



AOMI AND MFOOD RECORDED AN INCREASE OF 20% TO 30% IN THEIR SERVICES AMID THE CURRENT COVID-19 OUTBREAK FACING THE CITY

P2

ASSOCIATION CALLS ON GOV'T TO STRENGTHEN TOBACCO CONTROL POLICY

P5

RESIDENT SENTENCED TO A SUSPENDED TERM OF FIVE MONTHS IN PRISON FOR VIOLATING DE-FACTO LOCKDOWN MEASURES

P3

AP PHOTO



China Flooding and extreme high temperatures have caused multiple deaths in eastern China as summer heat descends earlier than usual. Record-high temperatures have been reported in Zhejiang province, just east of the global business hub of Shanghai, topping out above 42 degrees Celsius yesterday.

AP PHOTO



South Korea Health officials in South Korea are expanding booster shots to adults 50 and over as COVID-19 cases creep up again across the country. The 40,226 new cases reported yesterday marked the country's highest daily jump in more than two months, although hospitalizations and deaths remain stable. Baek Gyeongran, South Korea's top infectious disease expert, attributed the rising case counts to people's waning immunities following vaccinations and prior infections and a major removal of social distancing measures.

AP PHOTO



Japan A Tokyo court yesterday ordered four former executives at the utility behind the tsunami wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant to pay 13 trillion yen to the company, holding them liable for the 2011 meltdown crisis. In a high profile ruling, the Tokyo District Court said the former chairman of Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, Tsunehisa Katsumata, and three other former executives failed to fulfil their duty of taking the utmost safety precautions despite knowing the risks of a serious accident.

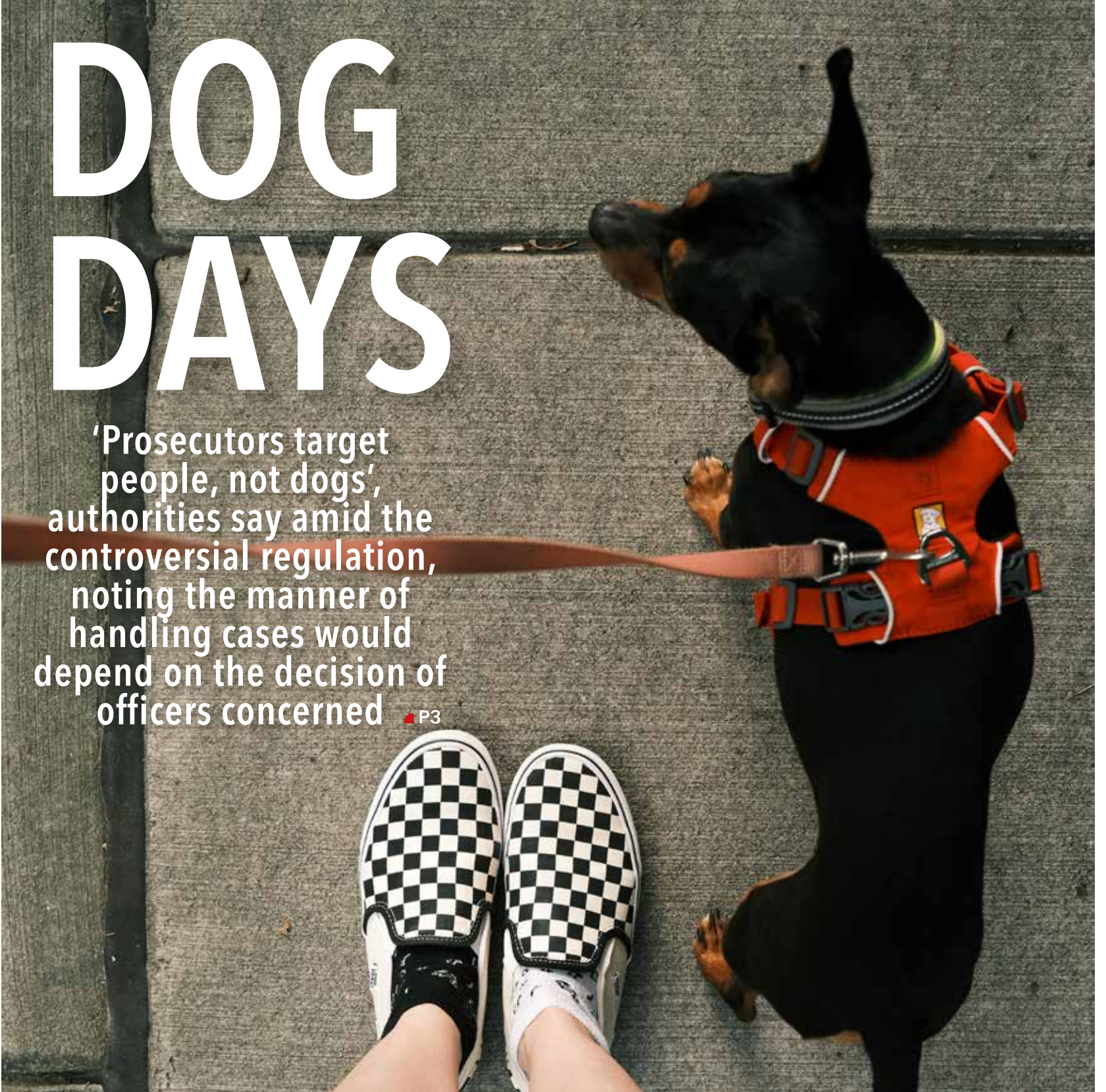
More on backpage

DOG DAYS

'Prosecutors target people, not dogs,' authorities say amid the controversial regulation, noting the manner of handling cases would depend on the decision of officers concerned

P3

TAYLOR HEERY



MANDATORY CONFINEMENT MENTAL DISORDERS AND CALLS FOR HELP GROWING FAST

P4-5

RENATO MARQUES



GAMING BETTER DAYS AHEAD: CASINO GIANTS

P4

Food delivery firms record up to 30% increase in orders amid outbreak

STAFF REPORTER

FOOD delivery platforms Aomi and MFood have recorded an increase of 20% to 30% in their services, amid the current Covid-19 outbreak facing the city.

To slow the spread of the virus, the government has announced a mandatory confinement that bars residents leaving home unless necessary. The confinement has led to an increase in the number of takeaway orders recorded by the two food delivery platforms.

"The average daily number of takeaway orders was around 30,000 before the outbreak, and the number has increased to up to 40,000 per day now," said a manager of the Aomi platform.

The manager said that there are currently over 1,000 food delivery drivers registered, and their

daily average delivery capacity is 40 orders, noting that it is still enough to satisfy the demand so far. As the flow of people and vehicles has been reduced under the current mandatory confinement measure, the manager believes that the pace of deliveries can also be improved.

"As of last week, the average daily number of orders has increased around 20 per cent," said another takeaway platform, MFood.

A representative at MFood said that since the outbreak of the pandemic on June 18 when dining-in became prohibited, takeaway orders have continued to rise. MFood's spokesperson further said that there are around 1,000 food delivery drivers so far. Most are full-time drivers, which is enough to cope with the situation.

Both food delivery platform

RENATO MARQUES



companies said that drivers are required to take daily body temperature checks, clean and disinfect their vehicles, carry out nucleic acid testing every day, and wear a mask, to ensure full compliance

with the government's pandemic prevention measures.

Aeson Lei, president of the Macau Catering Industry Association, previously stated that since residents have mainly been orde-

ring meals via online platforms, there has been minimal impact on business for restaurants that have been directed to only provide takeaway service during the pandemic.



IAS responds in part to social workers' demands

ANTHONY LAM

CHOI Sio Un, representative from the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), told yesterday's press briefing a care facility had initiated the process of shift rotation for confinement management.

