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“THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’”

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AL COMMITTEE CALLS ON GOV'T TO PROVIDE THEM WITH THE UPDATED VERSION OF THE GAMING LAW AMENDMENT BILL AMID CONSIDERATION OF JUNKETS BILL

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AP PHOTO



Myanmar A court yesterday postponed by a day delivering a verdict on the first of almost a dozen corruption cases filed against the country's former leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. The court in the capital Naypyitaw did not give any reason for delaying the expected verdict until today, said a legal official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to release information. Suu Kyi's trial has been closed to the public, and her lawyers barred from speaking to the press.

AP PHOTO



Australia Shadow foreign affairs minister Penny Wong [pictured] promised yesterday to establish a Pacific defense school to train neighboring armies in response to China's potential military presence on the Solomon Islands. The school was among a range of measures that the center-left Labor Party has promised to increase Australia's engagement in its region if the opposition wins elections on May 21.

AP PHOTO

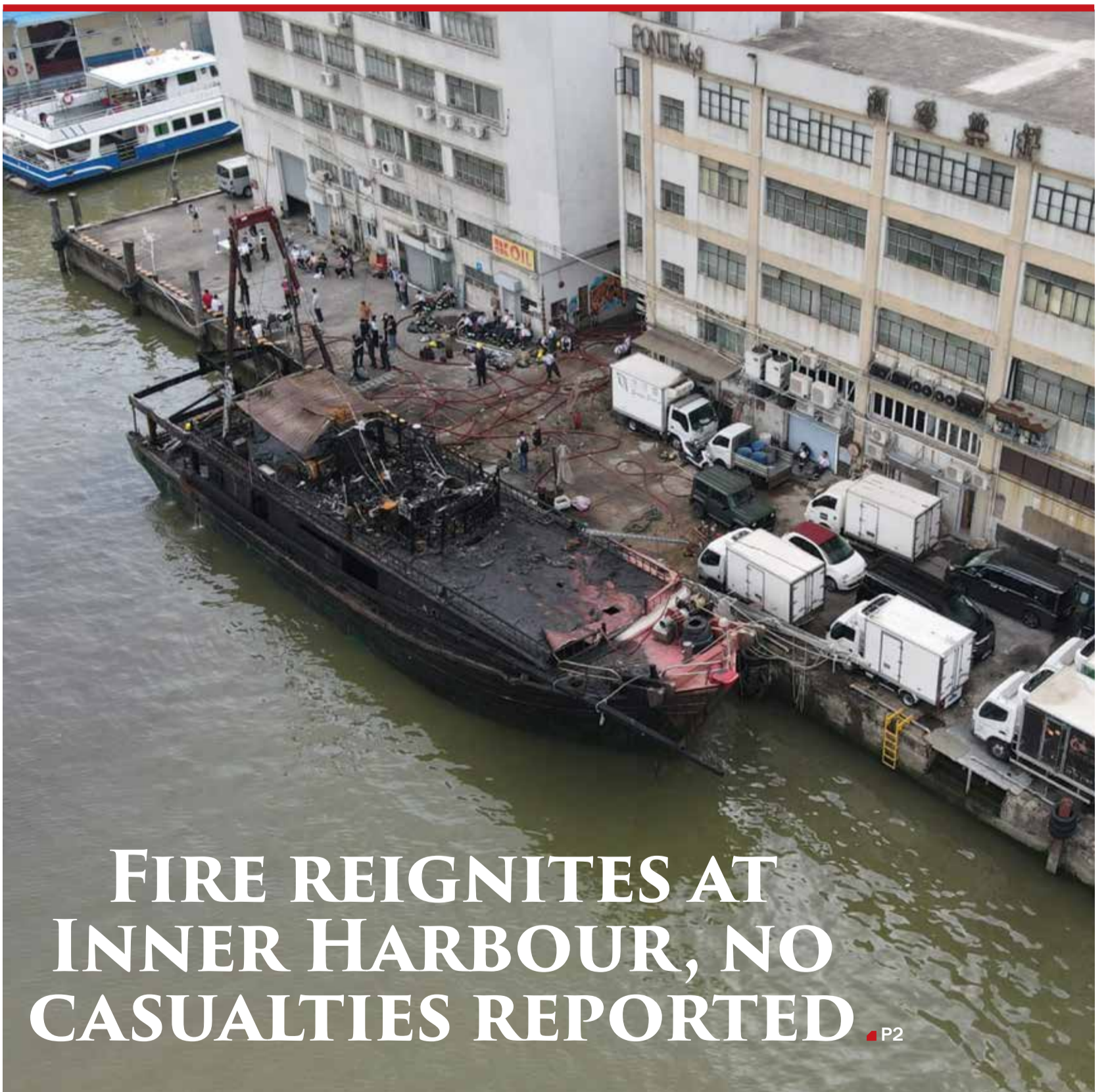


Pakistan An explosion ripped through a van inside a university campus in southern Pakistan yesterday, killing three Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver, officials said. A separatist militant group claimed responsibility and said the attack was carried out by a woman suicide bomber. The bombing at the University of Karachi also wounded a fourth Chinese national, as well as a Pakistani guard accompanying the van, according to university spokesman Mohammad Farooq.

MAY DAY

Gaming revenue slightly picks up while hopes of a turning point lie on Labor Day

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FIRE REIGNITES AT INNER HARBOUR, NO CASUALTIES REPORTED

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2020 HEALTH VOUCHERS EXPIRES APR. 30

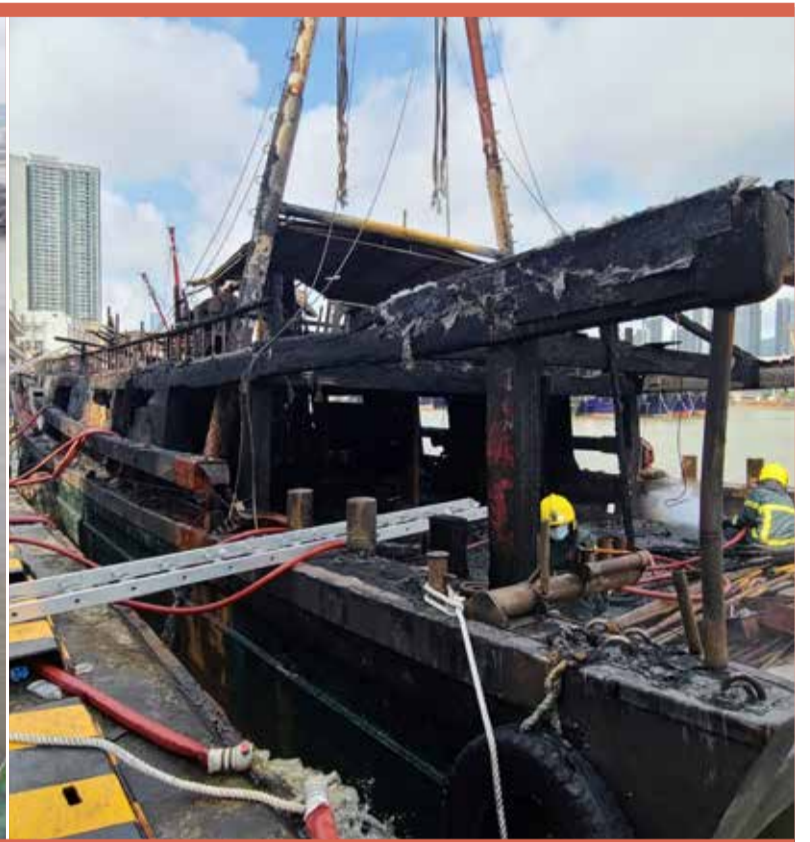
The period for using health vouchers from the year 2020 will end on April 30, 2022. The government reminds residents to check their balance and use these health vouchers, and directly transfer the balance to their family members online (whether parents, children or spouse) through the new version of the "Macao One Account." The Health Bureau reminds residents who hold a valid MSAR Permanent Resident Identity Card that they can pay for medical consultations with health vouchers in clinics who joined the health care co-payment program.

