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THE GOVERNMENT HAS FINALLY LAUNCHED THE MUCH-ANTICIPATED PUBLIC TENDER FOR 5G NETWORK

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FIA OFFICIALLY CANCELS PARTICIPATION IN MACAU GRAND PRIX

▲ P5

HEALTH BUREAU CONFIRMS THOSE THEY REQUIRE TO UNDERGO QUARANTINE WILL NOT NEED TO PAY THEIR FEES

▲ P2

AP PHOTO



Thailand A Myanmar fighter jet crossed the border into Thailand's airspace yesterday, prompting Thai air force jets to scramble and officials to order the evacuation of villages and classrooms, officials said. The Royal Thai Air Force said it dispatched two F-16 fighters to patrol the area after receiving a report of an aircraft that crossed into Thailand's airspace while carrying out an attack in Myanmar territory held by an ethnic minority group. It asked the military attaché at the Thai Embassy in Myanmar to convey a warning to Myanmar authorities.

AP PHOTO



India Pounding rain following weeks of heavy downpours triggered a mudslide in northeast India that killed at least 14 people and left more than 30 others missing, authorities said yesterday. Disaster response workers, police and local villagers were trying to rescue those buried under the debris in Noney, a town near Imphal, the capital of Manipur state.

AP PHOTO



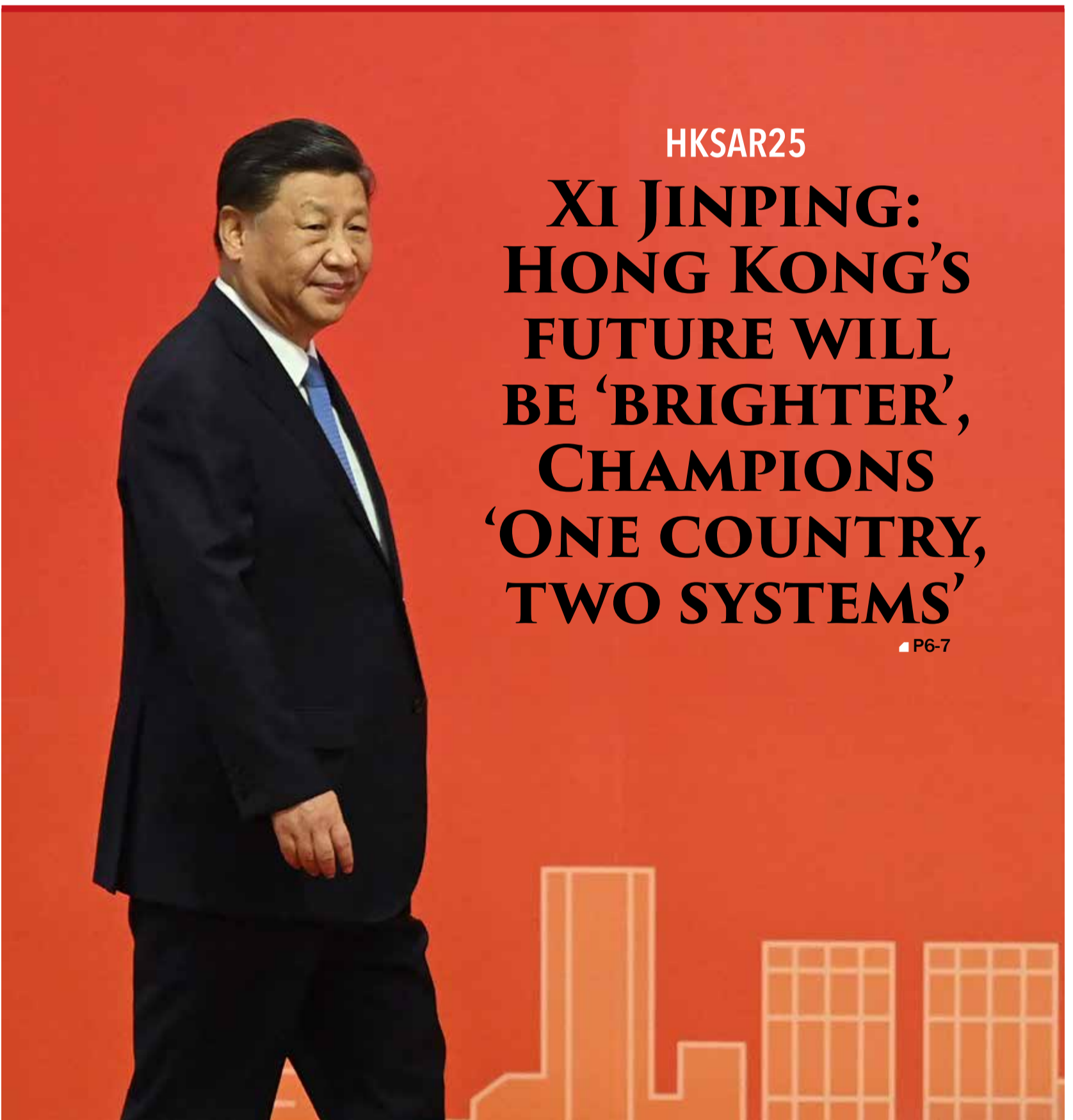
Afghanistan's Taliban rulers held a gathering yesterday of some 3,000 Islamic clerics and tribal elders for the first time since seizing power in August, urging those at the meeting to advise them on running the country. Women were not allowed to attend. The Taliban, who have kept a complete lock on decision-making since taking over the country, touted the gathering in the capital of Kabul as a forum to hear a range of voices on issues facing Afghanistan.

More on backpage

CHAOTIC NAT

Gov't abruptly retracted the 48-hour NAT requirement for casino and construction workers following huge queues at testing stations ▲ P3

AP PHOTO



HKSAR25

**XI JINPING:
HONG KONG'S
FUTURE WILL
BE 'BRIGHTER',
CHAMPIONS
'ONE COUNTRY,
TWO SYSTEMS'**

▲ P6-7

ANTHONY LAM

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

QUARANTINE FREE FOR PEOPLE UNDER SSM OBSERVATION

THOSE required by the Health Bureau (SSM) to undergo quarantine will not need to pay their fees, regardless of their nationalities, Lau Fong Chi, department head for the communications and external affairs of the Macao Government Tourism Office, confirmed.

This quarantine fee waiver does not apply to those undergoing quarantine-upon-arrival now or in the future.

The announcement was made, according to the tourism official, following earlier enquiries made by those currently under quarantine amid this current phase of serial infections.

"We are aware of enquiries made from the quarantined [persons] at facilities accommodating asymptomatic cases," Lau revealed. "In line with the practice in previous years on similar matters, those quarantined as requested by SSM will see their fees waived."

The tourism official added that her bureau would follow a list of quarantined guests issued by the SSM to offer fee waivers. Local residents, non-local workers and tourists will enjoy the waiver as long as they are quarantined on the request of the SSM.

However, if they make additional orders or spend during their stays, the government will not pay



for this part of the bill, meaning that the quarantined will need to pay the extra sums by themselves.

Meanwhile, in response to a question on how much non-local workers will need to pay if they test positive and are hospitalized, Leong highlighted that, pursuant to the law, the director of the SSM

has the discretion to issue a waiver on concerned patients.

According to a guideline posted on the SSM's website, in normal scenarios, local residents have to pay 70% of their in-patient bills if they are admitted to the public hospital. Non-local workers will pay 100% of their bills, while visi-

tors to Macau will pay 200%.

If they have purchased medical insurance policies, they may file for a claim. The public health doctor especially remarked that labor insurance is required by the Labour Relations Law.

At the same time, local residents will be exempted from paying if

they are diagnosed with any infectious diseases listed on a legal list.

