave of Israeli-Palestinian violence. The Israeli military were conducting an arrest raid in the village of Yamun, west of Jenin in the northern West Bank, when dozens of Palestinians started throwing rocks and explosives at the troops, who returned fire.

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# HELPERS EXODUS

**Domestic workers choosing to leave employers by the thousands this year after over two years of 'lockdown', despite new gov't measures to ease hiring foreign labor** P5



## ECONOMY

# PERFORMANCE FOR MARCH, APRIL ESTIMATED TO BE WEAK

# LIAISON OFFICE: MACAU HAS EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO ENSURE SAFEGUARDING NATIONAL SECURITY

LYNZY VALLES

**DIRECTOR** of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the SAR, Fu Ziyang, has said that Macau has seen progress and effective measures put in place to ensure its part in safeguarding national security.

Fu, also the National Security Affairs Adviser of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security, called on the Macau public to adhere to "bottom-line thinking, [and to] fully implement the holistic view of national security, consistently carry out national security education, and diligently fulfil its constitutional responsibility in relation to safeguarding national security."

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the National Security Education Exhibition last week, Fu said that Macau residents should fully grasp the significance of safeguarding national security; strengthen the city's legal and implementation mechanisms for safeguarding national security; and pass on the core value of loyalty to the country and to Macau.

"The Liaison Office would spare no effort in supporting the MSAR's



work in safeguarding national security and in promotion of national security," he said.

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng also delivered a speech at the opening ceremony, pledging that the government would spare no effort in "adhering to the holistic view of national security; and safeguarding the country's sovereignty, security and development interests, with a view to continuing the successful implementation of the 'One country, two systems' principle with Macau characteristics."

He also remarked that Macau had been able to attain progress in safeguarding national security, which

le keeping in place regular Covid-19 pandemic prevention and control measures. Such progress included ensuring the fundamental principle of 'patriots governing Macau'; strengthening the basis in society and the political system of the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle; optimising the work-, legal-, and implementation-related systems for safeguarding national security; and stepping up promotion and education effort.

This year's National Security Education Exhibition features more than 420 images and a number of videos. It has six sections, each with its own theme. They in-

clude: great achievements in the country's development; adherence to the holistic view of national se-

curity and continuous optimisation of the national security system; and remarkable achievements of national security in the new era, with a focus on preventing and solving major risks.

Other themes include the promotion of steady progress in the implementation of the 'One country, two systems' principle with a spirit of strengthening the foundation for consolidation thereof, and of tackling challenges head on; and the work of forging ahead diligently for further contribution to overall national development. The work of passing on to new generations the torch of patriotism for the country and for Macau and the advancement of a unified effort to safeguard national security are also included.

The exhibition at the China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade Service Platform Complex is open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily, until May 15.

## GOV'T MULLS ADDING PROCEDURAL STIPULATIONS TO NATIONAL SECURITY LAW

**SECRETARY** for Security Wong Sio Chak has said that stipulations regarding criminal procedures should be expected in the review of the National Security Law, for which the public consultation should be expected by the end of this year. Wong added that the current version – promulgated in year 2009 – is quite simple due to the social

conditions of the time. Procedural stipulations are crucial in the perspective of law-enforcement, Wong remarked. The government has repeatedly warned of national security risks to the city. When asked for an explanation, Wong reiterated that risks do exist, but that no disclosure of them can be made due to confidentiality factors.

## E-VOUCHER GOV'T TO DISTRIBUTE MOP8,000 IN NEXT CONSUMPTION CARDS

LYNZY VALLES

**THE** third round of the electronic consumer cards (e-vouchers) will be distributed in May and will hold a total value of around MOP8,000, according to the spokesperson of the Executive Council, André Cheong.

According to the official, the Executive Council has already greenlighted the bill amending the year's budget, where the SAR will distribute MOP5.9 billion in the new round, with MOP1.3 billion subsidizing household water and energy consumption.

Cheong said that further information regarding the next round of e-voucher subsidy scheme will be announced by the Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong.

In the recent plenary session where Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng was present to answer questions from lawmakers, he disclosed that he expects the consumption stimulus measure to be implemented by May, after the amendment to the Annual Budget.

The reason that details of the scheme are still yet to be announced is that the Annual Budget needs

to be amended and the amendments will then need to be passed by the parliament.

Last year, a total of MOP5.27 billion was approved under the consumer e-cards, bringing MOP8.24 billion into the market in the first round of consumption.

The government has recorded a deficit of MOP125 billion in the past three years of budgets.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the government issued two rounds of e-vouchers, each round worth MOP8,000, to all local residents, aiming to stimulate the economy.

## SUV BURNT AS TIRE WENT FLAT, WORN DOWN TO THE RIM

**A** Mercedes-Benz G63, price-tagged about MOP3 million, has been burnt on the Amizade Bridge at around 8 a.m. yesterday after the vehicle squeezed a flat tire and wore it down to the rim for two-thirds of the bridge's span. After the rim scratched the asphalt and created sparks, a burst of fire was lit that spread to the tail of the car. The entire vehicle was consumed by flames, but nobody was injured, according to first responders. Several video clips went viral on social media platforms recording the incident. Some users questioned why the driver did not realize about the condition of the tire. No injury was reported. Authorities temporarily closed the bridge's Macau-bound lanes. **AL**



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# Economic performance for March, April estimated to be weak

ANTHONY LAM

**D**ESPITE a rising estimated trajectory, the Prosperity Index for March to June will likely fly low, the Macau Economic Association (MEA) has forecast in a statement.

The projected values for the Index for these months are estimated to range between 2.5 and 2.7 points on a scale of 0 to 7 points.

Citing the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) optimistic forecast of Macau's economic recovery, which highlighted an estimated growth of 15.5% this year, MEA believes Macau will retain its attractiveness to tourists.

It added that Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng's recent lecture at the parliament on the 12-year economic cycle and the need for public faith in the city will support its trust in the city's recovery.

Meanwhile, the recently foreshadowed consumption stimulus and utility subsidies will help support local small and medium



enterprises, the MEA suggests.

The tightness of restrictions in different cities still fluctuates. For example, Hong Kong has recently announced the partial loosening of its disease control measures,

such as permitting the reopening of cinemas and relaxing social distancing measures in certain settings. However, some mainland cities have intensified their measures in their attempts to

contain the spread of the virus.

With this said, the desire of tourists to travel to Macau may not be strong, the MEA noted, adding that some business operations in tourism districts have

ceased. The city is also undergoing a structural economic transformation.

Given the analyses and forecasts, the MEA expects the local unemployment rate to further increase, suggesting that the public brace for bumps.

Reviewing the month of February, the index was at 2.6 points.