LOCAL EXHIBITION AT LA BIENNALE KICKS OFF

The exhibition "YiiMa" Art Group: Allegory of Dreams was recently inaugurated in Venice, Italy, curated by João Miguel Barros. The exhibition, as part of the the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, showcases 11 pieces (sets) of the latest integrated works by artists Ung Vai Meng and Chan Hin lo from "YiiMa" Art Group. It is the eighth year that Macau contemporary artworks have been featured as part of this century-old international art event. Through this exhibition, the artists hope to showcase the unique cultural life and ambience of Macau characterised by over 400 years of cultural fusion between China and the West, as well as a strong living ethos reflected therein. The exhibition will run until October 20, 2022.

SPORTS FESTIVAL FOR CIVIL SERVANTS

The "Sports Festival of Public Services 2022" is slated to take place in May and June, with the aim of encouraging civil service workers to occupy their free time through physical exercise. The nine sports are Football, Basketball, Tennis, Bowling, Badminton, Table Tennis, Squash, Athletics and Swimming. Participants should be vaccinated; the second dose should have been received not more than seven months ago as at May 21. Registration ends on May 13 at 12 p.m.



SHIPS SINK AFTER ANOTHER BLAZE

ANTHONY LAM

FIRE and smoke reignited early yesterday on fishing ships that were destroyed Monday evening as they caught fire, before some of them were partially submerged.

The reignition was observed at about 6:40 a.m. yesterday.

Rescue efforts by the Fire Services Bureau (CB) and the Macao Customs (SA) were mobilized and traveled immediately to the scene. The fire was then quickly put out.

According to the CB, at 11:30 p.m. Monday night, another ship tilted to one side, although there was no visible fire. Moreover, two other ships were still seen to be affected by fire. The tackling was consumed overnight.

With a ship partially sunk into the water, signs of fuel leakage were seen on the sea from a high angle.

The fires affecting several ships that were towed to the berth Monday night by the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) was pronounced extinguished at 4 a.m. yesterday. Search has been conducted with no injury or casualty found.

As the fire restarted, a woman aged 63 years who was reported to be a ship owner said that she was experiencing symptoms such as shortness of breath and high blood pressure. She also dis-

played distress. In the company of family members, she was sent to the government hospital for checks.

Lei Chon In, deputy executive director of the Associação de Mútuo Auxílio dos Moradores da Marginal (Coastal Area Residents' Mutual Help Association), told local media outlet Macao Daily News that the government should review and renew laws and regulations governing marine safety.

He added that given Macau has been allowed to administer a relatively large area of marine territory, such legal updates are necessary to align with prospective marine development.

Although the fire had been extinguished as of press time, some ship owners expressed their disagreement or dissatisfaction with the government's strategies in tackling the fire.

Due to the upcoming fishery recess period, ships are anchored on the coastline off the Pier 16 and the Sofitel Hotel. They were tied closely together with ropes to provide stronger protection against typhoon and monsoons.

The recess period will start on May 1 and end on August 16. The fishing recess period is intended to prevent overfishing by leaving time for fish to reproduce.

Some ship owners desired to return to their boats on Monday evening when the blaze had just

started to try and cut off the ropes so their ships, which were at that point not on fire, could move away from the scene, which would prevent the fire from spreading.

However, according to local reports, the rescuing teams forbade those owners from doing cutting the ropes of their boats, citing safety as the major reason.

Ship owners admitted that the ships had highly flammable materials onboard, such as gasoline and liquidized petroleum gas, because sometimes the owners, their families, and staff reside on the ships.

This explains why several explosions were seen and heard

during the fire on Monday.

Ship owners estimate the repair costs will range from one to two million patacas for each ship.

They also accused the government of not having enough equipment to tackle fire on the sea of such severity.

According to them, insurance coverage has been a problem because the service is not considered profitable, making it difficult for owners to purchase suitable insurance plans.

Meanwhile, the ferry service between the Inner Harbour and Wanzhai of neighboring Zhuhai was suspended Monday night to allow for firefighting. The service resumed at 3 p.m. yesterday.

GOV'T TO SUPPORT OWNERS OF BURNT FISHING BOATS

THE Maritime and Water Bureau, the Customs Service, the Fire Bureau, and the Social Work Bureau will support the owners and families of the fishing boats that caught fire.

According to authorities, when the possibility of fire again is completely ruled out, and the sea conditions permit, the administration will arrange for the shipowners to inspect the damage of their ships to determine how to salvage them, as well as other follow-up work. Among the six fishing boats in-

involved in the accident, there is one Macau-registered fishing boat and five Hong Kong-registered fishing boats.

The bureau can assist the owners of the Macau-registered fishing boats to apply for a deferment of the loan repayment to the fishery fund, and has also contacted the Hong Kong Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation.

More than 30 vessels and more than 200 rescue personnel were dispatched Monday and yesterday.

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Times

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Lawmakers want updated gaming bill amid consideration of junkets bill

ANTHONY LAM

A parliamentary committee yesterday called on the government to provide them with the updated version of the gaming law amendment bill so they can cross-reference it with a similar draft law.

The Second Standing Committee of the parliament has earlier finished its first-phase review of the gaming law amendment bill and is awaiting the government's provision of an updated version of the document. They will consider the future law as part of a further round of review.

For the time being, the committee is responsible for reviewing the Casino Gaming Operation and Business System, colloquially referred to as the junket operation bill (the Bill).

A week ago, on April 20, the Bill was passed at the parliament's plenary upon its first reading.

Yesterday saw the first session of the committee considering the Bill. Given the close connection

between the two bills, which are both concerned with the casino business, members of the committee thus desire the gaming law amendment bill to be updated before they move on to discuss the junkets bill.

The reason why the committee members wish for this arrangement is so they can consider both bills together. Furthermore, they will be able to ensure the proposed provisions in the two bills are in alignment and do not overlap, where appropriate.

On this, the government said to the committee that it would strive to provide the updated version of the gaming law amendment bill during the course of this week.

Despite the request, the committee considered some articles in the Bill yesterday.

Committee president Chan Chak Mo told the press after the meeting that the committee is awaiting more details on the proposed provision that each gambling intermediary enterprise should not possess a starting capital of MOP10 million.

ANTHONY LAM



Jupiter Guangdong Club Junket

Furthermore, the committee also demanded clearer explanation on the lines vesting the Secretary for Economy and Finance with the power to order under-ca-

pital enterprises to provide guarantees.

The Bill also proposes allowing the government to consider the scale of the city's gambling inter-

mediary business. On this, the committee also wishes further explanation.

Chan hopes the Bill can be passed by the end of August.



GAMING

Revenue slightly picks up, yet still subdued

THE city's gross gaming revenue has likely reached MOP2.1 billion from April 1 to 24, mainly due to the further relaxation of the nucleic acid test (NAT) validity, which also led to an increase in visitor arrivals over the weekend.

The recorded figure implies a daily run-rate of MOP83 million, 11% higher than the MOP75 million recorded the week before, brokerage Sanford C. Bernstein estimated.

Early this week, the validity of NAT results for border-crossing purposes was extended to 72 hours, allowing the tourism sector to expect hotel occupancy rates to reach 60% over the coming Labor Day holiday period.

"Despite the rebound, visitation and revenue remains largely subdued due to [mainland] China Covid-19 outbreaks and restrictive travel and border control," wrote analysts Vitaly Umansky

and Louis Li, as cited in a report issued by GGR Asia.

Previously, analysts have forecasted that the recovery of the gaming sector is likely to be further delayed. The upcoming holiday is a potential catalyst for the gaming industry, as well as for SMEs. Therefore, the new measure easing border restrictions comes as good news for the downturned sector.

Bernstein previously expected the April's

GGR to record a 13% drop compared to March revenues, which was MOP3.67 billion – a 55.8% tumble compared to figures recorded in February.