It was revealed by the press that some pregnant medical staff had been put to work on frontlines. On this, Leong said that the SSM would try its best to withdraw such medical staff from frontline positions, if work capacity is sufficient.

She also added that, according to the contingencies for mass outbreaks, the city's facilities can hold a maximum of 6,700 positive cases.

Chinese medical therapies kick in to combat infections

Lo revealed that, from today, all positive cases currently in hotel quarantine can receive Chinese medical consultations and therapies upon request.

The health chief said that, from then on, those who requested would see SSM Chinese medicine practitioners in phone or video consultations. They will evaluate their "body types" and, if necessary, prescribe prescription Chinese medications.

However, the Western medicine practitioner did not explain how the team of Chinese medicine practitioners would be able to identify people's "body types" without being able to access their pulse.

Evaluation of pulse conditions is one of the four core diagnostic tactics in traditional Chinese medicine, with the other three being

MACAU RECORDS MOP613B IN FINANCIAL RESERVES

As of April this year, the city has recorded a total of MOP613.03 billion in financial reserves. Of this sum, the city has MOP279.4 billion in deposits and current accounts. It also holds bonds to the value of MOP152.3 billion, as well as other investments totaling MOP177.1 billion. The safe of Macau also has approximately MOP4.2 billion in other assets. As for liabilities, the city has MOP9 billion in debt. In fiscal reserve capital, the city has MOP613 billion, of which MOP145 billion is in basic reserves and MOP486.5 billion is in surplus reserves. Due to the use of the financial reserves for additional budgets to fund pandemic relief measures, funds record a deficit of MOP18.45 billion.

UNSETTLED WEATHER TO CONTINUE

Tropical storm "Chaba" is expected to move NW slowly and generally towards the area between the western coast of Guangdong and Hainan Island. The chance of issuing tropical cyclone signal no.3 is relatively high from the early morning to noon today, the weather bureau informed. Under the influence of the broad circulation of the storm, its related rainband will start to bring unsettled weather to Macau. Flooding below 0.5m is expected to occur tomorrow, between morning and noon. Also, the winds will intensify, with frequent showers and thunderstorms from today to Sunday.

CRIME

Four men facing 'coercive measures' for violating quarantine rules

FOUR men, who are returnees to Macau, are facing "coercive measures" and remain under investigation for allegedly contravening epidemic prevention measures, according to a statement issued by the Public Prosecutions Office (MP).

During the returnees' medically observed quarantine at Sheraton, they were seen opening the doors of the rooms facing opposite each other and smoking cigarettes, talking, passing objects and even entering one other's rooms.

Having carried out the preliminary investigation, including viewing the video

recordings provided by the hotel in question, there are indications that the four defendants committed the crime of infringement of a preventive health measure, which is punishable by a fine of up to 60 days or prison.

The MP is still investigating the other individuals charged with violating epidemic prevention measures.

While at observation hotels, individuals are not allowed to open their doors unless food is delivered or when undergoing a nucleic acid test, nor are they allowed to speak with their neighbors.



The four men have already been referred to the MP. The bureau is calling

on citizens and tourists to strictly comply with the law. LV

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POLICY U-TURN

Gov't blames uncooperative NAT takers for crowd-building

ANTHONY LAM

TEST takers not keeping to their booking time was the reason behind recent crowds building up at test stations, public health doctor Leong Iek Hou of Health Bureau (SSM) said at yesterday's press conference.

However, SSM and related government bureaus abruptly retracted their guidelines on requiring casino visitors as well as casino and construction site workers to present proof of their 48-hour SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test (NAT) results in order to gain access to the two types of locations.

The guidelines were set to be enacted at 7 a.m. today. The requirement was replaced by a requirement for negative SARS-CoV-2 rapid antigen test (RAT) results obtained on the date of intended entry to be displayed.

Yesterday morning, videos went viral on different social media platforms, showing long queues at the Qingmao Border Checkpoint and the Workers' Stadium NAT stations. Another picture also showed long queues at the Kiang Wu Hospi-



tal test stations.

Workers in the two industries, according to media reports, feared that their NAT results may not come in time for the start of their shifts today, which was why they arrived early for their tests.

Defending the government's

moves and calling the situation "not ideal," Leong emphasized that the fault was with the test-takers, who did not keep to their booking time and arrived at test stations far too early.

The official was further challenged that the large size of the workforce in the two in-

dustries was known in advance, as well as the fact that the northern part of the Peninsula is traditionally busy. In fact, this part of the city is considered a "ballot warehouse" in the parliamentary election.

Cheung Kin Ian, division head at the Unitary Police Force (CPU), stepped in and responded that after receiving the news about crowding at the two NAT stations, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) was notified to encourage test-takers to use other stations instead.

Cheung noted that most test-takers were cooperative and decided to relocate to another testing station.

However, early this week, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Elsie Ao Ieong discouraged people from crossing districts in their trips to NAT stations. She said that doing so may pose risks to test-takers and people across the city.

The panel of officials were questioned about this, but neither of the officials made any comments.

Members of the public were concerned about whether the crowding would pose a risk of

further infections. To this, health officials have previously said that NAT is a preferred way to identify early infections. At the same time, preventive measures, such as social distancing and mask wearing, are in place at NAT stations.

On the question of who should be held accountable for the crowding yesterday, the public health doctor said: "I'm only a doctor and not in the position to answer who should be held accountable."

Leong was also questioned where the director of the bureau was yesterday. Two days ago, the director emphasized to the press that the press briefing should act as a platform for the government to announce and clarify its policies and measures.

Amid such a significant policy U-turn, both journalists and social media users wondered why the director was not at the event to "announce and clarify" his policies and measures.

In response, the public health doctor said that her superintendent was working busily at the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), issuing commands on how work can be further refined.

When questioned about whether the 48-hour NAT requirement on casino visitors as well as casino and construction site workers would return, Leong said that the government was constantly evaluating the situation.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

City has 572 positives, 35 more need confirmation

THE city recorded 88 new SARS-CoV-2 positive cases on Wednesday, raising the tally to 572. Of the new cases, 48 were detected from community and 40 from quarantine facilities.

The age range of the positive cases further extended upward. Now, the oldest positive case in Macau is 100 years old. Most of the cases are asymptomatic, with only 180 showing symptoms.

Of the 572 cases, 109 have not received any Covid-19 vaccine, 23 had only one dose, 216 only two doses and 224 had had three doses.

From midnight to 3 p.m. yesterday, a total of 35 preliminary positive results have been reported to the



FLORA TANG

SSM. During the same period, about 429,000 people uploaded their RAT results to the self-declaration platform, 26 of whom reported positive results. Seven of these were already under

quarantine and 19 were within the community. These people will be re-tested at the Macao Dome for confirmation.

The SSM has added a new cluster to the current

phase of infections. Cluster 11 relates to Hotel Fortuna and Kam Sau Garden Building. Connections to Cluster 1 have been found in respect of this new cluster.

As for the past citywide NAT, all specimens have been processed and results are out. A total of 50 test tubes contained positive specimens. They will be re-tested individually for confirmation. A test tube of specimens, containing six samples, needed to be re-tested due to technical complications, Leong added.

This round of citywide NAT has seen mainland test provider Kuok Kim failing to test 132 specimens due to technical failure.

Leong also confirmed that the SSM was testing a system using the health code where results of the citywide NAT will be published. She said it would only be used for purposes of proof, as some employers had required their employees to present such proof in order to report to work. **AL**

GOV'T CALLS ON PUBLIC TO SELF-TEST TODAY AND TOMORROW

IN view of the rising number of Covid-19 cases, the government is requiring the public to conduct self-test today and tomorrow.

Individuals should declare the results through the Declaration Platform of Rapid Antigen Test Results.