On Tuesday, Macao Social Workers' Union (MSWU) voiced demands on behalf of their

member social workers in an online press conference. The union called for better care and living conditions amid confinement. It stressed that it was not against the confinement arrangement, as they addressed the importance of health and safety.

Yesterday, Choi responded to the demands. Although there was not much information, he

said that the bureau had instigated communications with care facility managers to discuss details about entering and leaving confinement.

He then disclosed that a facility would put the next shift of workers in seven-day quarantine today. After this, they will substitute for their colleagues who are currently working. In the next few days, more

facilities will complete similar preparations, Choi added.

MSWU also complained about lack of mattresses in their workplaces, so that workers had to sleep on cardboard cartons or even under their work desks.

Choi responded to the situation, saying that foldable beds had been arranged. Facility workers could request the equipment from IAS. He added that personal amenities had also been prepared as required.

Lack of amenities was also a complaint from MSWU.

IAS has also opened a specific hotline for mental and emotional support for care facility workers currently under confinement. Their families can also call the hotline to arrange to send emergency and necessary resources, such as medicines, to workers, according to Choi. The phone number is 28558802 and will operate on a 24/7 basis.

MASS TESTING

MORE NATMOBILES BUT FEWER OVERNIGHT TESTING STATIONS

IN the coming round of citywide SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid tests (NAT), there will be two more specimen collection buses – NATMobile – but four fewer overnight stations, Luis Gomes, department head at Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), said yesterday.

This round will take place from today to tomorrow afternoon.

The two NATMobile buses will be stationed outside the Macau Anglican College and outside Pui Va Primary School, both in Taipa. They will operate between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m. today and 9 a.m. and

6 p.m. tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the NATMobile will be outside the Affiliated School of the University of Macau only today between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m.

Furthermore, Estrella do Mar Secondary School, Venetian Macao, the Macau Neighborhood Federation Lok Jeong Elderly Daycare Center and MGM Macau will not operate their stations overnight in this round.

Adding to the 11 stations already operating in the past round, the city will see 15 stations operating between 9 a.m. and 1 a.m., as well as 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. AL



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MANDATORY CONFINEMENT

PSP: Prosecutions target people, not dogs

ANTHONY LAM

LEI Tak Fai, representative from the Public Security Police Force (PSP), told yesterday's regular press briefing that "the subject of any prosecution is always a human, not animals."

At the briefing, the panel of officials was questioned on the details of a recent prosecution. A statement from the Macao Customs disclosed that a woman was

arrested early morning yesterday for taking a walk along the street in Ilha Verde.

Some sources on social media claimed that the woman was actually walking her dog during the incident.

When asked to verify the online information, Lei did not confirm or deny the claim. Rather, he said, "A person is the subject of a criminal prosecution, which occurred because a human being violated the Executive Order and the In-

fectious Disease Prevention and Control Law."

"I hope we are on the same line [here]," he added.

Moreover, the officials were also asked why some people had not been given a warning before charges were made. Police officers have told a press briefing that police agencies would strive to persuade alleged violators to change their behavior in a way that the police consider not to be violating laws and regulations.

Explaining the matter further, Lei said that the manner of handling each case would depend on different scenarios and the decision of the officers concerned at the time.

"For example, if a person's mask went sideways or tilted, we may issue a warning," Lei exemplified. "But if a person doesn't even have a mask with them, obviously this is a different scenario."

He said the type of measures applied would heavily depend on the particular situation and scenario.

Several non-government organizations opposed the measure published by the Macau government on July 11 prohibiting people from taking out their pets unless it is necessary.

Most pet owners have slammed the government on social media platforms after the government announced that taking pets out for a walk is "not essential."

A statement published by Everyone Stray Dogs Macau Volunteer Group stated that many opinions have been received from animal volunteer groups and pet owners who have said that their dogs have been experiencing both physical and mental health problems such as anxiety and food refusal throughout the measure, and that the measure is in violation of the Animal Protection Law.

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has stated that it will offer "dog care" services for all pet owners who are facing challenges as a result of the restrictions imposed by the confinement state currently in force until at least July 18.

SMOKER SENTENCED TO FIVE MONTHS IN PRISON FOR BREAKING CITY STANDSTILL

A resident has been sentenced to a suspended term of five months in prison and put on two-year's probation by a court of law for violating de-facto lockdown measures. The information was disclosed by Cheong Kin lan, representative of the Unitary Police Service (SPU) at the daily health press briefing. The summary proceeding facilitated the quick judgement. Pursuant to the law, the convicted is vested with the right to file an appeal. For the probation to be approved, the convicted must pay MOP10,000 to the government within a month. The police said that the convicted was arrested for not wearing his mask at 7 p.m. Tuesday. He was smoking at the time.

PJ WARNS OF FRAUD CALLS

Fraudsters have taken advantage of the latest pandemic situation in Macau and have taken the opportunity to cheat some residents out of money, according to a statement issued by the Judiciary Police (PJ). PJ states that they had received a report from the public that a con artist claiming to be an employee of the Health Bureau stated that they had discovered that the victim had been to a high-risk area in Macau and had to be quarantined. The call was transferred to people claiming to be from the prosecutor's office, who later claimed that the victim was involved in a money laundering case and requested personal bank details. PJ warns residents to be wary of such calls.

TPI SLIGHTLY DROPS BY 1.8%

Tourist Price Index (TPI) for the second quarter dropped by 1.77% year-on-year to 114.87, according to figures from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). The decrease was mainly attributable to lower hotel room rates, as well as the reduced prices of handbags and watches. Among the various sections of goods and services, the price index of Accommodation fell markedly by 15.03% year-on-year, and the indices of Clothing & Footwear (-2.90%) and Transport & Communications (-2.50%) also registered a drop. In comparison with the previous quarter, TPI for the second quarter of 2022 went down by 1.79%.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

City sees the passing of 94-year-old Covid and chronic disease patient

ANTHONY LAM

ADMITTED to a healthcare facility on July 3, a 94-year-old woman with a background of chronic disease was pronounced dead around midnight yesterday, Accident and Emergency doctor Lei Wai Seng, medical director of the public hospital, announced yesterday.

Lei explained that the woman had been suffering from chronic diseases, including chronic cardiac failure and respiratory failure. Before her death, she required full-time care.

Her infection was likely from a member she sha-



red a room with, who had tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. Designated as a close contact, the woman

was diagnosed with the disease and transferred to the Public Health Clinical Centre for treatment.

Lei disclosed that during her treatment, the woman was prescribed with antiviral and antibi-

otic medications.

He also explained that it was the family's decision not to exercise intrusive support and resuscitation, considering that failure of multiple organs had developed as her condition deteriorated.

In the past 2.5 years, the city has recorded four deaths with Covid-19. All of them occurred after June 18. Two of them had received two doses of the vaccine, while the other two had none.

Lei said that the four deaths were not caused by pneumonia, a common symptom of Covid-19 during the early stage of the pandemic. Covid-19 is referred to by the local government as the Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia.

The A&E doctor said that the four patients succumbed to their existing chronic diseases leading to complications or organ failure after contracting the virus.

MANDATORY CONFINEMENT

Mental disorders and calls for help growing

RENATO MARQUES

THE recent measures undertaken by the government establishing the so-called "state of relative confinement" are highlighting existing problems of mental disorders including depression, anxiety, insomnia, and suicidal tendencies, several academic studies, experts, and reports from local welfare associations note.

In the latest of these reports, local welfare association Caritas Macau has said that since the beginning of the community outbreak of Covid-19 last month and over a period of just three weeks, the association's suicide prevention and mental support hotline received over 500 requests for mental help, 18 of them directly related to suicide, *Hoje Macau* (HM) newspaper reported.