Meanwhile, Morgan Stanley has estimated that MGM China, SJM Holdings and Wynn Macau gaming operators are likely to post negative earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) during the first quarter of this year.

In a recent report, the investment bank JP Morgan wrote that it expects that SJM Holdings runs the risk of seeing its financial liquidity exhausted within half a year, taking into account the delay in the refinancing plan of the company amid the impact of the pandemic:

"From a financial point of view, our analysis suggests that SJM Holdings has only about six months of liquidity, which is by far the shortest [among Macau gaming operators]," warn analysts DS Kim, Amanda Cheng and Livy Lyu. LV

COMPENSATIONAL TAX REPAYMENTS TO COME WITH PROPOSED INTEREST OF 9.75% P.A.

IT is proposed that in the future, whether it is the taxpayer or the government owing money to one another, an interest rate of 9.75% per annum would be levied atop the repayment.

The proposal has been made in the draft of the Taxation Code (the Bill), which is now being reviewed in the parliament's Third Standing Committee. The Committee held a meeting to discuss the Bill yesterday, with officials from the finance sector sitting in.

After the meeting, Vong Hin Fai, president of the Committee, told the press that yesterday's meeting covered the interest rate mentioned above.

Although the interest rate per annum is proposed to be 9.75%, interest will be calculated on a monthly basis, suggesting a compound manner of interest calculation. As per the proposal, a period shorter than a month will be considered one whole month.

As proposed in the Bill, in the future, if the government

erroneously charges a taxpayer extra taxes, be they illegally or excessively charged, the government should pay interest to the taxpayer on top of the portion of tax to be repaid to the taxpayer.

Committee members suggested the government expand this proposal to all types of tax, because currently only consumption tax is targeted. Government officials accepted the suggestion.

At the same time, in the future, if a taxpayer fails to pay taxes punctually, when they repay the government the sum of taxes and interest, they will also be required to pay a fine amounting to 3% of the taxes to be paid.

The effective period for the calculation of interest will be shortened to three years, while the period for the recovery of unpaid taxes will be 15 years.

Proceeds from illicit activities will also be taxed when such illegalities are convicted by a court of law. AL

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DAY CELEBRATIONS MOVE TO IAO HON

RENATO MARQUES

THE International Museum Day, celebrated officially worldwide on May 18, will host a carnival event in Macau to be held on May 29 at the Iao Hon Market Park, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) said in a press conference yesterday afternoon.

Titled "Macao International Museum Day Carnival 2022," the event will feature several activities and games with the participation of a total of 20 local museums co-organizing the activity.

At the press conference held yesterday, the head of the Department of Exhibitions and Museums of the Cultural Affairs Bureau, Sam Hou In, justified the choice of the Iao Hon area for the development of such an event, given the fact that the area has a lot of historical shops being the stage of "many great memories" from the past.

This year, and following the theme internationally established for International Museum Day, the event will feature the topic of the "Power of Museums," with each museum presenting a range of activities at the carnival event, but also some events over the two weeks starting on mid-May and until the end of the month, with each one of them presenting special activities and benefits to visitors, such as free admission to the museums on particular days.

For this year's event, the IC is said to expect an attendance of around 1,200 people to the carnival, which has a total budget of 560,000 patacas.



The same IC official also noted that the purpose of the wide range of events surrounding the Museum Day is to "increase the relationship between the community and the museum," making the museum venues preferential spaces for learning and quality entertainment for families.

WECHAT GAMES AND LUCKY DRAWS

Although officials said that the purpose was to establish a wide range of activities to allow for different experiences, the various presentations from the responsible people for several of the museums involved have highlighted the online gaming activities to be done via the mobile application

PLUMMETING VISITOR NUMBERS TO MUSEUMS

THE local government is unaware of the actual figures of visitors to local museums, namely the decline that has occurred with the Covid-19 pandemic, the head of the Department of Exhibitions and Museums of the Cultural Affairs Bureau, Sam Hou In, admitted when questioned by the media on the matter.

When questioned on the topic, the official said, "It's very difficult to find a general figure, as there are many museums and according to their characteristics, as well as the location, they might have been influenced in different ways," adding, "The only thing we can say with certainty is that it [the number of visitors] declined."

The comments from the government official were made during the press conference that launched the 2022 Museum Day Carnival, held yesterday afternoon at the Macau Grand Prix Museum.

Although eight representatives from different

museum spaces in Macau were present in the room, they did not express a wish to add to Sam's comments, with the exception of the director of the Macao Museum, Lou Ho Ian, who told the media that, historically, the museum has always had a mix of visitors composed of around 50% of local residents and 50% of tourists. She advanced that the numbers of visitors to the museum have plummeted to about 18% of pre-pandemic times.

"Back in 2018 and 2019, we had around 500,000 visitors per year in the Macao Museum, a figure that dropped to about 100,000 per year in 2020, and last year [we only had] about 90,000," Lou explained in more detail.

The most recent figure accounts for a drop of 82% in the total number of visitors to the museum located in the heart of the historical center, inside Monte Fort and just a few steps away from the most famous touristic landmark, the Ruins of Saint Paul's. **RM**

MUST establishes its hospital in Zhuhai

JING WU

THE Faculty of Chinese Medicine (FCM) of the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) has established its Chinese Traditional Hospital affiliated with the Zhuhai Hospital of Integrated Traditional Chinese & Western Medicine, MUST announced last week.

The inauguration ceremony of Zhuhai Hospital of Integrated Traditional Chinese & Western Medicine, a subsidiary of the FCM of MUST, was held last week in Gongbei, Zhuhai.

The vice president of MUST, Tong Ka Lok, said in his speech during the cere-



mony that in the context of the integration of Zhuhai and Macau, both institu-

tions have a long history of cooperation, and a proven track record of planning

and building hospitals together.

"Since the establishment

of the University Hospital, both parties have commenced and will continue to strengthen their cooperation and consolidation in the areas of talent training, scientific research and medical treatment," he added.

According to MUST, the affiliated hospital provides professional teachers and clinical resources for the teaching of clinical subjects, postgraduate supervision, student internships and clinical research at the University.

22 experts have been appointed as part-time supervisors for postgraduate students at the University's School of Chinese Medicine and have started to recruit and supervise postgraduate students this year. Seven have been selected to teach undergraduate

professional courses at the MUST and "more medical experts and researchers will come to the hospital for clinical work and research collaboration," Tong informed.

Meanwhile, the vice mayor of Zhuhai, Zhang Chen, stated that the construction of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin is a major national strategy personally planned, deployed and promoted by President Xi Jinping.

He said further that the inauguration of the affiliation of the Zhuhai Hospital of Integrated Traditional Chinese & Western medicine is one of the major achievements of Zhuhai in deepening the cooperation between Zhuhai and Macau.

WeChat. Through these online means, according to the organizers, families can complete tasks and learn about different topics, earning prizes and gifts.

A special lucky draw for the attendants of the carnival has also been prepared to take place on May 29, organizers noted.

There will be other games, of the in-person kind, including the "Game of Air Cannon" to take place at the Esplanade of the Maritime Museum on the weekend of May 14 and 15 as well as on Wednesday, May 18.

Virtual Reality (VR) is the proposal of the Macao Science Center that presents to visitors the "VR Experiences of Bugs," where visitors can experience – intuitively and through virtual reality – the morphology and life of bugs.

The International Museum Day was designated by the International Council of Museums and started to be celebrated on May 18, 1977. It aims to draw attention to museums and well as promoting the development of cultural undertakings.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



Mutual trust boosts long-term cooperation between Sands China and SME

AG. Com. Chan Heng Ovos has been established for more than 70 years. It provides eggs from home and abroad, with its customers including large integrated resorts, restaurants, supermarkets, schools, and so on. In 2009, Ag. Com. Chan Heng Ovos became one of the sole suppliers of eggs to Sands China, and the cooperation has been sustained ever since.