Citizens who fail to upload the rapid antigen test (RAT) result today will be assigned a yellow health code by midnight of July 2. The concerned individuals have to report their RAT result within July 2 in order to convert their health code back to green colour.

Otherwise, their health code will be locked as yellow at midnight of July

3 and they must undergo a nucleic acid test at their own expense in order to convert their health code back to green code.

For people who have completed the RATs as required, but assigned with a red/yellow health code, they may visit the Enquiries and Assistance Platform for COVID-19 Prevention and Control (<https://www.ssm.gov.mo/covidq>) to apply for removal of red/yellow health code.

If the rapid antigen test result is positive, one should call an ambulance by phone at 119, 120 or 2857 2222 to go to Conde de São Januário Hospital to undergo a nucleic acid test as soon as possible. **LV**

5G NETWORK TENDER ACCEPTING BIDS UNTIL AUG. 12

RENATO MARQUES

THE government has finally launched the much-anticipated public tender for the fifth generation of wireless communication networks (5G).

The rules and regulations for the public tender were published this week on the government's official gazette, stating that proposals can be submitted until 5 p.m. August 12.

The government expects that, after the tender, operators will be able to launch the 5G service in Macau within the first quarter of 2023, the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) said in a press statement.

The regulation notes that "all companies licensed to install and operate a public mobile telecommunications network and provide public mobile telecommunications services in Macau" are eligible to submit a proposal, which restricts the tender to the current four operators of 3G and 4G communications (CTM, SmarTone, Hutchison - Three, and China Telecom).

Among the rules, it is also stated that bidders cannot, when bids are



Vice president of CTM Network Services, Declan Leong, presents 5G development to the press, last month

submitted, hold a shareholding or interest in another company also tendering, and that if any change to the company stakeholders occurs during the tender, CTT must be immediately notified.

The proposal documents should also include a system construction plan, including the detailed construction project on the network coverage indicating the specific scope of the network

coverage, with the minimum goal of building, at the bidder's expense, "a system capable of effectively reaching a minimum of 50% of the Macau SAR territory within 12 months counting from the date of

issue of the license," also providing, in the following 18 months, "the coverage, with good quality, of the entire territory through the construction of a system, owned solely by the tenderer or owned in partnership with another entity through infrastructure sharing."

The proposal must also indicate the system's capacity, expandable capacity, available network speed, and adopt a mandatory 3GPP technical standard, among other technical requirements.

The CTT also said that the proposal documents must include details about the structure and size of the tenderer as well as an estimation of the number of job that will be created in the local labor market.

The company plans for the 5G network should also include expansion plans, social benefits, and investment for the first five years.

The period of validity of the proposals is 240 days, counting from August 15, the date on which the bids received will be opened.

Last month, the major communications player - CTM - urged the government to move forward with the tender, claiming that Macau is already several years late in implementing this technology in comparison with the mainland, Hong Kong and South Korea, to note a few, which have launched the service in 2019 and 2020.

AD

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Radio Taxi drivers stage protest calling for support

A group of Radio Taxi drivers has staged a protest calling for the company's support during this Covid-19 outbreak period.

The protest, which took the form of a slow drive around the NAPE area, and namely around the company's vicinity, urged the company to exempt drivers from paying their taxi rentals, as well as allow them to

temporarily suspend work.

A representative of the drivers also told TDM that they also wish to park their taxis at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge (HKZMB) Port parking lot, free of charge, similar to what was allowed for the common taxis, also known as "Black Taxis."

To support the industry, common taxi drivers had

been allowed to park their cars at the West Parking Lot of the HZMB free of charge as of May 17, until the end of this year.

The same representative said that the company should also change its policies, allowing licensed drivers that wish to provide taxi services during this period to apply to the radio taxi company. **RM**



RENATO MARQUES



FIA officially cancels participation in Macau GP

RENATO MARQUES

THE governing body of the worldwide motorsport, Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), has officially announced the cancellation of all FIA events in this year's Macau Grand Prix event.

The decision affects three of the major headliners including the FIA World Touring Car Cup (WTCR), the FIA GT World Cup (GT), and the "Queen" of Macau's races, the FIA Formula 3 World Cup (F3).

FIA confirmed the cancellation

of these races at Wednesday's meeting of the World Motor Sport Council (WMSC), which convened in Paris for the second time in 2022.

The meeting was hosted by FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem with FIA Deputy President for Sport, Robert Reid, and WMSC members joining in person and via video conference.

The reasons for the cancellation of the events are the "ongoing restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic," the FIA said in a post-meeting statement, adding that such restrictions relate to "ongoing quarantine restrictions and asso-

ciated logistical challenges in Asia."

While the F3 and GT races are to be completely canceled and removed from this year's sports calendar, the WTCR event is likely to be replaced, with races to take place in other locations, the FIA Touring Car Commission further explained.

Regarded by the FIA as the ultimate training ground and talent-spotting formula for the stars of tomorrow, the F3 race in Macau has been absent from the international racing panorama since 2019, when Dutch racer Richard Verschoor won the last race of this category hosted in Macau.

MACAU NOT ALONE

In the statement from the FIA Touring Car Commission, the sub-division added that the event cancellation is not only restricted to Macau, but extends to Asia in general.

"Due to the ongoing quarantine restrictions and associated logistical challenges in Asia, rounds of WTCR – FIA World Touring Car Cup and FIA ETCR – eTouring Car World Cup that were set to take place on the continent will not be held this year," the statement reads, without specifying which events are also facing cancellation.

It is known that the original calendar of the WTCR included three racing events in Asia, starting with the WTCR Race of Korea, to take place at Inje on October 7 to 9, followed by the Race of China to take place at Ningbo on November 4 to 6, closing with the season finale in

Macau two weeks later.

It was also known that the WTCR race at Ningbo was the only international event planned for this year in China, as all events from other racing categories had been absent from the 2022 calendar due to restrictions imposed from the mainland following the Covid-19 "zero-case" policy in force in the country.

As the FIA statement also includes the ETCR, which only had one event scheduled for Inje, likely, events in South Korea are also affected, and the FIA is seeking to replace all three.

"Together with Discovery Sports Events, the promoter of the two series, the FIA is working towards securing replacement events. Further details on the new calendar additions will be communicated in due course," the commission added.

HKSAR25

Industry leaders expect closer, complementary cooperation with Hong Kong

INDUSTRY leaders in the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) are expecting closer and complementary cooperation with the Hong Kong SAR in the future given the two cities' proximity and similar histories.

As Hong Kong is to mark the 25th anniversary of its return to the motherland today, the industry leaders in the Macau SAR expressed confidence that

the two cities can work closely together and better integrate in building the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area by leveraging the advantages of the "one country, two systems" principle.

Kevin Ho, president of the Industry and Commerce Association of Macao, said that Hong Kong, an international financial center, and Macau, which is striving to build itself

into a world tourism and leisure center, can seek complementary cooperation and development.

"The two SARs are both our country's windows to the world," Ho said. "They can join hands in the industries of conference and exhibitions, tourism, and finance."

Alan Ho, president of the Macao Association of Convention, Exhibition and Tourism Sectors, ho-

ped that the convention and exhibition industries in Hong Kong and Macau can take the initiative in participating in regional cooperation and promoting cooperation in the Greater Bay Area through inter-city and smart conventions and exhibitions.

"As a major center of conventions and exhibitions in the Asia Pacific region, the industry in Hong Kong has developed fast since its return to the motherland, particularly in the sectors of jewelry, clocks and watches, and beauty products," he said.

In the past years, scientists and researchers in the SARs have also widely participated in the country's major scientific and technological projects.

Pang Chuan, vice pre-

sident of the Macau University of Science and Technology, said universities in both SARs have cooperated closely in personnel exchanges, scientific and research cooperation, exchanges of laboratories and the joint education of students.