The drop was mainly caused by the downsizing of the M2 money supply, which has exhibited a year-on-year contraction for four months in a row, since November last year.

Furthermore, the plunge in share prices of the six casino operators – the powerhouse of the city's economy – which reached as high as 35%, together with the fall in visitor arrivals and hotel occupancy rates, has put downward pressure on the Index level.

The employment rate also saw pressure, as employment figures fell from 401,000 during the early phase of the current Covid-19 pandemic to 373,000 in February, signaling a rising unemployment rate for four consecutive months.

Worse, the Consumer Confidence Index in mainland China became weak, recording a 5.1% year-on-year decrease. The outbreaks in several mainland cities, such as Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, have applied heavy pressure to the mainland index.

AD

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# LAWMAKER ASKS ABOUT PLANS FOR CREMATORIUM

ANTHONY LAM

As exporting human bodies for cremation is legally infeasible, lawmaker Ron Lam is calling on the government to reveal its roadmap for building a crematorium.

His inquiry came not long after the government announced its Master Contingency Plan against a potential Covid-19 outbreak.

The Master Plan pointed out that the bodies of people who died with infectious diseases are not supposed to be exported, even for cremation.

Previously, bodies were moved to and cremated in Zhuhai.

However, since May 2017, the mainland has blocked the import of bodies confirmed to be, or suspected of, carrying infec-

tious diseases.

With this said, without such a facility in Macau, the government has not clearly elaborated upon how bodies would be handled should there be an outbreak with excessive fatalities.

In contrast, the Master Plan only stipulates that, should there be an outbreak that causes fatalities, the Municipal Affairs Bureau

(IAM) and the Health Bureau (SSM), among other government entities, will take the lead in handling bodies.

As such, the lawmaker asked the government to present a clearer picture to the public on how it would handle the matter under the framework of the Master Plan. He also asked whether the government has any prospective locations in mind, and asked whether the government would outline requirements for a crematorium in terms of environmental and psychological factors.

In fact, alternative flameless methods, such as water and ice

cremation, which are purported to be more environmentally friendly, have drawn much attention in many parts of the world.

Lam is not the first lawmaker to push for the roadmap.

Former lawmaker Agnes Lam raised the same question with IAM in 2020, when the city was still under early-phase lockdown as Covid-19 was sweeping through the world.


Despite opposing the proposal regarding the same facility in June 2018 on the grounds of the government's manner of presentation of the plan, maintenance costs, location, as well as demands, the former lawmaker voiced concerns about the lack of progress regarding the facility in June, two years later, in light of the city being prone to death of or with Covid-19.

The reason why the former lawmaker requested more discussion on the facility in 2018 was that she found the government was not making sufficient disclosure on its roadmap as it then was.

On the occasion in 2020, she asked the government about the matter, to which a then IAM official replied, "It can't be rushed." Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong, also admitted to the need for the facility in Macau.

The government lifted, in year 2019, the requirement that crematoria must be located within a cemetery, considering the lack of appropriate locations in Macau.

AD



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## IC WARNS OF ADS ON CULTURAL RELICS

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is warning the public against placing advertising materials or graffiti on heritage buildings, noting that it constitutes a violation of the provisions of article 35 of the Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Law.

This comes after the IC received a report from the police stating that advertising materials had been posted on the stone steps

in front of the Ruins of the Colegio de São Paulo, including promotional materials being posted on the handrails of the stone steps, and words of graffiti having been found.

The incident involving graffiti being placed on cultural relics and unauthorized posting of objects, will be investigated further by police. Upon completion of the police investigation

process, the IC will proceed with the cleanup and restoration of the relevant site as soon as possible.

The IC urged residents to report any behavior of inscriptions or paintings on heritage buildings to the police, adding that the IC will continue to promote awareness of the protection of cultural heritage through various channels, namely graffiti or unauthorized posting of materials, and the installation of cultural objects, in order to perform the work of safeguarding heritage sites well. LV

# More domestic workers choosing to leave employers after over two years of 'lockdown'

LYNZY VALLES

**A** number of domestic workers have opted to go back home for good with many deciding that not seeing their families for over two years is a big price to pay for a minimum wage.

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows that the number of domestic workers in the region has declined to 27,100 in 2021, a 13% decrease from 2020 figures that stood at 31,100.

However, it is unknown how many of these workers are stranded in their home countries.

Lawmakers – even former members of the Legislative Assembly – have long called for a scheme to allow local authorities to provide an exemption for the entry of domestic workers, a scheme that would excuse them from the employment law barring non-resident workers from being employees without leaving the city.

The government announced a surprising measure last week, introducing a plan whereby non-resident Filipino workers will be exempted from entry restrictions – excusing them from the city's border closure, which has been in place since March 2020.

Applicants must fulfill certain conditions, such as the purpose of the request being to take care of an elderly person aged 65 years and over, children aged three years or less, or sick residents.

The application will go through relevant government bureaus such as the Labour Affairs Bureau, the Public Security Police Force and the Health Bureau. The government is set to announce finalized measures on the new scheme today.

However, for some Filipino domestic workers, these measures came a little too late.

Speaking to the Times, workers who have families have decided to go back home and leave their employers behind – all of which are families with children under the age of five.

Following the government announcement last week, one employer decided to bargain with Jenelyn Blaza, 37, offering a two-month vacation just for her to return.

However, speaking to the Times, Blaza noted that it has been three years since she last saw her children and husband due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



A mother of three, she expressed that it is high time to be with her children, who have been entreating her to return home.

"Times have been uncertain. I've only waited for my contract to end. It's difficult for children to grow up without seeing their mother. I know they need me. Teenagers nowadays are a bit tougher to discipline and I still want to be with them while they still listen to me," she said.

Another worker, Vilma Itable, who has been working in the city for 25 years, said, "It's different when you're not able to see them for three years. I don't want to regret not giving my son the kind of attention and care he needs just because I have to earn money."

"Two years of being stuck here is enough for me to decide that it's about time to go home. We'll never know when Macau would go back to normal. I'm not risking it," she said.

Macau has maintained a zero-Covid strategy, following Beijing's move, which has prompted consistent border closures and only allowing entry from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Also, under such a strategy, two weeks' quarantine is needed for arrivals from regions that have been affected by Covid-19, despite such arrivals showing a negative Covid-19 test result and being vaccinated with a booster shot.

However, whether it is sustainable, remains a question.

Another non-resident worker,

Ma. Victoria Menguito, is ready to return home after working in the region for 13 years.

She has just recently started working for a family of four, as her former employer moved back to Portugal.

However, with not enough pay, the worker said that it was time to go back home, as she considers that it was no longer worth it to work in Macau.