Originating from a booth at a wet market near San Ma Lo, this SME is growing through two generations of leadership. Executive Director Vong Kam Iun is succeeding his father's chairmanship, his business expanding from egg retailing to wholesale, and the business continues to optimize and upgrade procedures, services, and facilities to meet customers' requirements.

The egg is an essential daily ingredient but also has a short preservation period. Sands China has been prioritizing food quality

and safety when selecting components. Therefore, during the early stage of cooperation, the SME realized that it would be necessary to upgrade its cold chain transportation and distribution facilities. Vong immediately purchased refrigerator trucks.

About 15,000 eggs are needed every day for Sands China's restaurants, which includes their staff canteens, according to Sands China's procurement and supply chain senior manager, Rachel Zheng, and senior officer, Sardonna Lei.

The management commented that an advantage of Ag. Com. Chan Heng Ovos is a diverse source of products. "They are able to provide eggs from the U.S., Malaysia, the mainland, and other places, and even a kind of 'golden preserved quail egg' from the mainland, according to our special request."

Vong recalled challenges they have encountered over the decades: "We've faced various challenges

and been through several significant issues, such as the melamine scandal in 2008. The fact is that Macau food is dependent on imports. If there is any problem with the source, it'll easily affect the whole city. Therefore, we realized that when selecting ingredients we cannot rely on a single place of origin."

Vong, the far-sighted entrepreneur, decided to focus on food safety and improving management. The SME took the initiative to obtain ISO and IEC standard certifications. All employees are also required to take relevant courses to improve their knowledge about food safety.

These certifications also give confidence to its client. "We are happy to know that the SME is proactive in obtaining certifications that are related to food safety. As far as we know, few companies would take these exams, as it's time-consuming and requires a certain amount of money," said the procurement and supply

chain team from Sands. "Sands China conducts regular reviews of our suppliers. If a supplier has obtained certification, it means that they are relatively familiar with the content and requirements of the standard, which can increase our confidence in their hygiene monitoring and process management."

During the Covid-19 pandemic period, the prices of overseas goods fluctuated and transportation costs rose sharply. However, since the contract was signed six months ago, the SME stuck to the original price agreed in the contract and bore the extra costs. Sands China spoke highly of Ag. Com. Chan Heng Ovos's act of abiding by the contract. "We understand logistics and transportation are seriously delayed due to the epidemic. The supplier actively solved the problem."

In the meantime, the SME director Vong also expressed the hope that the Macau government roll out policies regarding legis-

tics and customs among Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau as soon as possible "so that Macau can make good use of importing advantages of the mainland when importing goods from overseas. And thus Macau would be less dependent on Hong Kong," he said.

The cooperative relationship with Sands China has boosted the local SME Ag. Com. Chan Heng Ovos and caused it to thrive and grow. Vong appreciates that its client keeps offering advice to the SME. He is encouraged to explore and introduce new sources of goods in the future.

Given the changing market amid the fluctuating pandemic period, Sands China suggests SME suppliers update or report their changes or challenges to clients accordingly. Good problem-solving ability, as well as good communication, helps to build a closer relationship with mutual trust between both business parties.



COVID-19

BEIJING ENFORCES LOCKDOWNS, EXPANDS MASS TESTING

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

WORKERS put up fencing and police restricted who could leave a locked-down area in Beijing yesterday as authorities in the Chinese capital stepped up efforts to prevent a major COVID-19 outbreak like the one that has all but shut down the city of Shanghai.

People lined up for throat swabs across much of Beijing as mass testing was expanded to 11 of the city's 16 districts.

Another 22 cases were found in the last 24 hours, Beijing health officials said at a late afternoon news conference, bringing the total to 92 since the outbreak was discovered five days ago. That is tiny in comparison to Shanghai, where the number of cases has topped 500,000 and at least 190 people have died. No deaths have been reported from the still-nascent outbreak in Beijing.

An initial announcement of testing in one Beijing district had sparked panic buying in the city of 21 million on Monday, but the situation appeared to calm yesterday even as testing was expanded. Public transport appeared to be running largely normally and roads were filled with com-



AP PHOTO

muters. "I'm not worried that Beijing would suffer from a shortage of supplies so I don't plan to stock up," said Zhang Yifan, who was on his way to get tested in Dongcheng district. "Because if people stock up blindly, it may cause a waste of resources. If people keep too much supplies at home, it will cause a shortage."

Beijing has locked down some apartment buildings and residential complexes and on Monday added a larger urban area

measuring about 2 by 3 kilometers. Workers put up blue metal fencing along part of the area yesterday, and police restricted who could leave. Residents are being kept inside their compounds.

Fears of a total lockdown have been fed by disruptions in the supply of food, medicine and daily necessities in Shanghai, a southeast coast business hub whose 25 million residents have only gradually been allowed to leave their homes after three weeks of confinement.

However, 86-year-old Beijing resident Chen Shengzhen said the capital had been given more time to prepare than its southern cousin.

Shanghai's lockdown "came all of a sudden, so the policies and other aspects were not able to be in place," leading to short-term hardships in the city, Chen told The Associated Press.

"My daughter works in a government department and they have prepared very well, such as beds, quilts, and articles for wo-

men's use. Even if we need to go into lockdown, we will be fine," said Chen.

Shanghai residents, confined to their complexes or buildings, had trouble ordering food deliveries and also faced higher prices. The lockdown of China's largest city has had ripple effects elsewhere as goods have backed up at Shanghai's port, affecting factory production, global supply chains and China's own economic growth.

Zhong Xiaobing, the general manager of the Lianhua Supermarket chain in Shanghai, said that shipments of goods from elsewhere in China have gotten smoother since the government organized trucks 10 days ago to bring in goods from key transfer stations, but that imports remain slower because of port and other transport restrictions.

Other cities have also been locked down in China as the omicron variant proves difficult to control, with Baotou in Inner Mongolia the latest to enforce one.

Beijing tested nearly 3.8 million people in an initial round of mass testing in Chaoyang district on Monday. All the results were negative except for one in a group of five that were tested together, a Chaoyang official said. Those five people were being tested to determine who among them is infected.

Chaoyang has had the most cases in the Beijing outbreak, but authorities decided to extend the testing to 10 more districts yesterday. **MDT/AP**

DIPLOMACY

Sri Lanka, China discuss loan from Beijing to cover debts

KRISHAN FRANCIS,
COLOMBO

SRI Lanka's government said yesterday it is discussing obtaining another loan from Beijing to repay some of its debt to Chinese banks after China told the nearly bankrupt island nation it was not in favor of restructuring existing loans.

Sri Lanka has nearly \$7 billion in foreign debt due for repayment this year and will need to repay \$25 billion over the next five years. A severe shortage of foreign exchange means the country lags money to buy imported goods, leading to shortages of food, fuel and other essentials.

The economic crisis has brought weeks of protests across the country calling for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's resignation.

Government spokesman Nalaka Godahewa said Beijing was balking at restructuring Sri Lanka's debt because it does not want to set that precedent. He told reporters the finance ministry will announce details of discussions with China later.

Earlier this month, the government said it was suspending repayment of foreign loans pending negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for a loan restructuring plan.

Sri Lanka's debt problems are partly because it built infrastructure like a port, airport and road networks using Chinese loans, but the projects are not making money.

Rajapaksa has asked Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who visited Sri Lanka in January, to restructure those loans.

The government issued its statement a day after Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka Qi Zhenhong said China was doing its utmost to help Sri Lanka. Qi scoffed at suggestions Beijing has Sri Lanka in a debt trap.

"Western developed countries, especially those who colonized Sri Lanka in history, should also come and help," a Tweet from the Chinese embassy quoted Qi as saying.

"The debt trap is only a myth, created and hyped by some foreign media and politicians intentionally," Qi said. He said China is neither the biggest nor the only lender to Sri Lanka and Beijing's projects are provided on concessional terms.

Japan, the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank are other large lenders, having begun the pro-

cess of aiding Sri Lanka's economy much earlier than China.