"Universities in Macau and Hong Kong are generally more international with more opportunities to take part in international cooperation," Pang said. "However, they are faced with a lack of supporting industries in the SARs."

Pang suggested that universities in the SARs combine their advantages in research and development with hi-tech enterprises in the Greater Bay Area to better convert international scientific and

research fruits.

Ma Chi Seng, a member of the Macau Sports Committee, lauded Hong Kong's sports achievements since its return to the motherland, noting that the Hong Kong SAR government has been dedicated to promoting Hong Kong as a city of international sports events, offering experiences that Macau could learn from.

"The 15th Chinese National Games to be co-hosted by Guangdong Province, Hong Kong and Macau in 2025 will provide an excellent opportunity to increase public participation in sports in the SARs and enhance in-depth cooperation between the sports industries in the three places," Ma added.
XINHUA

HKSAR25

President Xi visits changed Hong Kong for handover anniversary

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

CHINESE leader Xi Jinping arrived yesterday in Hong Kong to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the British handover of a city that his rule has transformed from a global hub known for its political freedoms to one that is much more controlled by the Communist Party.

In a staged event carried live on Chinese TV, students and others lined the platform of a high-speed rail station and packed a red carpet to greet the leader making his first trip outside of mainland China in nearly 2 ½ years — a choice that underscored Hong Kong's ever-closer ties to the mainland.

Waving small red Chinese and Hong Kong flags, the students chanted "Welcome, welcome! Warm welcome!" while city leader Carrie Lam greeted Xi and his wife, Peng Liyuan.

Under Xi's leadership, China has reshaped Hong Kong, cracking down on protests, imposing a strict national security law, introducing a more "patriotic" curriculum in schools, and revamping election laws to keep opposition politicians out of the city's Legislature.

In its view, China's ruling Communist Party has restored stability to a city that was wracked with pro-democracy protests in 2019.

For many in the U.S., the U.K. and other democratic nations, Xi has undermined the freedoms and way of life that distinguished



the city from mainland China and made it a international center for finance and trade.

In an apparent reference to the 2019 protests, Xi told well-wishers

on his arrival that Hong Kong has overcome many challenges over the years and had been "reborn from the ashes" with "vigorous vitality." Later after meeting with Lam,

he praised her for ending what he said was chaos that had gripped the city and for ensuring that only "patriots" would rule Hong Kong. "As long as we stick to the 'one

country, two systems' framework, Hong Kong will certainly have a brighter future and will make new and bigger contributions to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese

XI COMMENDS WORK OF CARRIE LAM, HO IAT SENG

PRESIDENT Xi Jinping met yesterday with Chief Executives of Hong Kong and Macau as part of his visit in the neighboring region.

Xi affirmed that central authorities fully acknowledge Lam's work during her five-year tenure as the Chief Executive.

Xi also affirmed that the central authorities fully acknowledge the work of Ho and the Macau SAR government.

Stressing the need to maintain stability while pursuing progress, Xi urged Ho and the Macau SAR government to work tirelessly on epidemic prevention and control, consistently and effectively alleviate hardship of people's livelihood, boost economic recovery, firmly



President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan greeted by Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam

promote a moderately diversified economy, and make every effort in safeguarding social stability in Macau.

Ho, also in Hong Kong for events celebrating the

25th anniversary, thanked Xi for meeting with him and vowed to make solid efforts in all aspects and resolutely safeguard the sound development of Macau. XINHUA

XI MEETS CPPCC NATIONAL COMMITTEE VICE CHAIRMAN

PRESIDENT Xi Jinping met yesterday with Leung Chun-ying, vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

Xi praised Leung for the tremendous efforts he has devoted to promoting national modernization and Hong Kong's prosperity and stability since he became vice chairman of the CPPCC National Committee.

Xi expressed the hope that Leung will fully support the incoming chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and the sixth-term government of the HKSAR in exercising law-based governance, and make



President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan wave to the welcoming crowd upon their arrival in Hong Kong

new contributions to the enduring success of the practice of "one country, two systems" along with people from different sectors.

Leung expressed his gratitude to President Xi's care and encouragement,

and pledged all-out efforts to continue serving Hong Kong and the motherland.

Xi also asked relevant parties to convey greetings to Vice Chairman of the CPPCC National Committee Tung Chee-hwa, who is in Hong Kong. XINHUA

Handover anniversary



se people," he said in a speech at the Hong Kong West Kowloon train station.

Since Britain returned the territory to Chinese rule on July 1, 1997, Hong

Kong has been a special administrative region that, like nearby Macau, is governed separately from the rest of China. But Xi has steadily eroded that distinction, and critics say, undermi-

ned the policy of maintaining two systems.

On Friday, he will celebrate the anniversary of the handover and officiate at the swearing in of John Lee, who will succeed Lam as city leader.

It is Xi's first time outside of mainland China since the COVID-19 pandemic took hold and Beijing imposed a "zero-COVID" policy that includes severe restrictions on travel.

It's also his first visit to Hong Kong since the massive protests that grew to include calls for broader democratic freedoms — but only appeared to harden Beijing's resolve to limit civil liberties in the territory.

Local media reported that Xi and Peng planned to spend last night in the Chinese city of Shenzhen — 15 minutes away from Hong Kong by high-speed train — and return to the city on Friday. It's not clear why that's the case but could reflect concerns about COVID-19 or security.

As part of his visit, Xi met yesterday with some 160 people from various sectors of Hong Kong, including businessmen, religious leaders and politicians. He then visited the Hong Kong Science Park to inspect Hong Kong's development of innovation and technology, according to a government statement.

Earlier this week, thousands of guests for the July 1 events — including top officials, lawmakers and diplomats — checked in to quarantine hotels and have taken daily tests as part of coronavirus precautions.

Police have also ramped up security, designating security zones and road closures as well as a no-fly zone for Friday.

More than 10 journalists from local and international media outlets had their applications to cover the today's events rejected this week on "security grounds." **MDT/AP**

Facts prove great strength of 'One country, two systems': Xi

FACTS have demonstrated the great strength of "One country, two systems," Chinese President Xi Jinping said yesterday.

In a period of time, Hong Kong had withstood a series of grave tests and overcome a series of risks and challenges. Hong Kong has since emerged stronger and shown great vigor, Xi said upon his arrival at the West Kowloon high-speed rail station.

Facts have proven the great strength of "One country, two systems," which guarantees Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability and ensures the well-being

of the Hong Kong compatriots, said Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission.

Xi also said he has all along been concerned about Hong Kong and his heart is always with Hong Kong compatriots.

"It has been five years since my last visit to Hong Kong," said Xi.

Over the past five years, I have been all along concerned about and caring for Hong Kong, and my heart is always with Hong Kong compatriots, Xi said. **XINHUA**



COVID-19

RESTRICTIONS EASE IN SHANGHAI AS CASE NUMBERS DROP

SHANGHAI is moving to allow in-person dining and reopening its Disney Resort theme park as domestically transmitted cases of COVID-19 in China's largest city remain at zero following a more than two-month lockdown.

Chinese officials hail their hardline "zero-COVID" policy for stemming the growth of cases and deaths from the virus, despite the enormous cost to the Chinese economy and international supply chains reliant on China's manufacturing and shipping abilities that have been thrown askew.

China has repeatedly defended the policy and indications are it will maintain "zero-COVID" at least through the spring of 2023, when President Xi Jinping is expected to be installed for a third five-year term as head of the world's second-largest economy and a rising competitor to the United States in the Indo-Pacific region.

In remarks carried by the official Xinhua News Agency, Xi on Wednesday said China's policies against the virus have "protected people's lives and health to the greatest extent."