**"It's important for us who work abroad to be able to see our families at least once a year for our longing for them to be relieved."**

MA. VICTORIA MENGUITO  
NON-RESIDENT WORKER

Although her children are grown-up, with one set to finish college this academic year, Menguito expressed, "The lockdown here in Macau has contributed to my decision to going back home for good."

"It's different when I'm able to see them even just for a few days each year. That's already such a relief to us, especially to us single mothers. From waking up next to them, preparing their meals, to going to church together," she said.

"It's important for us who work abroad to be able to see our families at least once a year for our longing for them to be relieved,"

the worker added.

The workers are currently awaiting a repatriation flight back home with no plans of returning.

However, for Menguito, "If given the chance to come back, I think it will only be when the government would impose favorable laws for domestic workers – such as being provided with basic healthcare."

She argued that the responsibilities of workers here are significant, as they multitask from doing house chores to cooking, to attending to the needs of their employers' elderly relatives or children.

On Facebook groups, the Times observed that employers have been on the search of domestic workers, offering monthly salaries of MOP5,500 up to MOP7,500.

Prior to the pandemic, a MOP5,500 offer was considered high and rare as many families were offering only up to MOP4,500, or even MOP3,800.

Progressive Labor Union of Domestic Workers of Macau, Jassy Santos, also expressed that low salaries have long discouraged domestic workers from remaining, with little to no benefits obtained from the government.

The Times is also aware that several Filipino migrant workers in the city have resigned from their jobs as they have found new opportunities in other countries such as Canada with much higher pay, and with the possibility of bringing their families with them.

## LIONEL LEONG PROPOSED TO REPRESENT CCCC IN MOTA-ENGLI

Former Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lionel Leong Vai Tac, has been proposed as a member of the board of directors of Mota-Engil, to serve as a representative of shareholder of the China Communications Construction Co. Ltd (CCCC). The proposal will be submitted at the general meeting, which will take place on May 6. CCCC is a shareholder of 32.41% of Portugal's largest construction firm. As cited in a TDM report, following the Chinese firm joining the Portuguese company last year, the group's board of directors reduced in number from 20 to 14. Mota-Engil will then increase the number of members of the board of directors from the current 14 to 15.

## EASTER ARRIVALS NEARLY 56,000

Macau has recorded some 55,953 tourist arrivals during the Easter holiday period from April 15 to 17, a plunge of nearly 50% compared to last year's figures. However, the high numbers last year were due to the Easter period coinciding with the Ching Ming holidays in the mainland, while Easter is generally not celebrated in China. Data from the Public Security Police Force shows that the overall number of arrivals and departures in the city's checkpoints reached 112,303, 46,886 of which traveled through the Border Gate.

## CE CONGRATULATES SHENZHOU-13 CREWED SPACECRAFT

The Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng has sent a congratulatory message to the central government regarding the successful return to Earth of the Shenzhou-13 crewed spacecraft. The top official expressed admiration for the three astronauts forming the crew – Zhai Zhigang, Wang Yaping and Ye Guangfu – as well as for the scientists and others involved in the mission. Shenzhou-13 was a significant flight mission in terms of testing critical techniques necessary for the country's space station. The three astronauts lived and worked in the space station for a record 183 days – the longest-ever duration of an in-orbit stay within the country's manned space programme.

COVID-19

# SHANGHAI REPORTS FIRST DEATHS IN CURRENT OUTBREAK

SHANGHAI authorities yesterday reported the first COVID-19 deaths in the latest outbreak in China's most populous and wealthiest city.

All three people who died were elderly, had underlying diseases such as diabetes and hypertension and had not been vaccinated against the coronavirus, city Health Commission inspector Wu Ganyu told journalists.

"After entering hospital, their conditions grew worse and they died after attempts to save them were unsuccessful," Wu said.

The deaths raise to 4,641 the number of people that China says have succumbed to the disease since the virus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

While China has an overall vaccination rate of around 90%, a low rate among the elderly remains a concern. Only 62% of Shanghai residents over age 60 have been vaccinated, according to the latest data available. Some experts say China needs to raise that rate before it can safely live with the virus.

While highly contagious, the



omicron BA.2 variant driving the Shanghai outbreak is less lethal than the previous delta variant.

Most of Shanghai's 25 million residents are being confined to their homes for a third week as

China continues to employ a "zero-tolerance" strategy to curb the outbreak, demanding isolation of anyone possibly infected.

China yesterday said 23,362 people had tested positive for the

virus over the previous 24 hours, most of them showing no symptoms and almost all of them in Shanghai.

The city has reported more than 300,000 cases since late Mar-

ch. Shanghai began easing restrictions last week, although officials have warned that the city doesn't have its outbreak under control.

Shanghai, which is home to China's biggest port and most important stock exchange, appeared unprepared for such a massive undertaking.

Residents have run short of food and other daily necessities while enduring lockdown conditions, and tens of thousands of people put under medical observation have been sequestered in crowded facilities where lights are always on, garbage bins overflow, food is inadequate and hot showers nonexistent.

Anyone who tests positive but has few or no symptoms is required to spend one week in a quarantine facility.

Concerns have risen about the economic impact of the government's hard-line policy.

While the ruling Communist Party has urged more targeted prevention measures, local officials have routinely adopted stringent regulations, possibly for fear of being penalized over outbreaks in their areas.

In the city of Wenzhou, which has seen only a handful of cases, authorities have authorized rewards of up to 50,000 yuan (\$7,800) for information about people who falsify their health status, online news site The Paper reported. **MDT/AP**

## Economy grows still-weak 4.8% in January-March

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

CHINESE leaders face pressure to shore up sinking economic growth after Shanghai and other cities shut down to fight coronavirus outbreaks, threatening to disrupt global trade and manufacturing.

Growth slid to 1.3% over the previous quarter in the first three months of 2022, down from a 1.4% rate in last year's final quarter, official data showed yesterday. Compared with a year earlier, a measurement that can hide recent fluctuations, growth was 4.8%, up from 4% in the final quarter of 2021.

In a sign the slide might be deepening, March retail sales fell 3.5% from a year earlier.

This month's activity is "set to be even worse," Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a report. "China's economic performance is likely to remain lackluster in the near-term."

The ruling Communist Party, which set a 5.5%

growth target this year, already was trying to reverse a slump that started in mid-2021. Pressure mounted after last month's surge in infections prompted Beijing to suspend access to Shanghai, a city of 25 million people, and other industrial centers.

"Further impacts from lockdowns are imminent," Iris Pang of ING said in a report.

The slowdown hurts China's trading partners by depressing demand for imported oil, food and consumer goods. Oil prices, which spiked after Russia's attack on Ukraine, have eased on expectations Chinese consumption will weaken.