Qi said it was "unrealistic" to expect all projects or loans to be flawless.

Central Bank figures show existing Chinese loans to Sri Lanka total around \$3.38 billion, not including loans to state-owned businesses, which are counted separately and thought to be substantial.

Godahewa also said that the Cabinet has approved a project to offer residence visas for up to 10 years to foreigners who buy apartments in the country costing at least \$75,000 and those who deposit more than \$100,000 in local bank accounts.

He said the offer was made to help the construction industry weather the economic crisis and to attract more foreign currency.



Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa (left) and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Chinese funded sea reclamation Port City project in Colombo, last January

AP PHOTO



NORTH KOREA

Kim vows to bolster nuke capability during parade

KIM TONG-HYUNG & HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to accelerate the development of nuclear weapons and threatened to use them if provoked in a speech he delivered at a military parade that featured powerful missiles capable of targeting the country's rivals, state media reported yesterday.

Kim's remarks suggest he will continue provocative weapons tests in a pressure campaign aimed at wresting concessions from the United States and its allies. The parade Monday night marked the 90th anniversary of North Korea's army — the backbone of the Kim family's authoritarian rule — and was held as the country's economy is battered by pandemic-related difficulties, punishing U.S.-led sanctions and its own mismanagement.

State media photos showed Kim, dressed in a white military ceremonial coat, smiling and waving from a balcony along with his wife Ri Sol Ju and top deputies.

"(We) will continue to take measures for further developing the nuclear forces of our state at the fastest possible speed," Kim told

his troops and the crowd gathered at a plaza in Pyongyang, the capital, the official Korean Central News Agency reported.

He said North Korea could preemptively use its nuclear weapons when threatened by attacks and called for his nuclear forces to be fully prepared to go "in motion at any time."

"The fundamental mission of our nuclear forces is to deter a war, but our nukes can never be confined to the single mission of war deterrent even at a time when a situation we are not desirous of at all is created on this land," Kim said. "If any forces try to violate the fundamental interests of our state, our nuclear forces will have to decisively accomplish its unexpected second mission," which would leave any invading force "perished," he said.

The parade featured thousands of goose-stepping troops and several of North Korea's most powerful missiles. Some of the intercontinental ballistic missiles could put the U.S. homeland well within range, and a variety of shorter-range solid-fuel missiles pose a growing threat to South Korea and Japan.

One of the weapons showcased at the brightly illuminated Kim Il Sung Square, named after Kim's

late grandfather and state founder, was North Korea's biggest and newest ICBM, the Hwasong-17.

North Korea claimed to have test-fired that missile successfully last month, but South Korea concluded the launch was of the smaller Hwasong-15 and that a launch of the Hwasong-17 had failed. Whichever weapon it was, the launch on March 24 was North Korea's first full-range ICBM flight test in more than four years and flew longer and higher than any other missile North Korea has previously launched.

KCNA said spectators at the parade raised loud cheers when they saw the Hwasong-17, which it said showed "the absolute power of Juche (self-reliance), Korea and the strategic position of our republic to the world."

North Korea often commemorates key state anniversaries by mobilizing huge crowds to boost internal unity. Yesterday's KCNA dispatch praised Kim for accomplishing "the historic great cause of completing the nuclear forces by making a long journey of patriotic devotion with a death-defying will" to make his people free of war.

Kim has been reviving nuclear brinkmanship aimed at forcing the United

States to accept North Korea as a nuclear power and to remove crippling econo-

mic sanctions, exploiting a favorable environment to push forward its weapons program as the U.N. Security Council remains divided over Russia's war in Ukraine.

Nuclear negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang have been stalled since 2019 because of disagreements over a potential easing of U.S.-led sanctions in exchange for North Korean disarmament steps. Kim has stuck to his goals of simultaneously developing nuclear weapons and the country's dismal economy in the face of international pressure and has shown no willingness to fully surrender a nuclear arsenal he sees as his biggest guarantee of survival.

Kim's comments about the possible use of nuclear weapons and his decision to attend the parade in a military coat, rather than his regular suit and tie, signal a tough approach toward South Korea's incoming conservative government, which may take a harder line toward Pyongyang than current liberal President Moon Jae-in, according to analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea's Sejong Institute.

Calls by Kim for his people to brace for long-term confrontation with "imperialists" show he has no immediate plan to re-engage in denuclearization talks with the United States as he monitors the geopolitical fallout of the Russia-Ukraine war and the rivalry between the U.S. and China, Cheong said.

South Korean President-elect Yoon Suk Yeol, who takes office on May 10, has accused Moon of seeking engagement with North Korea while ignoring a gathering North Korean threat. He has vowed to strengthen South Korea's defenses in conjunction with its alliance with the U.S., including preemptive strike capabilities.

"North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles have become a serious and realistic threat for our country and acquiring an ability to deter (the North's threat) is an urgent task," Yoon's office said in a statement.

North Korea has conducted 13 rounds of weapons tests this year. There are also signs North Korea is rebuilding tunnels at a nuclear testing ground that was last active in 2017, possibly in preparation for exploding a nuclear device. **MDT/AP**

AD

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青少年設計比賽2022 Teens' Design Contest 2022
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AP PHOTO



A Ukrainian serviceman walks next to a fighting vehicle, outside Kyiv

PUTIN'S WAR

France's victorious Macron boosts weapons, stakes in Ukraine

JOHN LEICESTER, PARIS

WHEN Vladimir Putin congratulated Emmanuel Macron on his re-election as France's president and wished him "success in your activities," the Russian leader probably was being more polite than sincere.

As he embarks on a second term, with the intention of keeping France at the forefront of international efforts to force Putin to change course in Ukraine, Macron has given a green light for the delivery of modern artillery pieces to Kyiv that could help stem Russia's new offensive in the east of the country.

Firing six rounds per minute over 40 kilometers or more, the truck-mounted Caesar cannons will allow Ukrainian crews to pound Russian troops from afar, then move and pound them again. Used to great effect against Islamic State forces in Iraq and in other conflicts, they represent a step up in France's assistance to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's government.

In another remarkable move, Macron is talking openly about the guns, lif-

ting a veil of secrecy he'd thrown over French military aid. The delivery and the publicity together signal a tougher line from Macron in his dealings with Putin — talking less and engaging more in brinkmanship with the Kremlin.

"Initially, we were a bit shy to show what was being provided," said retired Gen. Dominique Trinquand, a former head of France's military mission at the United Nations. But "we have been escalating week after week, testing the reaction."

Macron was in the closing stages of his presidential re-election campaign when he name-dropped the Caesar cannons in an April 21 interview with the newspaper Ouest-France. He also mentioned Milan anti-tank missiles, although those supplies had already been reported.

Macron didn't give numbers. Citing unidentified French sources, Ouest-France said 12 Caesars will be drawn from the French arsenal and that 40 Ukrainian artillery soldiers were arriving for training at a military base in the south of France.

Macron said his "red line" remains not entering into

direct conflict with Russia, but within that limit, "we must provide maximum help to the Ukrainians."

"We are delivering consequential equipment," he said. "We need to continue down this path."

His armed forces minister tweeted that thousands of shells would also be part of the delivery. Sunil Nair, an analyst who specializes in artillery systems for the defense publication Janes, said the cannons could be used independently of each other or together as a battery.

"It does give you firepower, no doubt about it," he said. "It's a question of how they use it and where they use it."

Before and after Russia's Feb. 24 invasion, Macron had kept an open line with Putin. But the horrors discovered by Ukrainian troops as they retook control of villages near Kyiv once Russian soldiers withdrew gave Macron pause. His office said last week that the two leaders haven't spoken since March 29.

Macron says that, eventually, he'll need to pick up the phone again — because not talking to Putin will allow the leaders of China,

India and Turkey to take the lead in trying to negotiate the peace, whenever that time comes.

"We'll have to prepare a cease-fire at some stage, and Europe will have to be around the table," Macron said last week.