Xi was speaking during a visit to the central city of Wuhan, where the virus was first detected in late 2019 before the outbreak of the pandemic that has killed more than 6.3 million people worldwide, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University in the United States.

"If China had adopted the 'herd immunity' policy or a hands-off approach, given its large population, the country would have faced catastrophic consequences," Xinhua quoted Xi as saying.

Even if there are some temporary impacts on the economy, we will not put people's lives and health in harm's way, and we must protect the elderly and the children in particular," Xi said, according to Xinhua.

Having associated himself so closely with "zero-COVID," any backdown by Xi would be seen as a political liability as he seeks to ensure his further control of domestic power and influence abroad.

China's tough approach, which involves lockdowns on hundreds of millions of people, mass testing costing billions of dollars and quarantines upending thousands of lives "are the most economical and effective," Xinhua reported Xi as saying.

Xi also warned against "any tendency to let down guard, grow weary of the fight, or slacken prevention and control efforts."

Despite the loosened restrictions, a negative test result on your mobile phone is still required for access to most public spaces in Shanghai and other cities.

Shanghai resident Amber Liu said she had long been hoping to leave the city for Chinese holiday destinations, such as the tropical island beaches of Sanya or the mountains and deserts of Yunnan, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Quarantine restrictions still made that difficult, if not impossible, she said.

"It's a tricky kind of normalcy," Liu said. "I think life is surreal now. It feels like there's still a long way to go before a full recovery. [...] Everyone is resigned to the situation." **MDT/AP**

Russia and China slam NATO after alliance raises alarm

JILL LAWLESS,
JOSEPH WILSON
& SYLVIE CORBET, MADRID

NATO faced rebukes from Moscow and Beijing yesterday after it declared Russia a “direct threat” and said China posed “serious challenges” to global stability.

The Western military alliance was wrapping up a summit in Madrid, where it issued a stark warning that the world has been plunged into a dangerous phase of big-power competition and myriad threats, from cyberattacks to climate change.

NATO leaders also formally invited Finland and Sweden to join the alliance, after overcoming opposition from Turkey. If the Nordic nations’ accession is approved by the 30 member nations, it will give NATO a new 800-mile (1,300 kilometer) border with Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned he would respond in kind if the Nordic pair allowed NATO troops and military infrastructure onto their territory. He said Russia would have to “create the same threats for the territory from which threats against us are created.”

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said Putin’s threats were “nothing new.”

“Of course, we have to expect some kind of surprises from Putin, but I doubt that he is attacking Sweden or Finland directly,” Kallas said as she arrived at the summit’s conference center venue. “We will see cyberattacks definitely. We will see hybrid attacks, information war is going on. But not the conventional war.”

China accused the alliance of “maliciously attacking and smearing” the country. Its mission to the European Union said NATO “claims that other countries pose challenges, but it is NATO that is creating problems around the world.”

NATO leaders turned their gaze south for a final summit session yesterday focused on Africa’s Sahel region and the Middle East, where political instability — aggravated by climate change and food insecurity sparked by the war in Ukraine — is driving large num-



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, left, speaks with U.S. President Joe Biden during a round table meeting at a NATO summit in Madrid, Spain, yesterday

bers of migrants toward Europe.

“It is in our interest to continue working with our close partners in the south to fight shared challenges together,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said.

But it was Russia that dominated the summit. Stoltenberg said Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine had brought “the biggest overhaul of our collective defense since the end of the Cold War.”

The invasion shattered Europe’s peace, and in response NATO has poured troops and weapons into Eastern Europe on a scale unseen in decades. Member nations have given Ukraine billions in military and civilian aid to strengthen its resistance.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who addressed the summit by video link, asked for more. He urged NATO to send modern artillery systems and other weapons and warned the leaders they either had to provide Kyiv with the help it needed or “face a delayed war between Russia and yourself.”

“The question is, who’s next? Moldova? Or the Baltics? Or Poland? The answer is: all of them,” he said.

At the summit, NATO leaders agreed to dramatically scale up military force along the alliance’s eastern flank, where countries from Romania to the Baltic states worry about Russia’s future plans.

They announced plans to increase almost eight-fold the size of the alliance’s rapid reaction force, from

40,000 to 300,000 troops, by next year. The troops will be based in their home nations but dedicated to specific countries in the east, where the alliance plans to build up stocks of equipment and ammunition.

U.S. President Joe Biden, whose country provides the bulk of NATO’s firepower, announced a hefty boost in America’s military presence in Europe, including a permanent U.S. base in Poland, two more Navy destroyers based in Rota, Spain, and two more F35 squadrons in the U.K.

The expansion will keep 100,000 troops in Europe for the foreseeable future, up from 80,000 before the war in Ukraine began.

Biden said Putin had believed NATO members would splinter after he invaded Ukraine, but the Russian leader got the opposite response.

“You’re gonna get the NATO-ization of Europe,” Biden said. “And that’s exactly what he didn’t want, but exactly what needs to be done to guarantee security for Europe.”

Still, strains among NATO allies have emerged as the cost of energy and other essential goods has skyrocketed, partly because of the war and tough Western sanctions on Russia. There also are tensions over how the war will end and what, if any, concessions Ukraine should make.

Money remains a sensitive issue — just nine of NATO’s 30 members currently meet the organization’s target of spending 2% of gross domestic product on defense.

Britain, one of the nine, announced a further 1 billion pounds (\$1.21 billion) in military support to Ukraine yesterday.

At what Stoltenberg called a “transformative” summit, the leaders published NATO’s new Strategic Concept, its once-a-decade set of priorities and goals.

The last such document, in 2010, called Russia a “strategic partner.” Now, NATO is accusing Russia of using “coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation” to extend its reach.

The 2010 document made no mention of China, but the new one addressed Beijing’s growing economic and military reach.

“China is not our adversary, but we must be clear-eyed about the serious challenges it represents,” Stoltenberg said on Wednesday.

NATO said that China “strives to subvert the rules-based international order, including in the space, cyber and maritime domains” and warned of its close ties with Moscow.

The alliance said, however, that it remained “open to constructive engagement” with Beijing.

China shot back that NATO was a source of instability and vowed to defend its interests.

“Since NATO positions China as a ‘systemic challenge,’ we have to pay close attention and respond in a coordinated way. When it comes to acts that undermine China’s interests, we will make firm and strong responses,” its statement said. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1997 HONG KONG HANDED OVER TO CHINESE CONTROL



Hong Kong has been handed back to the Chinese authorities - ending more than 150 years of British control.

The British flag was lowered over Government House - home to the last Governor Chris Patten for the past five years - at midnight last night.

The flag was presented to Mr Patten who was then driven off in his official Rolls Royce, before the car was handed over to Tung Chee-hwa, the territory’s Chief Executive.

In his farewell speech, Mr Patten said: “The story of this great city is about the years before this night and the years of success that will surely follow it.”

Britain has controlled Hong Kong island since 1842 - apart from a brief period during World War II when the Japanese took over.

A huge fireworks display lit up Victoria Harbour at 2000 local time. One hour later, 4,000 guests sat down to a banquet in the Convention Centre on the harbour front, while 509 Chinese troops crossed the land border into Hong Kong.

Among the guests for the final handover ceremony at the Convention Centre were Prince Charles, Prime Minister Tony Blair, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and Chris Patten. Chinese dignitaries included President Jiang Zemin, Premier Li Peng, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and military leader General Zhang Wannian.

In Beijing the ceremony was watched on giant screens erected in Tiananmen Square.

At the stroke of midnight, the red digits of the countdown clock turned to zero and the hand-picked crowd roared its approval.

Shortly afterwards, Prince Charles and Mr Patten boarded the Royal Yacht Britannia and waved a final farewell to the strains of Rule Britannia and Land of Hope and Glory.