The figure represents an exponential spike in the number of calls for help, which according to Caritas statistics topped the figure commonly received over four months.

"Usually, in a year, we receive between 45 and 50 calls [related to suicide prevention], but this year we have had more people addressing this issue. Right now, we need more resources and partners to

RENATO MARQUES



help all these people. We need to have staff working 24 hours a day at this hotline," Paul Pun, Secretary-general of Caritas said to HM,

adding that he expects that the number of requests for help arriving through this phone line will increase even more during the pe-

riod of confinement, that will last until July 18.

"I expect that during this partial confinement period there should

be many more cases. Some of the requests we have received are already related to the confinement that started on Monday. Many peo-

GAMING

Macau poised for unprecedented rebound post-pandemic: Casino giants

LYNZY VALLES

CASINO giants are expecting Macau to record an unprecedented market rebound once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

In an interview with American business media CNBC, CEOs of Las Vegas Sands, MGM Resorts and Wynn Resorts have expressed full confidence in the possible pent-up demand in the city once the outbreak has subsided.

According to them, "Macau has got its best days coming."

Severe Covid restrictions have prevented any kind of market rebound in the second quarter this year.

Since April, Macau has been registering a down-

AP PHOTO



turn in casino revenues, recording its worst revenue in June since September 2020.

For Rob Goldstein, chairman and CEO of Las Vegas Sands, Macau is geared towards a bright

future amid this tough time.

"You've got to basically hunker down and

wait for it to turn," said the boss of Sands China's parent company during a round-table discussion.

"As [Winston] Churchill said, when you're going through hell, keep walking. This is hell," he added.

Just this week, the local gaming operator announced that it has entered into a loan agreement

With LVS, totaling USD1 billion and repayable on July 11, 2028.

The loan is said to be indicative of the companies' confidence in Macau's future growth potential.

Meanwhile, Bill Hornbuckle, CEO and president of MGM Resorts, confident that Macau "will forever be" the largest gaming market in the world, recalled that pre-pandemic, "Macau was seven to eight times Las Vegas in scale."

Macau's adherence to the national zero-Covid strategy has been deterring consistent recovery of the gaming market, as aside from closing

its borders, it has put in place border restrictions and quarantine measures for arrivals from high-risk regions in the mainland.

"The only thing that keeps me up at night about Macau is the state of my team. They've been essentially trapped there for years. It's very difficult and I appreciate everything they do for us," said Craig Billings, CEO of Wynn Resorts.

Currently, all the city's casinos have been shuttered in the race to curb the spread of Covid, the second closure since the peak of the pandemic in February 2020.

Brokerage Sanford C. Bernstein expects that casino closures may last longer than this week, and has predicted that July gaming revenues would be 97% lower than 2019 numbers.

According to channel checks, casinos have only recorded an aggregate of MOP20 million from July 1 to July 10, an average of MOP2 million daily.

fast

ple are feeling enormous pressure, and for vulnerable groups, that pressure is even greater. At least, through this hotline, they can express what they feel and share their emotional problems, to better cope with them and avoid committing suicide," Pun said, advising that from the over 500 calls for help most involve issues related to depression, anxiety, and family conflict.

Interviewed by the same media outlet, psychologist Goretí Lima, currently in Portugal after several years working in Macau, said that she continues to receive a lot of requests from people she used to assist while in Macau.

Lima said that there is a large number of residents who continue to seek psychological help outside Macau as they wish to continue to consult professionals whom they have already seen but who are no longer in Macau.

According to the psychologist, most of the problems on the line are related to depression and anxiety, of people who either are clinging to the past, or worried about the future.

"The problem is really how to deal and live in the present, and that's a big part of the work I've been doing with them," Lime said, noting that in the case of

the Portuguese and other foreigners, many continue to wish to stay in Macau because of fears of moving children that are studying in Macau schools, while others, those who usually have a better financial situation, mostly want to leave since "there is not an [efficient] support network [in Macau] and many people do not trust local services."

Lima also noted the many cases of people practicing self-medication, namely those suffering from severe insomnia or struck by anxiety or panic attacks.

Filipa Freire, another professional in the same field who had also worked in the territory, shared a similar story noting that many of her clients continue to be residents in Macau.

"It is a very heavy situation that people in Macau are experiencing, especially when we feel that the rest of the world has moved forward to other types of policies to manage the pandemic. When we realize that things are different in other parts of the world, it causes us to feel sentiments of injustice and anger. People are exhausted and many are driven to act on impulse and emotions. There is a great deal of epidemic fatigue," Freire said in reference to her experience of her local clients.

ELDERLY CITIZENS 'SOCIAL ISOLATION' CAUSE MOST PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

According to a report published by Macao Daily news-

paper, that cites Peng On Tung Tele-Assistance Service group, the social isolation of the elderly as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions is targeted as the main cause of this group's psychological problems.

Pun Ka Lon, a representative of Peng On Tung, told Macau Daily that a group which is part of the Federation of Neighborhood Associations also called "Kai Fong," said that their phone assistance team has received almost 200 support requests from elderly people.

The same representative noted that most of the requests are not related to physical health, which have been steady at around 10 to 15 calls a day, but instead, most are related to the emotional state of the senior citizens.

Pun noted that closure of the local eateries was the factor pointed out by many as affecting their emotional state as "they used to spend most of their time during the day at these places chatting with friends and relatives," an activity halted by government order which banned dine-in food and beverage establishments.

Several have also reported feeling insecure, confused, and frightened by the requirement to comply with Rapid Antigen Test rules, resulting in the support group deploying staff to help those living alone to help with that daily task.

For the group, the government is not rigorous enough in implementing stricter measures for violators.

The association has called on the government to launch an online reporting platform to encourage residents to monitor whether online social media illegally promote and sell tobacco, and provide information so authorities could follow up.

Meanwhile, lawmaker Leong Sun Iok told Exmoo, "although residents can't get the electronic cigarettes legally, the law does not prohibit residents from using electronic cigarettes."

Leong suggested the government could prohibit the use of electronic cigarettes using this law, but set the second half of the year or next year as a transition period to allow residents to adapt before the law is implemented.

A study conducted by the Health Bureau (SSM) shows a 4% rate of e-cigarette use by students aged between 13 and 15, up 1.4 percentage points from 2.6% in 2015, pointing out that the problem of prevalence of electronic cigarettes should be highlighted.



STUDY: 40% OF THE POPULATION SUFFERING FROM MENTAL DISORDERS

RENATO MARQUES

A study conducted by researchers from the University of Macau (UM) in collaboration with the School of Nursing, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and several major national institutions for mental disorders in Beijing and Nanjing, has found that almost 40% of the population in Macau have mental disorders such as insomnia, depression, and anxiety.

The study titled "Network analysis of depression, anxiety, insomnia and quality of life among Macau residents during the COVID-19 pandemic" will be published in the August 15, 2022 issue of the Journal of Affective Disorders, an academic journal dedicated to publishing papers concerned with affective disorders including depression, mania, mood spectrum, emotions and personality, anxiety and stress.

The study was based on an online survey conducted in Macau between August 18 and November 9, 2020.

It concluded that the prevalence of depressive, anxiety, and insomnia symptoms could be found in 38.5% of the 975 participants in the study.

Researchers also noted that this work is unique in being the first to study the network structure of insomnia-anxiety-depression in Macau residents.

Sleep problems were also found to be the major central symptom in the network structure of insomnia-anxiety-depression, with "sleep maintenance" having the most relevant role in the process. Insomnia was noted as the strongest factor contributing directly to the quality of life.

"Trouble relaxing," "interference with daytime functioning," "irritability," and "fatigue" were other factors identified as interfering with the quality of life of the residents.