In the meantime, French weapons will do some of the talking — in hopes of adding to the pressure on Putin.

"The best way to have successful talks is to have successful Ukrainians throwing back the Russian invasion," said François Heisbourg, a French analyst on defense and security questions at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

The Caesars will allow their crews to go hunting for Russian artillery pieces being used in eastern Ukraine that are indiscriminately pummeling civilian targets.

"The Americans and the Poles and the Slovaks and the Belgians and the French and the Canadians are all sending heavy artillery to the Ukrainians," Heisbourg said.

"That's a really, really big improvement to the situation of Ukraine in the new phase of the war." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1945 RUSSIANS AND AMERICANS LINK AT ELBE

Russian and American troops have joined hands at the River Elbe in Germany, bringing the end of the war a step closer.

Statements have been released simultaneously in London, Moscow and Washington this evening reaffirming the determination of the three Allied powers to complete the destruction of the Third Reich.

According to a statement issued by Downing Street, the commanders of a United States division and of a Russian Guards division met at Torgau, south of Berlin on 26 April at 1600 hours local time.

In fact the first contact was made between patrols on 25 April when a first lieutenant and three men of an intelligence and reconnaissance platoon of the US division met forward elements of the Russian Guards division.

First Lieutenant Albert Kotzebue of the 3rd Battalion, 273rd Infantry, 69th Infantry Division took his men in a boat across the Elbe to be greeted by Lt Col Alexander Gardiev, Commander of the 175th Rifle Regiment of the 58th Guards Division, 34th Corps.

They made arrangements for the formal handshake in front of photographers at Torgau the following day.

By joining forces at Elbe, the American and Soviet troops have successfully cut the Germany army in two. However, The Times correspondent warns of the possibility of "a protracted period of mountain warfare".

The American and Russian military leaders have paid tribute to their troops. In Moscow 324 guns fired a 24 salvo in honour of "victory of the freedom-loving peoples over Germany".

General Omar Bradley, commander of the US 12th Army Group, praised the Soviet troops for their determination in forcing the Germans to abandon Russia and push them back to the Elbe River.

He went on to pay tribute to the American forces: "In 10 months you have advanced 1,120km (696 miles) from the invasion beaches. All this has been attained thanks to your courage, your spirit and initiative and thanks to your comrades who died in order to achieve this."

The British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, said: "We meet in true and victorious comradeship and with inflexible resolve to fulfil our purpose and our duty. Let all march forward upon the foe."

President Harry S Truman welcomed the news: "This is not the hour of final victory in Europe, but the hour draws near, the hour for which all the American people, all the British people and all the Soviet people have toiled and prayed so long."

Marshal Joseph Stalin spoke of the war still ahead: "Our task and our duty are to complete the destruction of the enemy to force him to lay down his arms and surrender unconditionally."

"The Red Army will fulfil to the end this task and this duty to our people and to all freedom-loving peoples."



Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Three days later (30 April) Adolf Hitler committed suicide with his wife of only a few hours, Eva Braun, in the underground bunker from where he had been directing operations. On 4 May a representative of Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz, Hitler's successor as chief of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces surrendered the Netherlands, Denmark and north-western Germany to Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery at Luneberg Heath, south-east of Hamburg. The six-year European phase of history's most destructive war ended on 7 May with Germany's unconditional surrender to Eisenhower at Reims. Victory in Europe Day was celebrated on 8 May. However, the Soviets refused to accept the Reims agreement and insisted another peace deal was signed in Berlin on 8 May. As the Red Army was still fighting for control of Prague at the time, the ceasefire did not come into effect until 11 May.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Your generous nature could be taken advantage of. Be sure to take care of any minor ailments. If boredom has set in, find new and unique directions that offer interesting friendships.

TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Hassles with your boss are sure to erupt if you speak your mind. You may have a tendency to put on weight. Be careful not to show your temper when dealing with the boss.

GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

You mustn't make promises that you won't be able to keep. You can make gains if you look at long-term investments. You can certainly gain popularity; however, don't do it by paying for everyone else.

CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You can meet someone who will become very dear to you if you get out and socialize. There are ways of making extra cash if you put your mind to it. Try not to overreact to the loss.

LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You have a real need to be vocal. You'll communicate easily and develop new friendships. Deceit with coworkers is apparent. Try not to say the wrong thing at the wrong time.

VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Your versatile mind and common sense will allow you to come up with various solutions. Problems on the home front might be a little disconcerting.

LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Don't overspend on friends or children. Be prepared to counteract the damage that adversaries are about to create. You will be able to close any deals successfully.

SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

This will not be the best day to make changes or renovations to your residence. Spend time with youngsters today. Consider a conservative investment that will stay solid when everything else goes sour.

SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Stress may cause minor health ailments. Think twice before eating spicy foods; you may have problems with your stomach. A residential move may be necessary to get a better job.

CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Go on business trips if at all possible. You can make progress professionally. You should consider getting into self-improvement endeavors.

AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

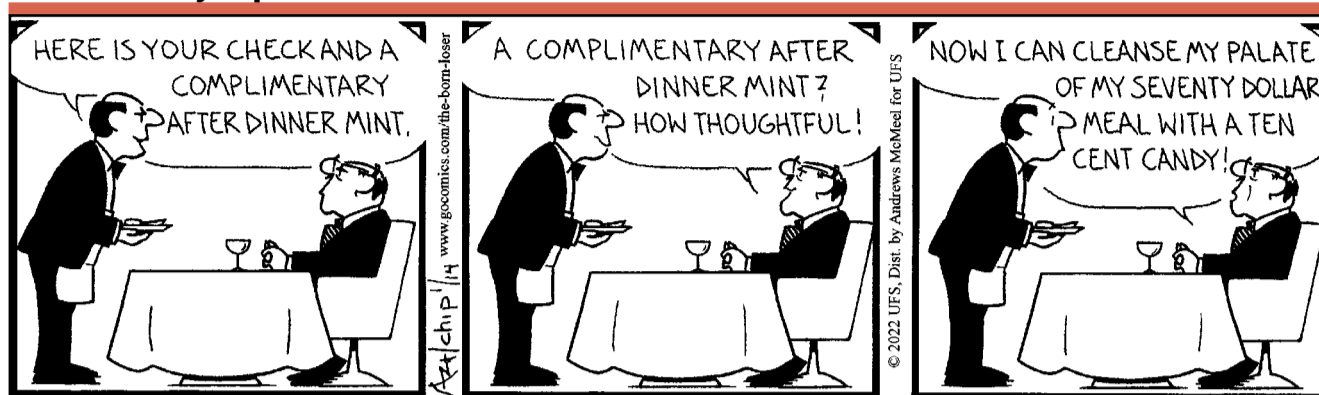
Don't be too eager to spend money that you really don't have. You will be full of energy and you need to find something constructive to do. Don't take sides if you wish to remain on good terms with both parties.

PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You can make money if you concentrate on producing services or goods that will make domestic chores easier. Stop those bad habits. Bring work home if it will help you get caught up.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

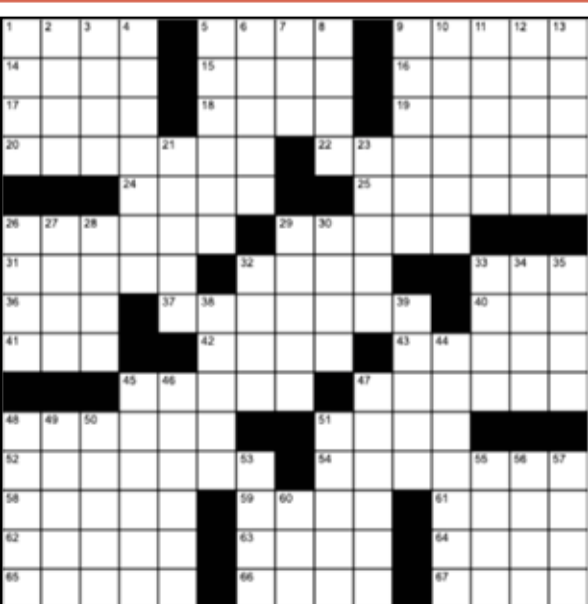
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	16	23	fine
Changchun	6	20	cloudy
Chengdu	18	30	cloudy
Chongqing	19	30	cloudy
Fuzhou	23	32	rain
Guangzhou	24	31	thunderstorms
Guiyang	17	25	cloudy
Haikou	26	35	cloudy
Hangzhou	20	26	rain
Harbin	5	18	showers
Hefei	17	27	overcast
Nanjing	18	25	overcast
Shanghai	20	23	rain
Taipei	23	28	cloudy
Wuhan	17	29	fine
Hong Kong	26	29	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	1	11	rain
Frankfurt	6	18	overcast
Paris	9	20	overcast
London	4	14	overcast
New York	4	13	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Footfall; 5- ___ Crunch; 9- Copper and zinc alloy; 14- Pop; 15- Gothic-type arch; 16- Nouveau ___; 17- Very, in Versailles; 18- Florence's river; 19- Pale; 20- Feeling; 22- Coins; 24- Sheltered, nautically; 25- Sewing instrument; 26- Ra, in ancient Egypt; 29- Watch over; 31- Healing plants; 32- Token; 33- Floor covering; 36- Gave grub; 37- Bright red color; 40- Salt Lake City athlete; 41- Shoe width; 42- Opposed; 43- Norwegian dramatist; 45- "Quiet!"; 47- Cured, in a way; 48- ___ corpus; 51- Slight; 52- Animate; 54- Shah, e.g.; 58- Woody vine; 59- Word that can precede bodied and seaman; 61- Remove from text; 62- Bridge expert Charles; 63- Earth's satellite; 64- Writer Bombeck; 65- The end of ___; 66- Smooth sailing; 67- Balance;

DOWN 1- Fast fliers; 2- Made tracks; 3- Land west of Nod; 4- Corridor; 5- Painted; 6- Go along (with); 7- Corral; 8- Light gas; 9- Stiff drink; 10- Dared; 11- Needed liniment; 12- Egg exterior; 13- Have a feeling; 21- At ___ for words; 23- Absurd; 26- Umpire's call; 27- Peter Fonda title role; 28- Network point; 29- Circumference; 30- Wrinkly fruit; 32- Lacking; 33- New wine; 34- To ___ (perfectly); 35- Look after; 38- Bring about; 39- Ornamental coronet; 44- Electric appliance; 45- Certain fisherman; 46- Capital of Cuba; 47- Tranquil; 48- Hagar's comics wife; 49- Opposed to cation; 50- Raucous sound; 51- "Amadeus" director Forman; 53- Appoint; 55- Able was ___; 56- Material charity; 57- Tidy, without fault; 60- Anaconda;



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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TRANSPORTATION

UBER ADMITS MISLEADING AUSTRALIAN RIDERS, AGREES TO PAY USD19M

ROD MCGUIRK, CANBERRA

UBER agreed to pay a 26 million Australian dollar (USD19 million) fine for misleading riders by falsely warning they could be charged a cancellation fee and for inflating estimates of comparable taxi rides, the ride share company and Australia's consumer watchdog said yesterday.

Uber B.V., a Netherlands subsidiary of San Francisco-based Uber Technologies Inc., admitted breaching Australian Consumer Law by making false or misleading statements in its app, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission said in a statement.

The first offense stems from a free cancellation policy that allows a customer to cancel a booking at no cost up to five minutes after a driver has accepted the trip.

Between at least December 2017 and September 2021, more than 2 million Australian customers who attempted to cancel within that five-minute window were warned: "You may be charged a small fee since your driver is already on the way."

AP PHOTO



The cancellation message has since changed to: "You won't be charged a cancellation fee."

"Uber admits it misled Australian users for a number of years

and may have caused some of them to decide not to cancel their ride after receiving the cancellation warning," Commission Chair Gina Cass-Gottlieb said.

Uber said in a statement almost all riders chose to cancel their trips despite the warnings.

The second offense related to estimated taxi fares provided

by the app to Sydney customers between June 2018 and August 2020, when the taxi ride option was abandoned.

The algorithm used to calculate the fare ranges inflated the taxi estimates. The actual taxi fare was almost always cheaper than Uber's lowest estimate. Uber had not ensured the algorithm was accurate, the commission said.

Uber apologized for the taxi fare estimate "being higher than it should have."

Uber said it cooperated with the commission and made changes to its platform based on concerns raised by investigators.

"We are committed to continually raising the bar — for ourselves, our industry and most importantly for the people who use our services," Uber said.

Uber and the commission agreed to jointly ask the Federal Court to order the AU\$26 million (\$19 million) fine.

The maximum fine Uber could have faced is difficult to calculate because the penalties rose sharply during the time in question.

The maximum financial penalties under Consumer Law had been AU\$1.1 million (\$793,000) per breach.

They are now AU\$10 million (\$7.2 million) — three times the value of the benefit received or 10% of annual turnover. **MDT/AP**

AD

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SAPPHIRE CROWN: DSL LAWYERS

PRINCIPAL MEDIA PARTNER: Times

FOOTBALL

Benfica ends 60-year European wait with Youth League title

SALZBURG 0, BENFICA 6

BENFICA is a European champion again — 60 years and 11 losing finals after the storied Portuguese soccer club's last title in a UEFA competition.

Playing yesterday [Macau time] in its fourth final of the UEFA Youth League, Benfica routed Salzburg 6-0 to claim the trophy.

Benfica's last European win was the European Cup in 1962, retaining the trophy the Lisbon club won for the first time the previous year.

The six decades since saw Benfica beaten in the final five times in the European Cup, once in the UEFA Cup, twice in the Europa League, and three times in the UEFA Youth League that began play in 2013.



According to club lore, the long losing streak was because of a curse by Béla Guttmann, the coach who left Benfica on bad terms after masterminding the two European Cup titles.

One of those Youth League losses was to Salzburg in the 2017 final.

The Austrian team was swept aside on Monday after Benfica led within 90 seconds through Martim

Neto. Henrique Araújo's hat trick, completed from the penalty spot in the 89th minute, was wrapped around goals by Italian youth international Cher N'Dour and Luis Semedo. **MDT/AP**

RUGBY

NEW ZEALAND TO HOST PACIFIC FOUR BEFORE WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

NEW Zealand will host the U.S., Canada and Australia in the Pacific Four series in June as part of preparations for the women's Rugby World Cup which kicks off in October.

New Zealand will play Australia and the U.S. will take on Canada on June 6, with other tests scheduled for June 12 and 18.

The Black Ferns will be playing their first tests on home soil in New Zealand since 2019.

"The Pacific Four gives New Zealanders the opportunity to get excited about women's rugby in the build-up to the Rugby World Cup and to get behind their team in what is a huge year for

the women's game," New Zealand Rugby chief executive Mark Robinson said in a statement yesterday.

The women's Rugby World Cup was postponed last year because of travel restrictions in place in New Zealand during the COVID-19 pandemic.

World Rugby CEO Alan Gilpin said preparations were well on track for the world tournament.

"We look forward to what will be two great showcases of the women's game in the country," Gilpin said.

The New Zealand women's team has won five of the last six Rugby World Cup titles. **MDT/AP**

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Urology : Dr. Lo Kwong Yin Richard, Dr. Zhao Yun Qiao

Paediatric Surgery : Dr. Yeung Chung Kwong

Paediatrics : Dr. Zhang Zhiqin

Obstetrics & Gynaecology : Dr. Fong Kuan Io

Plastic & Aesthetic Surgery : Dr. Lam U Lin

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EXPLAINER

World Views

Editors, MDT/AP

HOW IS TRANS-DNIESTER RELATED TO WAR IN UKRAINE?