The ruling party promised tax refunds and other aid to businesses after tighter controls on use of debt triggered a slowdown in China's vast real estate industry. Last week, Premier Li Keqiang, the No. 2 leader, called for quicker action to help entrepreneurs who generate China's new jobs and wealth.

Forecasters say Beijing

is using cautious, targeted stimulus instead of across-the-board spending, a strategy that will take longer to show results. Chinese leaders worry too much spending or bank lending might push up politically sensitive housing costs or corporate debt they worry is dangerously high.

Meanwhile, China faces more headwinds from a possible slowdown in the European Union, a major export market, due to Russia's war on Ukraine and higher oil and gas prices, according to Rajiv Biswas of S&P Global Market Intelligence.

That would "hit China's manufacturing export sector," Biswas said in an email.

The flow of industrial goods has been disrupted by the suspension of access to Shanghai, home of the world's busiest port, and other industrial cities including Changchun and Jilin in the northeast. Global automakers and other manufacturers have reduced or stopped production at Chinese factories.

The disruption "will weigh on activity in April and into May, if not longer," Tommy Wu of Oxford Economics said in a report. That is "likely to have a significant impact on global supply chains."

China's latest infection numbers are relatively low, but Beijing is responding to its biggest outbreak since the 2020 start of the pandemic with a "zero-COVID" policy that aims to isolate every person who tests positive.

Consumer demand, an important economic engine, was dampened by a government appeal to the public to avoid traveling during February's Lunar New Year holiday, normally a period of big spending on gifts, banquets and tourism.

Factory output rose 6.5% during the quarter over a year earlier. Investment in factories, real estate and other fixed assets increased 9.3%, possibly reflecting easier credit.

This quarter, retail sales might fall 5.5% from a year ago, while factory output

contracts by 1.5%, according to Nomura economists Ting Lu, Jing Wang and Harrington Zhang.

"Global markets underestimate China's growth slowdown," which is "set to ripple to the rest of the world," they said in a report.

Last week, regulators injected an extra 500 billion yuan (\$80 billion) into the pool of money for lending by reducing the amount of deposits commercial banks are required to hold in reserve.

Shanghai has eased controls that confined most its people to their homes. But while some 6.6 million people were allowed to go outdoors, most businesses stayed closed.

The agency that runs the Shanghai port says operations are normal. But companies say the volume of cargo it handles has fallen.

Shanghai is so important that a full month's shutdown will subtract 2% from China's annual economic growth, according to Pang of ING.

"This loss will increase if the lockdown lasts longer,"

Pang wrote.

Authorities also suspended access to Tianjin, a port and petrochemical center east of Beijing, and Shenzhen, a finance and tech hub near Hong Kong. Other cities have closed businesses, told residents to stay home if possible or imposed limits on movement.

Economists have warned spring planting by Chinese farmers who feed 1.4 billion people might be disrupted. That would hurt economic activity and boost demand for imported wheat and other food, potentially pushing up already high global prices.

China rebounded quickly from the pandemic in 2020, but activity weakened as tighter controls on borrowing by real estate developers hit construction, which supports millions of jobs.

Investors are waiting to see what happens to one of China's biggest developers, Evergrande Group. It has struggled since last year to avoid defaulting on \$310 billion owed to banks and bondholders. **MDT/AP**

AUSTRALIA

# PM Morrison warns of a resurgence in asylum seekers

ROD MCGUIRK, CANBERRA

**A**USTRALIA'S prime minister yesterday warned that thousands of asylum seekers will attempt to reach the country by boat if the opposition party wins elections on May 21.

The annual number of asylum seekers arriving in Australian waters by boat peaked at more than 20,000 in 2013, the year the conservative government was elected and began turning back boats in a military-led policy known as Operation Sovereign Borders.

The government also continued a center-left Labor Party administration's policy — introduced two months before the election — of banishing boat arrivals to immigration camps on remote Pacific islands. Boat arrivals have since become almost nonexistent.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison suggested his coalition government's success against the people smuggling trade had inspired Britain's plan to put some asylum seekers on one-way flights to Rwanda.

"We established Operation Sovereign Borders and it has been one of the most successful border protection policies anywhere in the world. So successful, that

AP PHOTO



other countries are taking their lead from Australia's successful approach, and why? It's the humane thing to do," Morrison said.

Opposition leader Anthony Albanese has said a Labor government would change the national policy on asylum seekers by getting rid of so-called temporary protection visas.

Refugees among Australia's formal protection intake are per-

manently resettled. But those who arrived by boat are given three-year protection visas. The visas can be extended if refugees can't be returned to their homelands, but critics argue the uncertainty over their futures gets in the way of creating new lives.

Morrison blamed a previous Labor government abolishing three-year refugee visas in 2008 for the surge in boat arrivals that

followed. Only 161 asylum seekers arrived in 2008. But more than 2,700 arrived the following year and 6,500 in 2010.

"I know that when Labor abolished temporary protection visas in 2008, the armada of people smugglers' boats came to Australia and that was the launching point," Morrison said.

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul, a Mel-

bourne-based refugee advocate, accused Morrison of "scare mongering" over the need for temporary visas that don't provide refugees with the same rights as permanent visas.

Australia's harsh refugee policies have been criticized by the United Nations and human rights groups.

Indonesia has condemned the Australian navy turning back asylum seeker boats to Indonesian ports as a violation of Indonesian sovereignty.

Some smuggling crews had developed a tactic of sabotaging their crowded fishing boats after being intercepted by patrol boats so that Australian crews would have to rescue them from sinking.

Australian ships have countered by putting these asylum seekers and crews into powered lifeboats that are then towed close to the Indonesian coast and left with just enough fuel to reach the shore.

The leader of the Anglican church this week strongly criticized the British government's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, saying "sub-contracting out our responsibilities" to refugees can't stand up to God's scrutiny.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby made the unusually direct political intervention in his Easter Sunday sermon, saying there are "serious ethical questions about sending asylum-seekers overseas."

Labor has been leading the government in most opinion polling in recent months. The government is seeking a rare fourth three-year term. **MDT/AP**

SRI LANKA

# Cabinet reshuffled to counter economic crisis

BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI, COLOMBO

**S**RI Lanka's president appointed 17 new Cabinet ministers yesterday as he and his powerful family seek to resolve a political crisis resulting from the country's dire economic state.

The appointments follow weeks of protests over fuel and food shortages and demands that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his government resign.

The president's older brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, remains but some other relatives were dropped in what's seen as an attempt to pacify the protesters without giving up the family's hold on power.

Many seniors and those facing corruption allega-

AP PHOTO



tions were excluded from the Cabinet in line with calls for a younger administration, though the finance and foreign affairs ministers are retaining their po-

sitions to assist with economic recovery.