Just half an hour after the handover, there was a demonstration by the Hong Kong Democratic Party outside the Legislative Council building - but it did not delay the inauguration of the new Special Administrative Region government.

Tung Chee-hwa was sworn in as Hong Kong’s new leader.

“This is a momentous and historic day ... Hong Kong and China are whole again,” said Mr Tung.

But he promised, “We value this empowerment and we will exercise our powers prudently and responsibly.”

CourtesyBBCNews

IN CONTEXT

Discussions between Britain and China on the future of Hong Kong began in 1982.

After 22 rounds of formal talks, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Chinese counterpart, Zhao Ziyang, signed the Joint Declaration in 1984.



In 1992, Chris Patten was sworn in as the last governor of Hong Kong with a remit to prepare for the colony’s democratic future under Chinese rule.

Democratic elections were held in 1995 for the new Legislative Council.

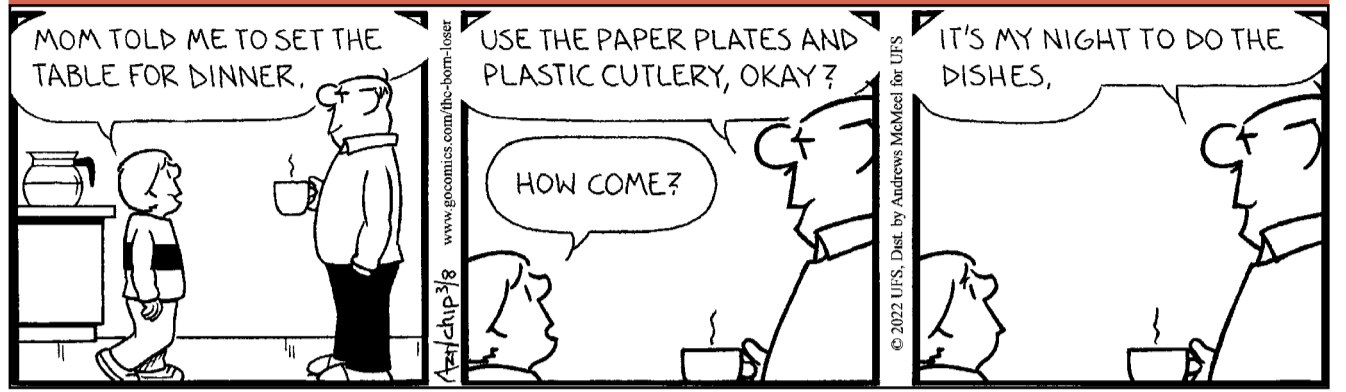
Proposals to introduce controversial new security laws in 2002 galvanised public opinion to a degree not seen since the handover.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

 ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Your magnetic, outgoing personality will capture hearts. Avoid any hassles. Do things that involve children. Put your efforts into being creative.	 TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Take some time out. Your outgoing nature will win hearts. You may be likely to have difficulties with females. You can make amends by taking them somewhere special.
 GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Try not to lose your cool, and make your point known. You are best to stick to yourself today. Someone you work with may be trying to make you look bad.	 CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Hidden matters are likely to surface. You don't need to pay out in order to have fun. This is not the best time to take a risk, to gamble or spend money you really can't afford to part with.
 LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 You should look into making some physical changes, such as new hair color or toning up your body. Opportunities to get involved in self improvement projects will be rewarding.	 VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Do things for them but don't allow them to make unreasonable requests. Your temper could get the better of you if you confront personal situations. Work diligently and you will get ahead today.
 LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 You can meet new friends who will let you know just how valuable you are. Accept the inevitable. You should regain some of your self esteem if you get involved in organizational functions.	 SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Physical limitations are possible if you aren't careful. Someone you live with may feel totally neglected. Your position may be in question if you haven't been pulling your weight.
 SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Be careful signing important contracts today. Don't overextend your self in order to add luxury items to your entertainment center. Don't let the cat out of the bag.	 CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Be prudent and don't be led down the garden path. Help elders in your family. You can ferret out secret information if you just listen to what others have to say.
 AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Your interest in religion and philosophy may lead you to specific destinations. You can expect opposition at work. Don't let your competition be privy to information that could be incriminating.	 PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Keep your mind on your work and stay away from situations that could ruin your reputation. Keep important information to yourself. Travel is evident, but be cautious while in transit.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	21	29	rain
Changchun	19	29	cloudy
Chengdu	23	34	overcast
Chongqing	25	37	cloudy
Fuzhou	27	32	rain
Guangzhou	26	34	thunderstorms
Guiyang	19	27	showers
Haikou	26	33	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	27	34	rain
Harbin	19	29	cloudy
Hefei	24	32	rain
Nanjing	25	31	thunderstorms
Shanghai	26	32	rain
Taipei	25	30	cloudy
Wuhan	26	34	cloudy
Hong Kong	28	31	thunderstorms
WORLD			
Moscow	15	26	overcast
Frankfurt	14	22	overcast
Paris	11	17	rain
London	12	19	showers
New York	22	32	clear

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Gillette brand; 5- Hand woven wall hanging; 10- Spanish surrealist; 14- Swedish auto; 15- Hit back, perhaps; 16- Thor's father; 17- "On the Waterfront" director Kazan; 18- ___ Picchu; 19- Carefree outing; 20- Pres., militarily; 21- Queen of Egypt; 23- That's awful; 25- Alley-___; 26- Sicken; 31- Ward off; 35- Fashion monogram; 36- Family tree member; 38- Great reviews; 40- Kitchen addition; 42- Piece of history; 44- Legal claim; 45- ___ firma; 47- Less loony; 49- It's past due; 50- Carries on; 52- Precedent; 54- Beverage commonly drunk in England; 56- Large body of water; 57- Move from a boat to a barge, e.g.; 62- Revenuers, for short; 66- Normandy city; 67- Vinegary prefix; 68- Title; 69- Rat-___; 70- Maxim; 71- Zenith; 72- Just the ___; 73- Antiknock fluid; 74- Fleshy fruit;


DOWN 1- Wait ___; 2- Anklebones; 3- Drops from the sky; 4- Calculating device; 5- Vinyl resting place; 6- Actual; 7- Speed contest; 8- Blessed sound?; 9- Apathy; 10- Blockhead; 11- Jewish month; 12- Old Italian money; 13- Writing fluid; 22- Impersonator; 24- ___-X; 26- Russian no; 27- Fall bloomer; 28- Extremely; 29- Driving aids; 30- Dazzling display; 32- Friend; 33- Patti LuPone role; 34- Ogl'es; 37- Mozart's "___ kleine Nachtmusik"; 39- Dagger of yore; 41- Directional ending; 43- Reservoir for sewage; 46- Env. notation; 48- Hwy.; 51- Opening word; 53- Doze; 55- Horse race venue in England; 57- Parting word; 58- 500 sheets; 59- Initial stake in a hand of poker; 60- 8th letter of the Hebrew alphabet; 61- ___-bitty; 63- Clublike weapon; 64- Jane Austen classic; 65- ___-do-well; 66- ___ in Charlie;

Yesterday's solution

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

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BOOK IT

A slice-of-life novel both meaningless and profound

AS a freshman, Nina has a crush on her English teacher.

That's how "The Most Precious Substance on Earth" begins. Author Shashi Bhat wastes no time with introductions or context because it's all there in the universality of Nina's hyper-specific experiences.

Nina soon develops a fascination with the occult and other religions. Her parents may be from India, but she's Canadian to the core, eating Timbits and Googling the Hindu gods and goddesses her parents pray to. Meanwhile, her best friend, Amy, is learning how to occupy her time with boys and weed.