The paper is co-authored by Wei Bai, Yan-Jie Zhao, Hong Cai, Sha Shad, Qing Zhang, Si-Man Lei, Grace K. I. Lok, Ines H. I. Chow, Teris Cheung, Zhaohui Su, Todd Jackson, and Yu-Tao Xiang, and its major findings have been published online in late May this year on the ScienceDirect website.

In two other academic papers on the "Perceived impacts of COVID-19 on risk perceptions, emotions, and travel intentions: evidence from Macau higher educational institutions," and "Understanding the reactions of government and gaming concessionaires on COVID-19 through the neo-institutional theory - the case of Macao," both from 2021, researchers also pointed out that public health measures adopted in Macau during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak have been similar to those in mainland China. These include the issuing of a level III alert (moderate level) on January 5, 2020, in Macau, which resulted in the suspension of group tour visas for mainland Chinese visitors to Macau on January 22, 2020, suspensions of casinos and other entertainment venue operations for 15 days from February 5, 2020, and bans of all non-resident workers (except mainland China, the region of Taiwan, and Hong Kong) from entering Macau on March 19, 2020.

Control measures "have had negative economic effects on about three-quarters of the territory's population who were directly or indirectly employed in casinos and other entertainment venue operations, as well as government tax revenues," the first research paper notes.

Another paper co-authored by Xiong Jiaqi from the University of Toronto and titled "Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in the general population: A systematic review" has also noted that "lower or unstable socioeconomic status and unemployment are risk factors for developing psychiatric symptoms, including anxiety, depression, psychological distress and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic."

From this perspective, many Macau residents may experience serious mental health problems at this time in particular.

Additionally, a large-scale nationwide study conducted in the general population of China, which targeted a universe of 56,679 respondents, reported the prevalence of depressive, anxiety, and insomnia symptoms were 27.9%, 31.6%, and 29.2%, respectively.



Association calls on gov't to strengthen tobacco control policy

STAFF REPORTER

SMOKE-FREE & Healthy Life Association Macau is calling for a more rigorous measure to reduce smoking, especially among young people.

The law review proposal aiming at banning e-cigarettes in the city passed in a first reading in June in the parliament, with the govern-

ment considering banning the production, sale, distribution, import, export and transport of vapor products in the city.

The association said that despite the rise in use of electronic cigarettes among teenagers, the number of prosecutions for illegal sales of electronic cigarettes is only one to two per year.

TERRITORIAL DISPUTE

US destroyer sails past Chinese-held South China Sea islands

THE U.S. Navy yesterday sailed a destroyer close to China-controlled islands in the South China Sea in what Washington said was a patrol aimed at asserting freedom of navigation through the strategic seaway.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold sailed past the Parcel Islands and continued thereafter with operations in the South China Sea.

The operation "upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea," the 7th Fleet said in a news release.

Such operations are considered key to the U.S. Navy maintaining its presence in the Indo-Pacific, where China has grown its presence through a massive ship building campaign.

Beijing has also alarmed the U.S., Australia and New Zealand with the signing of a mutual defense agreement with the Solomon Islands, under which it could receive Chinese troops in emergencies and possibly establish a permanent Chinese military presence.

In response to the Benfold's passage, China's Southern Theater Command tracked the vessel's movements and ordered it to leave the area, Air Force Col. Tian



Junli was quoted as saying on the Defense Ministry's website.

"Our troops in the military area are on high alert at all times to safeguard national sovereignty, security and peace and stability in the South China Sea," the ministry said.

China claims ownership over virtually the entire strategic waterway, through which passes around \$5 trillion in global trade

each year and which holds highly valuable fish stocks and undersea mineral resources. The Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan also lay competing claims to the region.

The aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan has also been deployed to the South China Sea, along with its strike group including guided-missile cruiser USS Antietam and guided-missile destroyer

USS Higgins.

"Our presence in the South China Sea demonstrates America's commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," Capt. Fred Goldhammer, commanding officer of the Ronald Reagan, was quoted as saying in a news release.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin yesterday reiterated China's rejection

of a 2016 Hague arbitration ruling brought by the Philippines under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea that invalidated Beijing's vast territorial claims in the South China Sea.

"China neither accepts nor recognizes (the ruling). China will never accept any claim or action based on this award," Wang said at a daily briefing.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday issued a call for China to abide by the ruling and warned that Washington is obligated to defend treaty ally Philippines if its forces, vessels or aircraft come under attack in the disputed waters.

While publicly pursuing closer ties with the Philippines government, China has moved aggressively to assert its control in disputed waters with its vastly superior coast guard and naval assets.

Dozens of left-wing activists and workers protested in front of the Chinese Consulate in Manila's Makati financial district on Tuesday, asking Beijing to respect the arbitration ruling and for newly elected President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to defend the country's territory and sovereign rights in the South China Sea.

Washington lays no claim to the disputed waters but has deployed Navy ships and Air Force jets to patrol the waterway for decades and says freedom of navigation and overflight is in the U.S. national interest. China has responded angrily, accusing the U.S. of meddling in a purely Asian dispute and demanding it leave the region where it has had a naval presence for more than a century. **MDT/AP**

ECONOMY

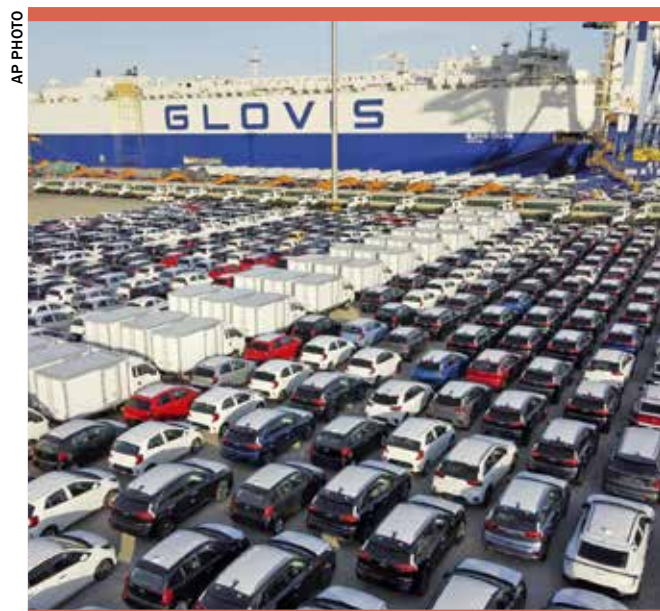
Trade surplus surges to record as exports accelerate

JOE MCDONALD,
BEIJING

CHINA'S monthly trade surplus soared to a record \$97.9 billion in June as export growth picked up after anti-virus controls that shut down Shanghai were lifted and shippers moved a backlog of cargo.

Exports rose 17.9% over a year ago to \$331.2 billion, up from May's 16.9% growth, customs data showed yesterday. In a sign of Chinese economic weakness, imports rose just 1% to \$233.3 billion, pushing up the trade surplus by 90% from a year ago.

Imports from Russia, mostly oil and gas, rose 56% over a year ago as Beijing took advantage of price cuts offered by the Kremlin after Washington and Euro-



pe suspended most of their own purchases to punish Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine.

China's trade already was depressed by weak global demand before Shan-

ghai, site of the world's busiest port, and other cities shut down starting in late March. Cargo handling is back to normal, but economists warn the shock will be felt abroad for months.

"Exports rebounded strongly as shipping bottlenecks eased," said Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics in a report. "But we think this may be the last hurrah for China's pandemic export boom before shipments drop back on cooling demand."

Weak import demand reflects a slump in construction, a major customer for foreign iron ore and other raw materials, after the government launched a crackdown on debt that has chilled the vast real estate industry.

Forecasters have cut estimates for China's economic growth to as low as 2% this year, well below the ruling Communist Party's target of 5.5%.