Speaking to the new ministers, President Rajapaksa requested their support for an efficient, clean go-

vernment.

"Today, most of the government institutions are under serious economic difficulties and it is absolutely essential to rectify

it," Rajapaksa said, calling the crisis "an opportunity to bring about the system change that the people expected."

The Cabinet resigned on April 3 after protests erupted across the country and demonstrators stormed and vandalized the homes of some Cabinet ministers.

Thousands of protesters were occupying the entrance to the president's office for a 10th day yesterday.

Opposition parties have rejected an invitation by Rajapaksa to form a coalition unity government while he and his brother would remain in power. Opposition parties have meanwhile, to gain a parliamentary majority.

Sri Lanka is on the brink of bankruptcy, with nearly \$7 billion of its total \$25 billion in foreign debt due for repayment this year. A

severe shortage of foreign exchange means the country lacks money to buy imported goods.

People have endured months of shortages of essentials like food, cooking gas, fuel and medicine, lining up for hours to buy the very limited stocks available.

Last week, the government said it was suspending repayment of foreign loans pending talks with the International Monetary Fund. Sri Lanka's Finance Minister Ali Sabry and officials left for talks with the IMF on Sunday. The IMF and World Bank are holding annual meetings in Washington this week.

Sri Lanka has turned to China and India for emergency loans to buy food and fuel.

Much public anger has been directed at Rajapaksa and his elder brother the prime minister. They head an influential clan that has held power for most of the past two decades. **MDT/AP**

PUTIN'S WAR

# Russian strikes kill at least seven in Lviv, Moscow preps assault on the east

YURAS KARMANAU, LVIV

**R**USSIAN missiles hit the western Ukrainian city of Lviv yesterday, killing at least seven people, Ukrainian officials said, as Moscow's troops stepped up strikes on infrastructure in preparation for an all-out assault on the east.

Plumes of thick, black smoke rose over the city after a series of explosions shattered windows and started fires. Lviv and the rest of western Ukraine have seen only sporadic strikes during almost two months of war and have become a relative safe haven for people from parts of the country where fighting has been more intense.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, meanwhile, vowed to "fight absolutely to the end" in strategically vital Mariupol, where the last known pocket of resistance in a seven-week siege was holed up in a sprawling steel plant laced with tunnels. Russia has repeatedly urged forces there to lay down their arms, but those remaining ignored a surrender-or-die ultimatum on Sunday.

Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadoviy said seven people were killed and 12 wounded in overnight missile strikes. Lviv's regional governor, Maksym Kozytskiy, said the Russian strikes hit three military infrastructure facilities and a tire shop. He said the wounded included a child, and emergency teams were battling fires caused by the strikes.

A hotel sheltering Ukrainians who had fled fighting farther east was among the buildings badly damaged in the attack, the mayor said.

"The nightmare of war has caught up with us even in Lviv," said Lyudmila Turchak, 47, who fled with two children from the eastern city Kharkiv. "There is no longer anywhere in Ukraine where we can feel safe."

A powerful explosion also rocked Vasylykiv, a town south of the capital of Kyiv that is home to a military airbase, according to residents. Video posted on social media sites showed smoke in the area after the blast. It was not immediately clear what was hit, and there was no official confirmation from authorities.

Military analysts say Russia is increasing its strikes on



weapons factories, railways and other infrastructure targets across Ukraine to wear down the country's ability to resist a major ground offensive in the Donbas, Ukraine's mostly Russian-speaking eastern industrial heartland.

The Russian military said its missiles struck more than 20 military targets in eastern and central Ukraine in the past day — including ammunition depots, command headquarters and groups of troops and vehicles. Meanwhile, it said artillery hit another 315 Ukrainian targets, and warplanes conducted 108 strikes on Ukrainian troops and military equipment. The claims couldn't be independently verified.

Gen. Richard Dannatt, a former head of the British Army, told Sky News the strikes were part of a "softening-up" campaign by Russia ahead of a planned ground offensive in the Donbas.

Ukraine's government halted civilian evacuations for a second day yesterday, saying Russian forces were shelling and blocking the humanitarian corridors.

Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Ukraine had been negotiating passage from cities and towns in eastern and southeastern Ukraine, including Mariupol and other areas in the Donbas. The government of the Luhansk region in the Donbas said four civilians trying to flee were shot dead by Russian forces.

Russia is bent on capturing the Donbas, where Moscow-backed separatists already control some territory, after its attempt to take the capital failed.

"We are doing everything to ensure the defense" of eastern Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly address to the nation on Sunday.

The looming offensive in the east, if successful, would give Russian President Vladimir Putin a badly needed victory to point to amid the war's mounting casualties and the economic hardship caused by Western sanctions.

The capture of Mariupol is seen as a key step in preparations for any eastern assault since it would free Russian troops up for that new campaign. The fall of the city on the Sea of Azov would also hand Russia its biggest military victory of the war, giving it full control of a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized in 2014, and depriving Ukraine of a major port and prized industrial assets.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar has described Mariupol as a "shield defending Ukraine."

The city has been reduced to rubble in the siege, but a few thousand fighters, by Russia's estimate, are holding on to the giant, 11-square-kilometer (4-square-mile) Azovstal steel mill.

"We will fight absolutely to the end, to the win, in this war," Shmyhal, Ukraine's prime minister, vowed Sunday on ABC's "This Week." He said Ukraine is prepared to end the war through diplomacy if possible, "but we do not have intention to surrender."

Many Mariupol civilians, including children, are also sheltering at the Azovstal plant, Mikhail Vershinin, head of the city's patrol police, told Mariupol

television.

An estimated 100,000 people remained in the city out of a prewar population of 450,000, trapped without food, water, heat or electricity.

The relentless bombardment of Mariupol — including on a maternity hospital and a theater where civilians were sheltering — along with street fighting have killed at least 21,000 people, by Ukrainian estimates.

After the humiliating sinking of the flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet last week in what the Ukrainians boasted was a missile attack, the Kremlin had vowed to step up strikes on Ukraine's capital.

Ukraine says it hit the Russian warship Moskva with two Neptune missiles; Russia said only that it sank while being towed after a fire. Russia said its crew evacuated, but their fates remained unclear. Footage posted by the Russian military on Sunday showed Russia's naval commander inspecting rows of sailors, identified as being from the ship, in the Moskva's home port of Sevastopol in Crimea. It was unclear how many sailors were in the group.

Recent aerial attacks have also hit Kyiv and the eastern city of Kharkiv, where shelling killed at least three people and wounded three others, according to AP journalists on the scene. One of the dead was a woman who appeared to be going out to collect water in the rain. She was found lying bloodied with a water canister and umbrella by her side.