When Nina finds herself back in the classroom as a Grade 9 teacher, there's a clear parallel between high school and adulthood, both dog-eat-dog Battle Royales. Anyone might be an ally or an enemy under the right circumstances — a teacher, a friend, a parent, a student.

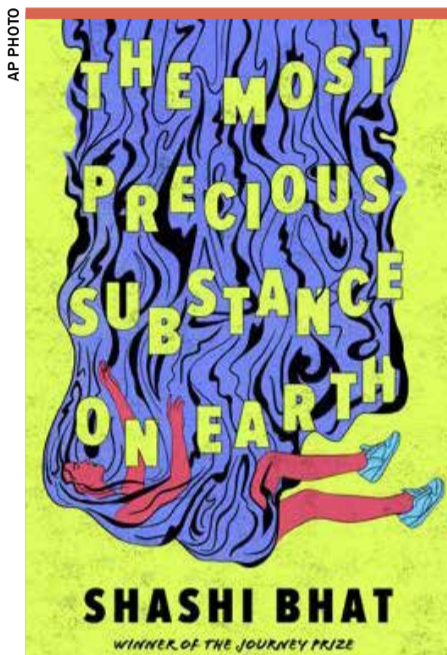
With the smooth suspense of a novel and the openness of a journal, Bhat's writing is transportive as it pops from one major event

to the next.

The vignettes reflect Nina's growth through the writing's voice and style. Early chapters use funky metaphors and chunks of context overflowing with detail. Later chapters are blunt, describing bare facts of events and allowing the gut-wrenching sorrow of mistakes, failures and regrets to live between the lines of the text. It's tough to tell which is a worse feeling — or perhaps better captured — but the entire novel is deeply effective and moving.

Intensifying the novel's relatability, the setting has a consistently strong sense of time and place. Nina's teen years are so '90s it hurts. Bhat weaves in technological advances and cultural shifts as the novel rolls from the 2000s to the '20s, the progression a quiet homage to the decades.

"The Most Precious Substance on Earth" is both pro-



"The Most Precious Substance on Earth" by Shashi Bhat (Grand Central)

found and meaningless. True to life, there is no great moral. The book is neither tragic nor triumphant. Bhat's novel is a slice of life that will either ring eerily true, or be a highly educational experience in empathy. **DONNA EDWARDS, MDT/AP**

tTUNES

HARRY STYLES IS FULLY AT HOME IN 'HARRY'S HOUSE'

IF the 13 tracks of Harry Styles' third LP are the walls in which he lives, "Harry's House" is a place of self-expression, happiness and healing. From the jubilant, funky "Cinema," to the meandering cruiser "Keep Driving," Styles shows a breadth of style that matches the album's emotional range.

Styles set the tone for the album with his single "As It Was." The up-tempo track sounds carefree at first listen, but the lyrics reveal a heavier premise. It's a song that thematically explores the fear and pain associated with accepting that you must let something, or someone, go. It's a single that teases Styles' comfort with vulnerability — something that he displays countless times on the record.

Similarly, "Grapejuice" is deceptively upbeat with synthesized horns and even a subtle, cheerful whistle at the end of the second verse. The song chronicles a relationship's end ("There's never been someone who's so perfect for me/ But I got over it") and how just as a hangover feels harder with age, it is harder, too, to hide from your emotions the older you get ("I pay for it more than I did back then"). Even when teasing out uncomfor-



Harry Styles, "Harry's House" (Columbia Records)

table moments, the musical composition suggests there's freedom in fully embracing each feeling.

In "Harry's House," Styles proves his talent for storytelling — whether it's his own stories of pain or joy or putting himself in the shoes of another. Perhaps the most heartbreaking track is "Matilda" — a song that made several of his friends cry on first listen, according to his interview with Zane Lowe.

Throughout the record, Styles is confident, but not cocky, bringing self-awareness and ease into each song. "Harry's House" finds him at his best — free, observant and content. **RAGAN CLARK, MDT/AP**

AD

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馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata °
趙魯 Zhao Lu °*
馬傑安 João Nogueira Marques

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DRIVE IN

In 'Rise of Gru,' Minion mayhem reigns

JAKE COYLE, AP FILM WRITER

FOR a not small segment of the audience for "Minions: Rise of Gru," only one thing really needs to be said. The Minions are in it. That's enough.

Now five films and 12 years into the "Despicable Me" series, the appeal of the bug-eyed, overalls-wearing, banana-yellow henchmen horde is overwhelming apparent. They have swarmed the planet like that human mob in "World War Z," spreading a happy cartoon plague that long ago became endemic. The Minions are one of the great second-banana success stories.

And the franchise's latest installment, "Minions: Rise of Gru," is smart enough not to reinvent the wheel — even if trying to do so might sound like the kind of job the Minions would love to get a crack at. The outline of the film is a sequel to 2015 "Minions" and "Despicable Me" prequel for Gru (Steve Carell), who here is an 11 3/4-year-old aspiring supervillain. But the coming of age belongs less to Gru than his



Gru, voiced by Steve Carell, in a scene from "Minions: The Rise of Gru"

little army of sidekicks who once again steal the show as they establish their undying allegiance to "Mini Boss."

The perfunctory storyline centers on Gru reaching for his diabolical dreams, and proving his mettle to an evildoer group called the Vicious 6. We're in 1976 California. The Vicious 6 has jettisoned its founder, an aged nunchuck-wielding criminal named Wild Knuckles (Alan Arkin, a voice so distinctive that

it pierces even something this cartoonish). Its new leader, the disco-styled Belle Bottom (Taraaji P. Henson), takes possession of a powerful amulet and then holds auditions for new members in the Vicious 6's San Francisco secret lair beneath a music store called Criminal Records. With hair neatly combed, Gru shows up seeking his big break only to be immediately dismissed as a mere child. In the fallout, Gru and the Minions

sneak off with the amulet.

I'm sure you're just dying to know the fate of that amulet. Thankfully, "Rise of Gru" knows that its MacGuffins are nothing but Minion fodder. More than any previous film, this one feels engineered to enable as much slapstick hijinks for the yellow ones as possible. The plot is mostly just a mechanism for Minion mayhem, allowing them the opportunity to pilot an airliner, learn kung fu from an acupuncturist (Michelle Yeoh) and repeatedly pronounce "San Francisco."

It's not a recipe for the greatest movie ever, necessarily, but a far worse sin, in this world of Minion domination, would be to skimp on screen time for the little guys. "Rise of Gru," directed by franchise veteran Kyle Balda, supplies a brisk and breezy 88-minute Minion morsel to keep the pipsqueak masses satiated before the next "Despicable Me" movie. After singling out the trio of Kevin, Stuart and Bob (all voiced by Pierre Coffin), the plump and talkative Otto gets introduced this time.

Along the way, there are plenty of '70s needle drops, from the Ramones to Sly and the Family Stone, and even a Linda Ronstadt reference. There's plenty of affectionate period detail, too, including a Tupperware party and a trip to the movies to see "Jaws." (The Minions laugh their heads off.) "Rise of Gru" likewise at moments adopts a Blaxploitation vibe or a James Bond opening credit sequence.

If anything, the Minion craze has proven the timeless versatility of the googly-eyed henchmen — a cartoon concoction of childlike slapstick simplicity and eminent pliability. It's enough to make you curious to imagine the Minions in subsequent decades — on Wall Street in the '80s, maybe, or head banging at a Nirvana concert in 1990s Seattle.

"Minions: Rise of Gru," a Universal Pictures release, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association of America for some action/violence and rude humor. Running time: 88 minutes. ★★★★★

AD

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OPINION

China Daily

Xinhua commentary

HONG KONG POISED FOR GREATER SUCCESS UNDER "ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS"

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), which celebrates its 25th anniversary on July 1, is set to write a new chapter in its success story with the strong support of the central government and the hard work of more than 7 million Hong Kong residents.