China's economy grew by a weak 4.8% over a year

earlier in the quarter ending in March. That was an improvement over the 4% rate in the final three months of 2021.

Some believe it shrank in the quarter ending in June before beginning a gradual recovery. Surveys show that might be under way as manufacturing and service activity accelerates.

If that lasts, "the outlook for the second half of 2022 is for stronger imports," Rajiv Biswas of S&P Global Market Intelligence said in a report.

Exports to the United States surged 19.3% over a year earlier to \$56 billion despite lingering tariff hikes in a trade war over Beijing's technology ambitions. Imports of American goods edged up 1.7% to \$14.6 billion.

China's politically volatile trade surplus with the United States widened by 26% from a year earlier to \$41.4 billion. It was among irritants that prompted then-President Donald Trump to launch the trade fight and hike import taxes.

Envoys from the two governments have talked by phone and video link but have yet to announce a date to resume face-to-face negotiations.

Exports to the 27-nation European Union rose 17.1% from last June to \$50.5 billion, while imports of European goods climbed 9.7% to \$25 billion. China's trade surplus with Europe widened by 65% to \$25.4 billion.

Imports from Russia rose 56% over a year ago to \$9.7 billion. **MDT/AP**



Police use teargas as Sri Lankan protesters storm the compound of prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's office, demanding he resign, Colombo, Sri Lanka, yesterday

SRI LANKA

President flees amid crisis as ire turns toward PM

KRISHAN FRANCIS
& KRUTIKA PATHI, COLOMBO

SRI Lanka's president fled the country early yesterday, slipping away only hours before he promised to resign under pressure from protesters enraged by a devastating economic crisis. But the crowds quickly trained their ire on the prime minister, storming his office and demanding he also go.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his wife left aboard an air force plane bound for the Maldives — and he made his prime minister the acting president in his absence. That appeared to only further roil passions in the island nation, which has been gripped for months by an economic disaster that has triggered severe shortages of food and fuel — and now is beset by political chaos.

Thousands of protesters — who had anticipated that Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe would be appointed acting president — rallied outside his office compound and some scaled the walls, as the crowd roared its support and tossed water bottles to those charging in.

Dozens could later be seen inside the office and standing on a rooftop terrace waving Sri Lanka's flag — the latest in a series of government buildings demonstrators have occupied in their quest for new leaders.

"We need both [...] to go home," said Supun Eranga, a 28-year-old civil servant in the crowd. "Ranil couldn't deliver what he promised during his two months, so he should quit. All Ranil did was try to protect the Rajapaksas."

But Wickremesinghe, who declared a state of emergency, appeared on television to reiterate that he would not leave until a new government was in place — and it was not clear when that would happen. Although he fled, Rajapaksa has yet to resign, but the speaker of the parliament said the president assured him he would later in the day.

Police initially used tear gas to try to disperse the protesters outside the prime minister's office but failed, and more and more marched down the lane toward the compound. As helicopters flew overhead, some demonstrators held up their middle fingers.

Eventually security forces appeared to give up, with some retreating from the area and others simply standing around the overrun compound. Inside the building, the mood was celebratory, as people lounged on sofas and held mock meetings in board rooms.

Protesters have already seized the president's home and office and the official residence of the

prime minister following months of demonstrations that have all but dismantled the Rajapaksa family's political dynasty, which ruled Sri Lanka for most of the past two decades. At one point, they also burned Wickremesinghe's private home.

Yesterday morning, Sri Lankans continued to stream into the presidential palace. For days, people have flocked to the palace almost as if it were a tourist attraction — swimming in the pool, marveling at the paintings and lounging on the beds piled high with pillows.

President Rajapaksa planned his escape while he still had constitutional immunity

At dawn, the protesters took a break from chanting as the Sri Lankan national anthem blared from speakers. A few waved the flag.

Protesters accuse the president and his relatives of siphoning money from government coffers for years and Rajapaksa's administration of hastening the country's collapse by mismanaging the economy.

The family has denied the corruption allegations, but Rajapaksa acknowledged some of his policies contributed to the

meltdown, which has left the island nation laden with debt and unable to pay for imports of basic necessities.

The shortages have sown despair among Sri Lanka's 22 million people and were all the more shocking because before the recent crisis, the economy had been expanding and a comfortable middle class growing.

"Not only Gotabaya and Ranil, all 225 members of Parliament should go home. Because for the last few decades, family politics have ruined our country," said Madusanka Perera, a laborer who came to Colombo from the outskirts the day protesters occupied the first government buildings. He lost his job, and his father, a driver, can't do his because of fuel shortages.

"I'm 29 years old — I should be having the best time of life but instead I don't have a job, no money and no life," he said.

The political impasse has only added fuel to the economic disaster since the absence of an alternative unity government threatened to delay a hoped-for bailout from the International Monetary Fund. In the meantime, the country is relying on aid from neighboring India and from China.

As the protests escalated outside the prime minister's compound, his office imposed a state of emergency that gives broader powers to the military and police and declared an immediate curfew in the western province that includes Colombo. It was unclear what effect the curfew would have: Some ignored it, while many others rarely leave their homes anyway because of fuel shortages.

In his TV appearance, Wickremesinghe said he created a committee of police and military chiefs to restore order.

The air force earlier said in a statement that it provided an aircraft, with the defense ministry approval, for the president and his wife to travel to the Maldives, an archipelago in the Indian Ocean known for exclusive tourist resorts. It said all immigration and customs laws were followed.

The whereabouts of other family members who had served in the government, including several who resigned their posts in recent months, were uncertain.

Sri Lankan presidents are protected from arrest while in power, and it is likely Rajapaksa planned his escape while he still had constitutional immunity. A corruption lawsuit against him in his former role as a defense official was withdrawn when he was elected president in 2019.

Assuming Rajapaksa resigns as planned, Sri Lankan lawmakers agreed to elect a new president on July 20 who will serve the remainder of Rajapaksa's term, which ends in 2024. That person could potentially appoint a new prime minister, who would then have to be approved by Parliament.

"Gotabaya resigning is one problem solved — but there are so many more," said Bhasura Wickremesinghe, a 24-year-old student of maritime electrical engineering, who is not related to the prime minister.

He complained that Sri Lankan politics have been dominated for years by "old politicians" who all need to go. "Politics needs to be treated like a job — you need to have qualifications that get you hired, not because of what your last name is," he said, referring to the Rajapaksa family. **MDT/AP**

OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI,
HANNA ARHIROVA &
MARIA GRAZIA MURRU, KYIV

PUTIN'S WAR

Minister: Ukraine needs assurances to resume grain exports

THE Ukrainian foreign minister says grain exports from his country's ports won't resume without security guarantees for ship owners, cargo owners and Ukraine as an independent nation.

Military officials from Russia and Ukraine were set to hold their governments' first face-to-face talks in months yesterday. They planned to meet in Istanbul to discuss a United Nations plan for getting blocked Ukrainian grain to world markets through the Black Sea.

Speaking to The Associated Press ahead of the talks, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said any agreement needs to ensure Russia "will respect these corridors, they will not sneak into the harbor and attack ports or that they will not attack ports from the air with their missiles."

Kuleba also told the AP on Tuesday that Ukraine's military is "planning and preparing for full liberation" of Russian-occupied cities and towns near the country's Black Sea coast. Ukrainian forces already have stepped up their activity to retake territory in the south as Russia concentrates on eastern Ukraine.

Asked about the likelihood of negotiations to end the war that started when Russia invaded neighboring Ukraine on Feb. 24, the foreign minister said peace talks were unlikely to happen soon.

"Russia continues to be in the war mood, and they are not seeking negotiations in good faith. They are seeking a way to make us implement their ultimatums, which is not going to happen," Kuleba said.