At least five people were killed by Russian shelling in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, on Sunday, regional officials said.

Zelenskyy called Sunday's bombing in Kharkiv "nothing but deliberate terror."

Zelenskyy also appealed for a stronger international response to what he said was the brutality of Russian troops in parts of southern Ukraine, where he accused them of torture and kidnappings. He urged the world to send more weapons and apply tougher sanctions against Moscow.

"Russian forces are destroying Mariupol," he added, claiming Russia wanted to wipe cities in the Donbas "off the face of the Earth." **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1993 WACO CULT SIEGE ENDS WITH INFERNO



At least 70 people are feared to have died in a fire at the besieged headquarters of the Branch Davidian sect near Waco, Texas.

The fate of the cult's leader, David Koresh, is still unknown.

The White House said the blaze had been started deliberately by those inside after the FBI began a dawn assault.

Tear gas canisters and stun grenades were fired into the cult's compound and an armoured vehicle moved in to demolish the walls.

Three hours later they broke down the main entrance.

At one point reports said the cult members had agreed to come out but then reneged on the deal.

When the fire started at around 1200 local time (1800GMT) several children were believed to be inside with David Koresh and his followers.

By the time firefighters arrived the fire had taken a firm hold on wooden buildings inside the compound.

The fire worsened when the cult's store of munitions exploded.

Eight cult members escaped but David Koresh is not believed to be among them.

The cult's buildings been surrounded since February when four agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) were killed as they attempted to arrest Mr Koresh on firearms charges.

It was hoped Mr Koresh would give himself up last week but he sent FBI agents a message saying he had not yet received his orders from God.

The Branch Davidians descend from a breakaway group from the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

President Bill Clinton said yesterday he had had advance warning of the assault on the compound.

But the president added that newly-appointed Attorney-General Janet Reno made the decision to begin the operation.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Approximately 77 cult members, including David Koresh, died in the fire.

Some cult members, including David Koresh, were found to have died of gunshot wounds.

The FBI was criticised for what were seen as heavy-handed tactics to end the siege and newly-appointed Attorney General Janet Reno was forced to defend her decision to use tanks and tear gas.

In January 1994 11 surviving Branch Davidians were put on trial.

They were all cleared of the most serious charges relating to the deaths of the four government agents.

Five were convicted on the lesser charge of voluntary manslaughter.

In July 2000 a government-appointed investigator cleared the FBI of any blame in starting the fire after hiring a specialist firm to stage a re-enactment. In September of the same year a \$675m (£433m) claim against the US Government by relatives of those who died and survivors was thrown out by a judge.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

## YOUR STARS



### ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Don't fall into the trap. Get busy on those home improvement projects that you've been procrastinating about. You will have a problem dealing with groups.



### TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Difficulties with your mate may lead to estrangement. Give everyone in the house a physical chore that will help burn off some of the excess energy. Do not get upset about situations you cannot change.



### GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

You're not your usual self today. You will find your vitality is lowered. You should sit down with someone you trust and work out a budget that will enable you to save a little extra.



### CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Entertainment should include your whole family. Be sure to double-check the house on your way out. Only bite off what you can chew.



### LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Be prepared to meet new lovers through colleagues. Don't let your emotions interfere with your efficiency. Communication will be your best bet.



### VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

There is not much you can do to alleviate the problem, but consider putting some extra work into your house. Your attitude could be up and down like a yo-yo.



### LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Try not to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Travel will be enjoyable but could be expensive. Take care of the needs of elders in your family.



### SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Don't let friends or relatives rule your life. Put your efforts into physical fitness programs or competitive sports. Social events may lead to a romantic interlude.



### SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You're in the mood to do things such as competitive sports, or perhaps a night on the town. Your ability to charm others will put you in the limelight at social functions.



### CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Opposition is present and you should be prepared to counteract it as best you can. Don't delay; go to your physician or dentist and get to the bottom of the discomfort.



### AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Delve into your work if you can't make amends at home. Unique forms of entertainment could capture your attention and bring about a romantic interest.



### PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You may be able to impart knowledge that's innovative to those searching for a new angle. Things aren't as they appear. Involvement with prestigious organizations will be to your advantage.

## The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



## SUDOKU

### EASY

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

### EASY+

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

### MEDIUM

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

### HARD

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

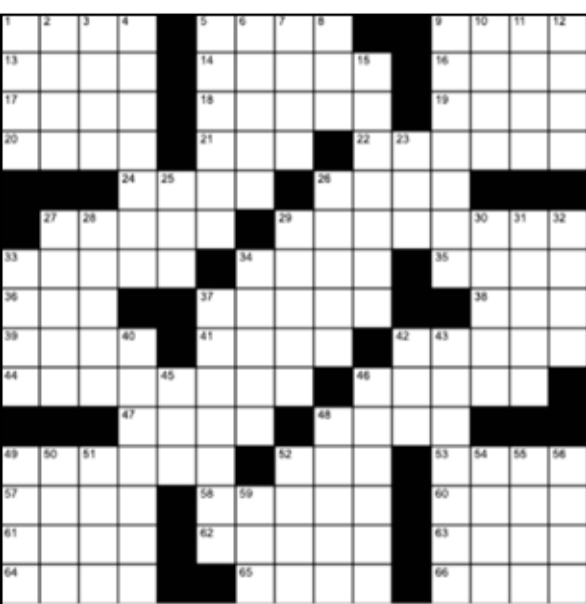
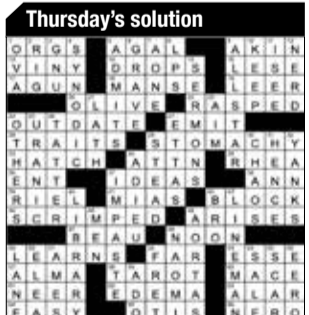
## WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	12	23	fine
Changchun	2	16	cloudy
Chengdu	9	19	overcast
Chongqing	12	20	overcast
Fuzhou	14	22	rain
Guangzhou	17	21	rain
Guiyang	6	13	overcast
Haikou	23	26	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	12	19	overcast
Harbin	0	14	cloudy
Hefei	8	21	cloudy
Nanjing	12	22	cloudy
Shanghai	14	20	overcast
Taipei	19	23	rain
Wuhan	10	23	cloudy
Hong Kong	18	21	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	4	13	overcast
Frankfurt	4	18	overcast
Paris	8	18	overcast
London	7	17	rain
New York	6	12	overcast

## CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Actor Cronyn; 5- Bhutan's continent; 9- Roseanne, once; 13- Domain; 14- Elephant parts; 16- Singer Adams; 17- Petri dish gelatin; 18- Sheep cry; 19- Shootout; 20- Neuter; 21- Supplement, with "out"; 22- Seldom; 24- Cheerful; 26- Structure for storing grain; 27- Enumerate; 29- Wrapper; 33- Picture border; 34- Dagger of yore; 35- Den; 36- Ignited; 37- Chevets; 38- \_\_\_ chi ch'uan; 39- "So be it"; 41- Massive wild ox; 42- Peace goddess; 44- Liquid hydrocarbon; 46- Shorthand taker; 47- Guitarist Lofgren; 48- Round object, often used to store computer data; 49- Sad; 52- Thanksgiving tuber; 53- Mozart's "\_\_\_ kleine Nachtmusik"; 57- Sunset direction; 58- Puppeteer Lewis; 60- "Johnny Mnemonic" actor; 61- Capital of Norway; 62- Roman general; 63- Blood vessel; 64- Dance move; 65- Brio; 66- Actress Best;

DOWN 1- Dutch name of The Hague; 2- Goad; 3- Kind of ticket; 4- Membrane in the ear canal; 5- Optimally; 6- Sullen; 7- Words of understanding; 8- Police blotter abbr.; 9- Campers mattress; 10- Together, in music; 11- Monetary unit of Cambodia; 12- Depend; 15- Tries hard; 23- Malt beverage; 25- United; 26- Twisted expression?; 27- Serious wrongdoing; 28- Western; 29- Result; 30- Like Cheerios; 31- Device with 88 keys; 32- Fort \_\_\_, captured by U.S. forces in 1814; 33- Strong criticism; 34- Bridges; 37- Eternal; 40- Without interruption; 42- T.G.I.F. part; 43- Accept delivery of; 45- Canine command; 46- Apelike; 48- "Our Gang" girl; 49- Terrible time?; 50- Repose; 51- Capri, for one; 52- Southern address; 54- Secured, as victory; 55- Dresden denial; 56- Gas burner or Sicilian volcano; 59- Color;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

## USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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wide living spaces 4

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3

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4

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TAIPA | Nova Park | 2 | HKD 10,800,000  
TAIPA | Buckingham | 2 | HKD 8,590,000  
MACAU | Bai Yuen G. | 3 | HKD 12,800,000

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MACAU | San On | 2 | HKD 10,500  
COLOANE | 1 Oasis | 2 | HKD 11,200  
MACAU | S. Lazaro | 2 | HKD 6,900  
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**BOXING**

# Undisputed, still undefeated welterweight champ may be next

STEPHEN HAWKINS,  
ARLINGTON (TEXAS)

**T**HERE could be an undisputed, and still undefeated, welterweight champion later this year.

Undefeated champs Errol Spence Jr. and Terence "Bud" Crawford may finally get in the ring together. Both have made it clear that is what they want to happen.

Soon after WBC and IBF champion Spence won his unification bout to take the WBA belt from Yordenis Ugás, WBO titleholder Crawford tweeted that it was time for the "real fight" to happen.

"Everybody knows who I want next. I want Terence Crawford next," Spence said after his scheduled 12-round with Ugás was stopped in the 10th round late Saturday night. "That's the fight that I want. That's the fight everybody else wants."

Spence (28-0, 22 knockouts)

AP PHOTO



Errol Spence Jr., right, lands a punch to Yordenis Ugás, from Cuba, during a world welterweight championship boxing match over the weekend

had already been talking about wanting to face Crawford and the possibility of an undisputed championship even before adding his third belt Saturday night. An energized home crowd of 39,946 was there for Spence's first fight since his 12-round unanimous decision over Danny Garcia more than 16 months earlier — also at

the home stadium of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys.

The 34-year-old Crawford (38-0, 29 knockouts) last fought in November, a 10th-round TKO of former champ Shawn Porter. That was Crawford's fifth defense of the WBO title he first won nearly four years ago.

In his tweet directed at Spence, Crawford wrote, "con-

gratulations great fight now the real fight happens. No more talk no more side of the street let's go!!!!"

Another tweet read, "keep my belts warm I'll be coming to grab em later this year."

There are still plenty of details and negotiations to be worked out before there will be a fight with unprecedented title implications in the 147-pound division — and a lot of big money on the line.

"I'm not going to talk about what's going to be fair for both us," the 32-year-old Spence said about potentially difficult negotiations. "I have guys in suits to go over all of the analytics and stuff like that. ... He's got his people."

Mexican superstar Canelo Alvarez last November became the first undisputed super middleweight champion (168 pounds) in the four-belt era. Now the stage is set for Spence and Crawford to determine one welterweight champ. **MDT/AP**

**FOOTBALL**

# RONALDO HAT TRICK BOOSTS MAN U'S HOPES FOR CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

**C**RISTIANO Ronaldo capped his hat trick with a stunning free kick in the 76th minute to give Manchester United a 3-2 win over Norwich over the weekend and boost the team's hopes of securing a Champions League spot.

United moved past Arsenal into fifth place, three points behind Tottenham in the English Premier League.

United blew a two-goal lead after last-placed Norwich fought back to tie the game on goals by Kieran Dowell and Teemu Pukki at Old Trafford.

But the day belonged to the Portugal superstar, who recorded the 50th hat trick of his professional career for his clubs and 60th overall.

Ronaldo's goal in the seventh minute was courtesy of Anthony Elanga, who stole the ball from defender Ben Gibson in the area and slid a pass to him for an easy one-timer past goalkeeper Tim Krul. Ronaldo then headed home a corner kick in the 32nd. Ronaldo's free kick from outside the area sailed through the wall and off Krul's outstretched hands into the top left corner of the net. **MDT/AP**

AD

- 合夥人 PARTNERS:**  
 官樂怡 Rui José da Cunha<sup>o</sup>  
 山度士 Álvaro Rodrigues<sup>o</sup>  
 馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata<sup>o</sup>  
 趙魯 Zhao Lu<sup>o</sup>  
 馬傑安 João Nogueira Marques
- 大律師 ASSOCIATES:**  
 高文軒 Adelino Correia<sup>o</sup>  
 羅善齡 Zelina Rodrigues<sup>\*</sup>  
 白秀蘭 Susana Batalha  
 馬潔冰 Maria João Marques  
 陶義德 António Isó de Azevedo  
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 冼玲鳳 Mariana Afonso Esteves  
 馬秀文 Sofia Mendes Martins  
 飛嘉華 Carlos dos Santos Ferreira<sup>o</sup>  
 杜力信 Nelson de Azevedo  
 宋哲言 João Gonçalves Assunção  
 莫永誠 Rui Velez de Moura  
 安東尼 António Manuel dos Santos  
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 歐文傑 Miguel Evaristo  
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 顏曉蓉 Teresa Xiaorong Yan  
 諾瑪莉 Maria Noras  
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 潘卡莉 Candice Pun  
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 伍福賢 Domingos Ng  
 劉慧敏 Amanda Liu  
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**OPINION**

**Multipolar World**

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**THE DOLLAR, OTHER CURRENCIES AND CONTROL OVER THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL SYSTEM**

After the Bretton Woods agreement in 1944, other currencies began to maintain a fixed exchange rate with the US dollar (dollar), which in turn was backed with gold - the "gold standard system". By 1970, 85% of central banks reserves were in dollars. With the onset of successive budget deficits from 1960 onwards, the U.S. began to lose the massive gold reserves it had built up and the gold-dollar standard was abandoned by the U.S. in 1971.