Among the sites of the former Soviet Union's "frozen conflicts," a long and narrow strip of land in Moldova has been the most stable for three decades. Trans-Dniester hasn't seen fighting since the end of a separatist war in 1992.

But explosions in the past two days have raised concerns that Russia's war in Ukraine could extend there. About 1,500 Russian troops already are stationed in Trans-Dniester. Another outbreak of hostilities would pose a severe challenge to Moldova, one of Europe's poorest countries.

WHAT IS TRANS-DNIESTER?

Trans-Dniester extends some 400 kilometers between the eastern bank of the Dniester River in Moldova and the country's border with Ukraine. Most of the breakaway region's population of 470,000 speaks Russian, although residents identify themselves as ethnically Moldovan, Ukrainian or Russian.

Moves to make Moldovan Moldova's official language in 1989, when it still was part of the Soviet Union, alarmed people in Trans-Dniester. The region declared independence in 1990 and clashes broke out. Fighting intensified in March 1992 and lasted until a July cease-fire; more than 700 people are estimated to have died in the conflict.

As part of the cease-fire agreement, a contingent of Russian troops stayed in Trans-Dniester as nominal peacekeepers. Since then, the region has insisted it is not part of Moldova, which declared independence in 1991.

Trans-Dniester has retained many Soviet ways and iconography, including using the hammer-and-sickle image on its flag. But it has remained generally peaceful, and some tourists come to relish the anachronisms.

WHAT HAPPENED THERE THIS WEEK?

Explosions rocked the headquarters of the region's state security ministry on Monday. The building reportedly was empty due to the Orthodox Easter holiday, and no casualties were reported. Officials said the attack was committed with rocket-propelled grenades. Local media showed what appeared to be firing tubes lying on a street.

Yesterday, a pair of explosions at a broadcasting facility knocked two powerful antennas out of service. No claims of responsibility for the attacks have been made.

Trans-Dniester's president, Vadim Krasnoselsky, called for imposing anti-terrorist security measures at a "red level" for 15 days, including setting up blockposts at the entrances to cities.

The United States has warned amid the war in Ukraine that Russia could launch "false-flag" attacks in nearby nations as a pretext for sending in troops.

DOES RUSSIA HAVE AMBITIONS IN THE REGION?

Russia does not recognize Trans-Dniester as independent, as it does with other breakaway areas, such as South Ossetia, Abkhazia and the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.

The recognition of those areas came either after Russia and Georgia fought a 2008 war or as justification for Moscow's February invasion of Ukraine. An outburst of fighting in Trans-Dniester could change the Kremlin's political calculus; Russia's security policy states it has the right to protect ethnic Russian populations throughout the world.

A senior Russian military official, Rustam Minnekayev, said last week that Russian forces were aiming to take full control of southern Ukraine, saying such a move would also open a land corridor between Russia and Trans-Dniester.

Achieving that military objective would require significant battles to capture Ukraine's Black Sea coast, including the major port city of Odesa. Russian soldiers would surely encounter enormous resistance. The Russian contingent in Trans-Dniester is focused on guarding ammunition and warehouses, and its fitness for combat is uncertain.

Moldova is constitutionally neutral, so Russia could not cite the country seeking to join NATO to justify an invasion, as Russian President Vladimir Putin did with Ukraine. But expanding to Moldova would give Russia a presence next to NATO member Romania.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres has called for a cease-fire in Ukraine at his meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Guterres is visiting Moscow and is then scheduled to visit the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, this week.

"We are extremely interested in finding ways in order to create the conditions for effective dialog, create the conditions for a cease-fire as soon as possible, create the conditions for a peaceful solution," Guterres said, speaking in televised com-

ments at the start of the meeting.

Guterres also said he wanted to reduce the impact of fighting in Ukraine on food security in other parts of the world. Lavrov said they would discuss "the situation around Ukraine that acts as a catalyst for a great number of problems which had piled up over recent decades in the Euro-Atlantic region."

Guterres is also expected to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin today [Macau time].



The Bonanza Creek Ranch, where the film "Rust" was being filmed, in Santa Fe, New Mexico

POLICE RELEASE VIDEOS IN PROBE OF BALDWIN FILM-SET SHOOTING

LAW enforcement officials released a trove of video evidence Monday in the ongoing investigation of a fatal October shooting of a cinematographer by actor and producer Alec Baldwin on the set of a Western movie.

Data files released by the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office include lapel camera recordings taken by a commanding officer as he arrives at a film-set ranch where medics are attending to the wounded, with an evacuation helicopter whirring overhead. A search for the gun leads to the movie production's armorer, who breaks down in tears.

Other videos show investigators as they debriefing Baldwin within hours of the fatal shooting, talking with him inside a compact office — and rehearsal clips that show Baldwin in costume as he practices a quick-draw maneuver with a gun.

Santa Fe County Sheriff Adan Mendoza said in a statement that the investigation by his agency remains open and ongoing as it awaits the results of ballistics and forensic analysis from the FBI as well as studies of fingerprint and DNA.

"The sheriff's office is releasing all files associated with our ongoing investigation," he said in the statement. Those files also include photos of ammunition from the set and examination reports.

At a ranch on the outskirts of Santa Fe on Oct. 21, 2021, Baldwin was pointing a gun at cinematographer Halyna Hutchins when it went off, killing Hutchins and wounding the director, Joel Souza. They had been inside a small church during setup for filming a scene.

In a video taken by police later that day, Baldwin makes a few frantic calls as he awaits a meeting with law enforcement officials.

"You have no idea how unbelievable this is and how strange this is," he says over the phone.

Under questioning by two investigators, Baldwin pieces together what happened as the gun went off, still apparently unaware that Hutchins would die and shocked to learn that he had been holding a gun loaded with live ammunition. Baldwin said the gun should have been empty for a rehearsal with no filming.

"I take the gun out slowly. I turn, I cock the pistol," Baldwin says. "Bang, it goes off. She (Hutchins) hits the ground. She goes down. He (Souza) goes down screaming."

Souza recounted his experience from a hospital emergency room, where he was treated for a bullet wound and questioned by investigators.

Souza described "a very loud bang, and then it felt like someone kicked me in the shoulder." He knew Hutchins was wounded too and asked if she was OK.

In the Oct. 21 video, Baldwin repeatedly says there were no prior problems of any kind with firearms on the set of "Rust."

Those statements conflict with more recent findings by state occupational safety regulators, who last week issued the maximum possible fine of nearly \$137,000 against the "Rust" film production company.

Baldwin said in a December interview with ABC News that he was on set pointing the gun at Hutchins at her instruction when it went off without his pulling the trigger. MDT/AP

Iran A court in Iran has sentenced two students to 16-year prison terms each on charges of endangering national security, the judiciary's spokesman said yesterday. According to the spokesman, Zabihollah Khodaeian, the two sabotaged public facilities, tried to cooperate with opposition groups and spread propaganda against the system. These actions translated to 10-year, five and one-year prison terms, he added.



Romania Police in the separatist region of Trans-Dniester say two explosions yesterday in a radio facility close to the Ukrainian border knocked two powerful antennas out of service. Trans-Dniester, a strip of land in Moldova with about 470,000 people, has been under the control of separatist authorities since a 1992 war with Moldova. Russia bases about 1,500 troops there, nominally as peacekeepers, but concerns are high that the forces could be used to invade Ukraine.

Poland The death toll from two coal mine accidents last week in southern Poland has risen to 13 after another injured miner died yesterday, a doctor said. The miner died at the Siemianowice Slaskie hospital, which specializes in treating burns, where 20 other coal mine workers were still being treated for injuries from methane gas blasts, Dr. Przemyslaw Strzelec said.

Spain The government is set to pass a decree aimed at boosting transparency in a monarchy still reeling from scandals involving King Felipe VI's father, Juan Carlos. The move comes a day after Felipe made public his personal assets of 2.6 million euros for the first time. The government said the decree, to be approved at its weekly cabinet meeting, would "strengthen transparency, accountability, efficiency and exemplarity in the royal household."