Moscow is attempting a de facto annexation of Kherson, Mariupol and other seized cities by introducing a Russian



Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba

school curriculum, doing business in Russia's currency and offering Ukrainians Russian passports, he said.

"I'm pretty confident that once these territories are liberated, the vast majority of people will burn their Russian passports quietly in their fireplaces," Kuleba said.

In the meantime, Ukraine is insisting upon a full withdrawal of Russian forces as a condition for ending the conflict, he said.

"We are fighting for our freedom, for our territorial integrity, and we want peace. This war was imposed on us. This was not our choice," Kuleba told the AP.

Ukraine nevertheless has enough people willing to join the armed forces, he said.

"The only goal that we pursue in this war is our survival.

When you are fighting for your survival, you have no choice. You have to fight," Kuleba said.

Ukraine's top diplomat credited U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Turkish government for facilitating Wednesday's talks on grain shipments. A Turkish delegation and U.N. representatives were scheduled to join the discussion between Russian and Ukrainian military officials.

President Volodymyr Zelensky has said a Russian naval blockade stranded about 22 million tons of grain inside Ukraine, a country known as the "breadbasket of Europe" for its exports of wheat, corn and sunflower oil.

With shipments stalled because of the war is endangering food supplies in many developing nations and could

worsen hunger for up to 181 million people, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization. Kuleba said he was hopeful the talks in Istanbul would yield a deal on creating safe shipping corridors.

Ukraine's future, as well as his own, is still uncertain, the 41-year-old minister said.

"There were numerous wars between the Ukraine and Russia in the last 300 years. But all of the leaders of these efforts, on the Ukrainian side, in the end, they were either killed, or they wrote their memoirs in exile," Kuleba said. "So my personal ambition is to write my memoirs in Ukraine. And it will be a memoir of victory and a memoir of a person who belonged to the generation that changed history." MDT/AP

this day in history

1991 UK FORCES WITHDRAW FROM KURDISH HAVEN



British troops protecting the Kurdish population in Iraq have begun to pull out of the region.

They had been part of a western relief effort - Operation Haven - to re-settle 450,000 Kurdish refugees who fled into the Turkish mountains when Iraqi President Saddam Hussein crushed their rebellion in March.

At its height the allied presence in northern Iraq - which began in May - numbered 20,000 men from 13 nations.

The decision for the remaining 3,300 soldiers to leave was announced in Washington two days ago.

Some Kurds have spoken of their fear of reprisals from Saddam Hussein as the allies withdraw and there have been peaceful demonstrations around the former headquarters.

All foreign troops - including American, French and Dutch - are on schedule to meet the withdrawal deadline of sunset tomorrow.

Local guerrilla leader Tawfiq Abu said: "It would be better for us if they stayed, so Europe would remember us. But they helped us at the right time. If they hadn't come we would all be dead."

A force of around 3,000 American, British and French - and possibly Italian and Turkish - troops will form a Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) in southern Turkey to preserve the Kurdish security zone 50 miles into north-western Iraq.

The allied command hopes this will provide enough support for the Kurdish leadership to reach agreement with Baghdad.

The Pentagon has warned Saddam Hussein no Iraqi aircraft are to fly over the Kurdish settlements north of the 36th parallel air exclusion zone and US planes will continue to fly over the region.

Most British soldiers will return to the UK but 400 will join the RRF in Operation Poised Hammer based at Silopi, Batman along the Turkish border and at Incirlik in south-eastern Turkey's Adana Province.

Courtesy BBC News

BRITISH PARLIAMENT

UK Conservatives cast votes in first round of leadership race

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

CONSERVATIVE Party lawmakers in Britain casted ballots yesterday in the first round of an election to replace Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

The internal party contest will replace the flamboyant, scandal-ridden Johnson — a figure famous in Britain and

around the world — with a new and much lesser-known prime minister.

Eight candidates have secured the required backing of 20 of their colleagues to make the first ballot. The 358 Tory legislators will vote Wednesday afternoon, with the last-placed candidate and any others who fail to get 30 votes dropping off

the list. Further rounds of voting will take place today and, if needed, next week.

The final two contenders will face a runoff vote by about 180,000 Conservative Party members across the country. The winner is scheduled to be announced Sept. 5 and will automatically become prime minister, without the need for

a national election.

Few of the contenders have a high public profile. Former Treasury chief Rishi Sunak is the bookies' favorite and has the largest number of declared supporters, followed by Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and Trade Minister Penny Mordaunt.

Treasury chief Nadhim Zahawi, backbench lawmaker Tom Tugendhat, ex-Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch, former Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt and Attorney General Suella Braverman are also on the ballot. MDT/AP

IN CONTEXT

Between 1975 and 1990 4,200 Kurdish villages in Iraq were demolished and countless Kurdish people were killed in mass executions by the regime. Saddam Hussein took over as Iraqi leader in 1979.

In October 1991 Kurdistan began a fragile self-rule for its population of 3.5m in three provinces of northern Iraq, with a no-fly zone assured by the Western allies.

Saddam Hussein responded in November with crippling sanctions against the Kurdish areas. The Kurds held democratic elections in May 1992 and the two leading parties - the PUK, under Jalal Talabani and the DPK under Masoud Barzani - formed a coalition government in July of that year.

But fierce fighting between the two main factions in the mid-1990s led to the effective partition of the Kurdish region.

In May 2006 the Kurdish parliament approved a single administration, uniting the two rival parties.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You may overspend if you travel today; however, the trip will be one to remember. Travel will promote new romantic encounters and additional cultural knowledge.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20

You always seem to spend more than you make. You may be out of sorts if you have been extravagant or have let children or friends take advantage of you financially.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21

Don't forget that your budget is limited right now. Difficulties with your mate may lead to estrangement. You need time to think things through.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You can make money if you concentrate on producing services or goods that will make domestic chores easier. Proceed with caution if operating equipment or vehicles.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You might have a problem hanging on to your money today. Take your time and try not to overload yourself. Instant romance could be yours if you go out with friends.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Be careful what you consume today. Take time to explain your intentions to loved ones. Think about taking the time to complete unfinished domestic chores.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You will get great satisfaction from your efforts. Lowered vitality could affect your work. Pay attention to small but important details.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Your desire for excitement and adventure may be expensive. Think twice before you say something you might regret later. You must steer clear of overindulgent individuals.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Work quietly on your own. Love relationships will flourish. Travel will promote romantic connections. Give everyone in the house a physical chore that will help burn off some energy.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Be precise in your communications to avoid any misunderstandings and arguments. Try not to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. This will not be the time to give too much to your children.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You are exceptional at presenting your ideas. Think of starting a new business or emotional partnership. Your personal secrets may be revealed if you let coworkers in on your family dilemmas.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Things will be emotional with your mate. Try to calm down and listen to your partner's complaints. Compromise may be necessary. Trips will be exciting.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	23	34	fine
Changchun	21	25	rain
Chengdu	24	33	cloudy
Chongqing	33	40	fine
Fuzhou	26	39	cloudy
Guangzhou	26	35	cloudy
Guiyang	22	31	cloudy
Haikou	26	32	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	29	40	cloudy
Harbin	20	24	rain
Hefei	27	39	cloudy
Nanjing	30	39	cloudy
Shanghai	31	40	overcast
Taipei	25	31	cloudy
Wuhan	29	36	fine
Hong Kong	29	33	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	14	23	thunderstorms
Frankfurt	13	29	overcast
Paris	16	32	overcast
London	13	26	overcast
New York	21	32	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Scarf; 5- Hew; 9- Scapegoat; 14- Having flu symptoms; 15- Small batteries; 16- Convex molding; 17- Length times width; 18- Cpls.' superiors; 19- Herbert Hoover, for one; 20- Curtailment in spending; 23- Ike's ex; 24- Inc., overseas; 25- Cock and bull; 28- Loudly; 31- ___ were you...; 34- Disguised, briefly; 36- Broke bread; 37- Put ___ on it!; 38- Make a trade?; 42- Any will do in a storm; 43- A Kennedy; 44- Public square; 45- Flamenco cheer; 46- Loser's request; 49- Bad start?; 50- Extra-wide shoe size; 51- Bridle strap; 53- Comprehensible; 60- Siouan speakers; 61- Clue; 62- Opinion; 63- European capital; 64- Suffix with exist; 65- Kitchen addition; 66- Bridge declaration; 67- Antlered animal; 68- Minus;