But in the meanwhile, the dollar had already become the preeminent currency of the international financial system, having become the main currency of the vast majority of foreign exchange reserves of other countries, the medium of payment in which international trade is carried out, the currency in which raw materials were quoted on commodity markets, and the reference currency in countless contracts, including the issuing of public debt by many other countries.

This status of the dollar - called an "exorbitant privilege" by France and other countries - allows the U.S. to enjoy benefits that other countries do not have: (i) access to inexpensive financing in the domestic currency; (ii) benefits of seigniorage, (iii) regular FDI flows, especially in situations of economic uncertainty, due to the absence of alternatives that offer the scale and depth of the U.S. financial markets, (iv) official and private investors around the world becoming dependent on dollar-denominated financial assets; (v) no need to balance its current account (since its imports are paid for in its own currency); (vi) ability to issue Treasury bonds with hardly any limits.

Various entities - China, Russia, the Gulf Cooperation Council, UNCTAD, the IMF - have proposed adopting a new independent currency or using the Special Drawing Rights as a reserve currency. However, this is unlikely to happen.

Other countries would like their currency to have a similar status, but this has only been partially the case with the euro. The IMF's 2020 data on the composition of foreign exchange reserves by major currencies shows that the dollar remains the leading currency (59%) followed by the euro (21.2%); a long way behind are the yen (6%), the British pound (4.7%) and the yuan (2.2%). The country's influence in international trade, the size of its economy, the relevance of its financial markets, and its purchasing power (despite trillions of dollars in debt) have kept the dollar as the world's preeminent currency reserve. The euro was the first currency to threaten the international preeminence of the dollar (which explains several attempts to discredit the euro). The yuan also meets some of these requirements and the Chinese government is promoting a policy of internationalization of the yuan, but there is much to be done before the yuan can be recognized as a widely accepted currency.

While there are good economic reasons for the U.S. itself to favor more reserve currencies of global significance, in the short-term political-strategic considerations of asserting world leadership, a desire to maintain the benefits of the dollar's status as the preeminent currency, and maintaining control of the international financial system should prevail.

During a visit to Syria in 2017, Vladimir Putin lavished praise on a Syrian general whose division played an instrumental role in defeating insurgents in the country's long-running civil war. The Russian president told him his cooperation with Russian troops "will lead to great successes in the future."

Now members of Brig. Gen. Suheil al-Hassan's division are among hundreds of Russian-trained Syrian fighters who have reportedly signed up to fight alongside Russian troops in Ukraine, including Syrian soldiers, former rebels and experienced fighters who fought for years against the Islamic State

group in Syria's desert.

So far, only a small number appears to have arrived in Russia for military training ahead of deployment on the front lines. Although Kremlin officials boasted early in the war of more than 16,000 applications from the Middle East, U.S. officials and activists monitoring Syria say there have not yet been significant numbers of fighters from the region joining the war in Ukraine.

Analysts, however, say this could change as Russia prepares for the next phase of the battle with a full-scale offensive in eastern Ukraine.

**CHINA SENDING UP NEXT SPACE STATION CREW IN JUNE**

China will launch three more astronauts to its newest space station in June after the latest crew returned this weekend following a six-month stay in orbit, an official said this week.

The crew of the Shenzhou 14 capsule will spend six months on the Tiangong to add two modules to the station, Hao Chun, director of the China Manned Space Engineering Office, told a news conference.

China's ambitious space program launched its first astronaut into orbit in 2003, landed robot rovers on the moon in 2013, and on Mars last year. Officials have discussed a possible crewed mission to the moon.

The core module of the Tiangong, or Heavenly Palace, was launched in April 2021. Plans call for completing construction this year.

The Wentian module will be launched in July and the Mengtian module in October, Hao said.

Near the end of the Shenzhou 14 crew's mission, three more astronauts will be launched aboard Shenzhou 15 for a six-



The return capsule of the Shenzhou-13 manned space mission after landing at the Dongfeng landing site in Inner Mongolia this week

-month stay, Hao said. He added that the two crews would overlap for three to five days, marking the first time the station has six people aboard.

On Saturday, the crew of Shenzhou 13 landed in the Gobi desert in the northern region of Inner Mongolia.

During the mission, astronaut Wang Yaping carried out the first spacewalk by a Chinese woman. Wang, commander Zhai Zhigang and crewmate Ye Guangfu also beamed back physics lessons for high school students.

China was the third nation to launch an astronaut

into space on its own after the former Soviet Union and the United States. Tiangong is China's third space station following predecessors launched in 2011 and 2016.

The government announced in 2020 that China's first reusable spacecraft had landed following a test flight but no photos or details have been released.

China is excluded from the International Space Station due to U.S. unease that its space program is run by the ruling Communist Party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army. MDT/AP



**Vatican** On what is supposed to be Christianity's most joyful day, Pope Francis made an anguished Easter Sunday plea for peace in the "senseless" war in Ukraine and in other armed conflicts raging in the world, and voiced worry about the risk of nuclear warfare. "May there be peace for war-torn Ukraine, so sorely tried by the violence and destruction of this cruel and senseless war into which it was dragged," Francis said, speaking from the central balcony of St. Peter's Square.



**France** Paris prosecutors are studying a report by the European Union's fraud agency accusing French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen and other members of her nationalist party of misusing public funds while serving in the European Parliament. The report was disclosed yesterday by French investigative news site Mediapart days before Le Pen faces incumbent Emmanuel Macron in a runoff election.

**THE DECISIVE MOMENT**

AP Photo/Ashwini Bhatia



Gulfam Raza sits sideways on his motorcycle in an enclosure known as Maut ka Kuan, or the well of death, at a local fair in Dharmsala, India.



**USA** The Biden administration is taking a key step to ensuring that federal dollars will support U.S. manufacturing — issuing requirements for how projects funded by the \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure package source their construction material. The guidance being issued Monday requires that the material purchased — whether it's for a bridge, a highway, a water pipe or broadband internet — be produced within the U.S., according to administration officials.