In the past 25 years since Hong Kong returned to the motherland, development in the SAR has come along in leaps and bounds under "one country, two systems."

Facts and figures speak volumes.

In 2021, Hong Kong's economy grew to 2.86 trillion Hong Kong dollars (about 364 billion U.S. dollars), up from 1.37 trillion Hong Kong dollars in 1997. During the period, its total foreign trade in goods more than tripled to 10.27 trillion Hong Kong dollars.

Hong Kong has emerged stronger as an international financial, shipping, and trade center. It has been consistently rated by global institutions as one of the freest and the most competitive economies with a world-class business environment.

An opinion letter published in the South China Morning Post said Hong Kong remains resilient, fearless and proof of what a progressive, cosmopolitan financial center can be.

Some foreign media outlets have also noted that Hong Kong has retained its status as a financial hub, and some of the top finance executives here are banking on a bright future.

People's well-being has also improved steadily.

Hong Kong residents have one of the highest life expectancies in the world. Average life expectancy in Hong Kong in 2021 stood at 83.0 years for males and 87.7 years for females, compared to 76.8 years and 82.2 years, respectively, in 1997.

These achievements won't be made without the hard work of Hong Kong people who have shown their love of the motherland and Hong Kong, their perseverance, the pursuit of excellence, and adaptability.

An increasingly prosperous motherland is a source of strength for Hong Kong to overcome difficulties and challenges; it also presents a reservoir of opportunities for Hong Kong to break new ground in development.

"One country, two systems" has proved to be the best solution to the historical question of Hong Kong and the best institutional arrangement to ensure Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability after its return.

"'One country' is like the roots of a tree. For a tree to grow tall and luxuriant, its roots must run deep and strong," President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, said on the 20th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to the motherland five years ago.

Xi has always stressed the need to fully and faithfully implement the principle of "one country, two systems," stay committed to the basis of "one country" and well leverage the benefits of "two systems."

"Hong Kong's development has always pulled at my heartstrings," Xi said.

Over the past decade, significant policies were rolled out to bolster Hong Kong's economy, improve people's livelihood, and ensure the maximum number of local people benefit from Hong Kong's development.

The Hong Kong SAR can share the benefits of the mainland's vast market and progress opportunities while also gaining a head start in future growth as China is bringing its comprehensive opening-up to a new level.

The role of the mainland as a staunch supporter of Hong Kong has been given full play to, and Hong Kong's competitiveness has been enhanced.

Development needs institutional and legal guarantee. The enforcement of the national security law in Hong Kong has brought stability back to society.

[Abridged]

WHO: COVID-19 CASES RISING NEARLY EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD

THE BUZZ

The number of new coronavirus cases rose by 18% in the last week, with more than 4.1 million cases reported globally, according to the World Health Organization.

The U.N. health agency said in its latest weekly report on the pandemic that the worldwide number of deaths remained relatively similar to the week before, at about 8,500. COVID-related deaths increased in three regions: the Middle East, Southeast Asia and the Americas.

The biggest weekly rise in new COVID-19 cases was seen in the

Middle East, where they increased by 47%, according to the report released late Wednesday. Infections rose by about 32% in Europe and Southeast Asia, and by about 14% in the Americas, WHO said.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said cases were on the rise in 110 countries, mostly driven by the omicron variants BA.4 and BA.5.

"This pandemic is changing, but it's not over," Tedros said this week during a press briefing.



President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. stands with his mother Imelda Marcos, left, and his wife Maria Louise Marcos, right, during the inauguration ceremony at National Museum, yesterday

PHILIPPINES

MARCOS TAKES HELM, SILENT ON FATHER'S ABUSES

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

FERDINAND Marcos Jr., the namesake son of an ousted dictator, praised his father's legacy and glossed over its violent past as he was sworn in as Philippine president yesterday after a stunning election victory that opponents say was pulled off by whitewashing his family's image.

His rise to power, 36 years after an army-backed "People Power" revolt booted his father from office and into global infamy, upends politics in the Asian democracy, where a public holiday, monuments and the Philippine Constitution stand as reminders of the end of Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s tyrannical rule.

But in his inaugural speech, Marcos Jr. defended the legacy of his late father, who he said accomplished many things that had not been done since the country's independence.

"He got it done, sometimes with the needed support, sometimes without. So will it be with his son," he said to applause from his supporters in the crowd. "You will get no excuses from me."

"My father built more and better roads, produced more rice than all administrations before his," Marcos Jr. said. He praised the infrastructure projects by his prede-

cessor, Rodrigo Duterte, who ended his six-year term also with a legacy of violence, strong-man rule and contempt for those who stood in his path.

The new president called for unity, saying "we will go farther together than against each other. He did not touch on the human rights atrocities and plunder his father was accused of, saying he would not talk about the past but the future.

Activists and survivors of the martial law era under his father protested Marcos Jr.'s inauguration, which took place at a noontime ceremony at the steps of the National Museum in Manila. Thousands of police officers, including anti-riot contingents, SWAT commandos and snipers, were deployed in the bay-side tourist district for security.

Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan and U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris's husband, Doug Emhoff, were among foreign dignitaries, who attended the event, which featured a 21-gun salute, a military parade and air force jet fly-bys.

"Wow is this really happening?" asked Bonifacio Ilagan, a 70-year-old activist who was detained and severely tortured by counterinsurgency forces during the elder Marcos's rule. "For victims of martial law like me, this is a

nightmare."

Marching in the streets, the protesters displayed placards that read, "Never again to martial law" and "Reject Marcos-Duterte."

Such historical baggage and antagonism stand to hound Marcos Jr. during a six-year presidency beginning at a time of intense crises.

The Philippines has been among the countries worst-hit in Asia by the two-year coronavirus pandemic, after more than 60,000 deaths and extended lockdowns sent the economy to its worst recession since World War II and worsened poverty, unemployment and hunger. As the pandemic was easing early this year, Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent global inflation soaring and sparked fears of food shortages.

Last week, Marcos Jr. announced he would serve as secretary of agriculture temporarily after he takes office to prepare for possible food supply emergencies.

He also inherits decades-old Muslim and communist insurgencies, crime, gaping inequality and political divisions inflamed by his election.

Congress last month proclaimed his landslide victory, as well as that of his running mate Sara Duterte, the daughter of the outgoing president, in the vice-presidential race. **MDT/AP**



Ukraine Russian forces withdrew from a strategic Black Sea island yesterday, potentially easing the threat to the vital Ukrainian port city of Odesa, but kept up their push to encircle the last stronghold of resistance in the eastern province of Luhansk. The Kremlin portrayed the pullout from Snake Island as a "goodwill gesture." Ukraine's military said the Russians fled in two small speedboats following a barrage of Ukrainian artillery and missile strikes. The exact number of troops was not disclosed.

German government yesterday presented plans to make it easier for transgender people to legally change their name and gender, ending decades-old rules that require them to get expert assessments and a court's authorization. Under the planned "self-determination law," adults would be able to change their first name and legal gender at registry offices without further formalities.



Poland A year after migrants started crossing into the European Union from Belarus to Poland, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and top security officials visited the border area yesterday to mark the completion of a new steel wall. Today, Polish authorities will also lift a state of emergency along the border that has blocked journalists, rights workers and others from witnessing a human rights crisis. At the very least, 20 migrants have died in the area's freezing forests and bogs.

Denmark A Parliament-appointed commission has harshly criticized the country's government for its decision to cull millions of healthy mink at the height of the coronavirus pandemic to protect humans from a mutation of the virus. The 2020 decision to wipe out Denmark's entire captive mink population had stirred strong controversy, particularly as the necessary legislation to allow such a drastic move was put in place more than a month after the cull had started.