DOWN 1- Swedish auto; 2- Farm measure; 3- Cartoonist Silverstein; 4- Hilton competitor; 5- Gambling house; 6- Minor Prophet of the 6th century; 7- Sworn thing; 8- Hey, over here!; 9- Evade; 10- Evade; 11- Large village; 12- Scoria; 13- Hither's partner; 21- Hint; 22- Actress Barkin; 25- African wader; 26- Matriculate; 27- Cross the goal line; 29- You ___ mouthful!; 30- Skater Midori; 31- Greek epic poem; 32- Bubbly; 33- Brainstorms; 35- Frequently; 37- Competitor of Tide and Cheer; 39- Point in the desired direction; 40- Religious sch.; 41- Plant louse; 46- ___ Pieces; 47- Daze; 48- Pivot; 50- Paradises; 52- Umbilicus; 53- Miners' sch.; 54- Asta's mistress; 55- Discard; 56- Fork feature; 57- Sever with the teeth; 58- Permits; 59- Flock members; 60- ___-Wan Kenobi was a character in "Star Wars";

Yesterday's solution

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

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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- ONE CENTRAL | 2 BEDS HKD16,500
- BUCKINGHAM | 2 BEDS HKD13,900
- HELLENE G. | 3 BEDS HKD12,500
- NAM LONG | 2 BEDS HKD11,500
- COLOANE V. | 1 BED HKD 9,300
- TAIPA STUDIO | 1 BED HKD 6,800
- COLOANE V. | 2 BEDS HKD10,500

FOR SALE

- JADE GARDEN | 4 BEDS HKD15,380,000
- NOVA TAIPA | 4 BEDS HKD12,880,000
- BAI YUEN GRD. | 3 BEDS HKD12,800,000
- MANHATTAN | 3 BEDS HKD12,980,000
- HELLENE G. | 4 BEDS HKD 9,588,000
- NAM LONG | 1 BED HKD 3,780,000
- HELLENE G. | 2 BEDS HKD 9,900,000
- TAIPA STUDIO | 1 BED HKD 3,980,000
- NOVA PARK | 2 BEDS HKD10,800,000

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US INFLATION REACHED A NEW 40-YEAR HIGH IN JUNE OF 9.1%

CHRISTOPHER RUGABER,
WASHINGTON

SURGING prices for gas, food and rent catapulted U.S. inflation to a new four-decade peak in June, further pressuring households and likely sealing the case for another large interest rate hike by the Federal Reserve, with higher borrowing costs to follow.

Consumer prices soared 9.1% compared with a year earlier, the government said yesterday, the biggest yearly increase since 1981, and up from an 8.6% jump in May. From May to June, prices rose 1.3%, another substantial rise, after prices had jumped 1% from April to May.

The persistent price acceleration underscores the brutal impact inflation has inflicted on Americans, with the costs of necessities, in particular, rising much faster than average incomes. Lower-income and Black and Hispanic Americans have been hit especially hard, because a disproportionate share of their income goes toward such essentials as housing, transportation and food.

Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, so-called core prices rose 0.7% from May to June, the biggest such increase in a year. Compared with 12 months earlier, core prices jumped 5.9%, below a recent year-over-year high of 6.4% but still exceedingly high.

The U.S. inflation surge erupted from the swift rebound from

AP PHOTO



the 2020 pandemic recession, spurred by vast federal aid, ultra-low Fed rates and pent-up spending fueled by savings built up during the nation's shutdowns. As Americans channeled their purchases toward items for the home, like furniture, appliances and exercise equipment, supply chains became snarled and prices for goods soared.

In recent months, as consumer spending has gradually shifted away from goods and toward services like vacation travel, restaurants meals, movies, concerts and sporting events, the resulting

higher demand has fueled high inflation in services, too.

Some economists have held out hope that inflation might be reaching or nearing a short-term peak. Gas prices, for example, have fallen from the eye-watering \$5 a gallon reached in mid-June to an average of \$4.63 nationwide yesterday — still far higher than a year ago but a drop that could help slow inflation for July and possibly August.

In addition, shipping costs and commodity prices have begun to fall. Pay increases have slowed. And surveys show that Ameri-

cans' expectations for inflation over the long run have eased — a trend that often points to more moderate price increases over time.

"There may be some relief in the July numbers — commodity prices have come off the boil, at least — but we are a very, very long way from inflation normalizing, and there is no tangible sign of downward momentum," said Eric Winograd, an economist at asset manager AB.

The breadth of the price gains shows how rising costs have seeped into nearly every corner of

the economy. Grocery prices have jumped 12.2% compared with a year ago, the steepest such climb since 1979. Rents have risen 5.8%, the most since 1986. New car prices have increased 11.4% from a year earlier. And airline fares, one of the few items to post a price decline in June, are nevertheless up 34% from a year earlier.

Energy prices soared 7.5% just from May to June, accounting for nearly half the month-over-month inflation. Gas prices have skyrocketed nearly 60% compared with a year ago.

From May to June, the cost of dental services surged 1.9%, the biggest one-month increase since record-keeping began in 1995.

The inflation spike has diminished consumers' confidence in the economy, sent President Joe Biden's approval ratings tumbling and posed a major political threat to Democrats in the November congressional elections. Forty percent of adults said in a June AP-NORC poll that they thought tackling inflation should be a top government priority this year, up from just 14% who said so in December.

Inflation is surging well beyond the United States, with 71 million people pushed into poverty in the three months after Russia invaded Ukraine, which further magnified energy and food prices, the U.N. Development Program said last week.

The war's economic damage has been especially severe in Europe, with its reliance on Russian oil and natural gas squeezing businesses and consumers with sharply higher bills for utilities, groceries, gasoline and more. Inflation reached decades-high levels of 8.6% last month in the 19 countries that use the euro currency and 9.1% in the United Kingdom in May. **MDT/AP**

UK Economy shows unexpectedly strong growth in May

BBRITAIN'S economy showed unexpectedly strong growth in May, with the three major components of production— manufacturing, construction and services — all posting gains.

The Office for National Statistics said yesterday that gross domestic product expanded 0.5% in the month, compared with economic forecasts of about 0.1%. GDP declined 0.2% in April.

But the Confederation of British Industries cautioned that the figures can be volatile. The May data was skewed by the celebrations marking Queen Elizabeth II's 70 years on the throne,

including an extra public holiday.

"This noise will continue to obscure the true state of the economy over the next few months," Ben Jones, the CBI's lead economist, said in a statement. "In reality, CBI surveys and real-time data point to subdued economic momentum."

Britain's sluggish economic growth has become a central issue in the contest to become the country's next prime minister, with all of the candidates pledging to cut taxes to spur investment by business owners. Eight candidates are vying to replace Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who

announced his resignation last week following a series of scandals that undermined his credibility.

In one sign of the headwinds facing the economy, the statistics office said output from consumer-oriented businesses fell 0.1% in May as rising prices strained household budgets. The Consumer Price Index rose 9.1% in May, the biggest jump in 40 years.

Overall, the service sector expanded 0.4% in the month, the statistics office said. The increase was driven by health care as people booked more appointments with general practitioners following the easing of

AP PHOTO



COVID-19 restrictions.

Services account for about 80% of U.K. econo-

mic output.

Output by manufacturers and other production

industries increased 0.9% in May, and construction jumped 1.5%. **MDT/AP**

ENOCK MUCHINJO,
BULAWAYO

CRICKET

US team one win from reaching first World Cup

IT'S almost natural that Vatsal Vaghela's first exposure to cricket in California was at a baseball field, where cricketers had to wait for the baseball players to finish and leave.

Cricket gave birth to baseball, though the offspring quickly eclipsed the parent as the summer pastime for Americans. But step back for a minute there, baseball, because Vaghela and his teammates on the United States cricket team aim to reach their own kind of World Series this week.

They need one more win tomorrow to qualify for a cricket World Cup for the first time.

The U.S. has easily beaten Jersey and Singapore in its first two games at a qualifying tournament in Zimbabwe. The prize is a place at the T20 World Cup in Australia in October, and another victory in the semifinals will clinch it for the Americans. T20 stands for Twenty20, the shortest format in international cricket.

"It's very exciting. We all know how important this tournament is," Vaghela said.

The 20-year-old Vaghela was born in Milpitas, California, to Indian immigrants and a love of cricket, unsurprisingly, was passed down to him by his father. Cricket is small fry in Milpitas, located in Silicon Valley, but it's the

AP PHOTO



United States cricket players walk off the pitch after beating Singapore by 132 runs in a cricket World Cup qualifier match in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Tuesday

only sport that matters in India, so down to a baseball park they went to play cricket.

"I picked it up just watching my dad play tennis-ball cricket with his friends at the local baseball field, and I think I was, like, 10 or 11 when I started playing cricket,"

Vaghela told The Associated Press in an interview.

Dad must have been a good coach because Vatsal's 16-year-old sister, Isani, plays for the U.S. women's team.

The connection to cricket-loving countries is strong through

out the U.S. men's team in Zimbabwe: Captain Monank Patel was born in India. Batter Steven Taylor was born and raised in south Florida by Jamaican parents. Other players were born in or have connections to Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa.


Batter and U.S. vice-captain Aaron Jones was born in Queens, New York. That's Mets country in baseball terms. But Jones' West Indian heritage dictated there was only one game for him, and it wasn't at Shea Stadium. The cricket World Cup was always the ultimate goal.

"For me, it's everything," Jones said. "The World Cup is the biggest thing in cricket. For me growing up as a little man, I always wanted to play in World Cups."



"This is a great opportunity right now. Definitely, it will be a big achievement, we've been talking about it over the past couple of years. It will be a big achievement not only for us, but for everyone back home in the USA."

Well, it's unlikely that "everyone" back home will care. Many will not even know. But this is the time for Americans to take just a little bit more notice of cricket, not just because the U.S. team is close to reaching the World Cup. The next T20 World Cup after this one will be co-hosted by the U.S. in 2024.


Cricket has two World Cups. There's the older 50-over version, the Cricket World Cup, and the shorter 20-over version called the T20 World Cup. The 2024 T20 World Cup will have games split between America and West Indies, the first major cricket tournament to be staged in the U.S. MDT/AP



HOLIDAY RENTAL HOUSES

Lugar das Letras  Casa de Gouvães 


The houses are set in the heart of the World Heritage Site of the Douro Valley and its famous winery landscape where the world's Ports are produced. Both restored relics overlooking the Rio Douro, these eight rooms houses have been blessed with gorgeous wooden floors, plush queen beds and marble baths; the best have dazzling river views. But it is the welcome that makes this place stand out from the crowd.




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OPINION

World views

Silas Laycock, UMass Lowell/The Conversation

JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE: AN ASTRONOMER EXPLAINS THE STUNNING, NEWLY RELEASED FIRST IMAGES

The James Webb Space Telescope team has released the first science-quality images from the new telescope. In them are the oldest galaxies ever seen by human eyes, evidence of water on a planet 1,000 light-years away and incredible details showing the birth and death of stars. Webb's purpose is to explore origins – of the universe, of galaxies, of stars and of life – and the five images released on July 12, 2022, make good on that promise.

Once the suite of instruments onboard all cooled down and were running smoothly, astronomers wasted no time in putting Webb to work. Each of the first images contains enough data to produce major scientific results on their own.

Webb was designed to collect light across the entire red to mid-infrared spectrum – wavelengths of light that are blocked by Earth's atmosphere. And with its giant mirror and sun-shade blocking infrared emitted by the Sun, Earth and Moon, Webb can produce images of a sharpness never before achieved by any other telescope.

The buzz among professional astronomers like me has been electric since members of the Webb team shared tantalizing test images. And the real images are even better than anyone could have hoped for. During the presentation where the first images were released, Webb project scientist Jane Rigby remarked "for Webb there is no blank sky, everywhere it looks it sees distant galaxies." Most of those galaxies were invisible until now.

Ancient galaxies and the early universe

The first Webb image the world saw is of a galaxy cluster known to astronomers as SMACS 0723. It lies in the southern hemisphere sky and is 5.12 billion light-years from Earth.

The detail of the thousands of individual galaxies in the image is stunning. It is like the universe in high definition, and I encourage you to look at the full resolution image and zoom in to truly appreciate the details.

The large white galaxies in the middle of the image belong to the cluster and are similar in age to the Sun and Earth. Surrounding and interspersed among the cluster galaxies are more distant galaxies, but stretched into spectacular arcs as if seen through a magnifying glass. And that is exactly what is happening. The background galaxies are much farther from Earth but appear magnified, as their light is bent toward Earth by the gravity of the much closer cluster.

In the background you can see faint red galaxies scattered like rubies across the sky. Those galaxies are even farther away. By measuring precise attributes of their light, astronomers can tell that they formed over 13 billion years ago and even determine the abundance of different elements in these early galaxies.

Webb is not only producing incredibly sharp images, but it is doing so easily when compared to its predecessor, the Hubble Space Telescope, which was launched in 1990. As Rigby quipped, "... the Hubble Extremely Deep Field took two weeks of exposure, Webb went deeper before breakfast." Once Webb carries out longer observations that allow it to collect more light from faint stars or galaxies, astronomers will be able to see some of the first stars and galaxies that formed right after the Big Bang.

[Abridged]

South African police are patrolling the streets of Johannesburg's Soweto township, following a spate of bar shootings that have rocked the nation.

The country's abundance of guns held illegally is partially to blame for the shootings in which 22 people were killed at three different taverns this past weekend, community activists said.

At least 16 people were shot dead at a tavern in the township of Soweto while four others were killed in Pietermaritzburg and two were shot dead in Katlehong, east of Johannesburg. One of

those wounded in the Soweto shooting died in hospital on Tuesday, raising the death toll in that incident to 16.

It's not known if the different shootings are linked but regional and ethnic rivalries, an organized crime extortion ring, competition between bar owners and political enmities are all possible motivations for the shootings, say analysts.

In all three incidents, the suspects opened fire on patrons before speeding off in their vehicles and notably the attackers did not rob the victims.

GENDER GAP

COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS TO HIT WOMEN HARDEST, REPORT SAYS

A cost-of-living crisis sparked in part by higher fuel and food prices is expected to hit women the hardest, the World Economic Forum reported yesterday, pointing to a widening gender gap in the global labor force.

The Geneva-based think tank and event organizer, best known for hosting an annual gathering of elites in the Swiss Alpine town of Davos, says a hoped-for recovery from a ballooning gender gap hasn't materialized as expected as the COVID-19 crisis has eased.

The forum estimates that it will now take 132 years — down from 136 — for the world to reach gender parity, which the organization defines around four main factors: salaries and economic opportunity, education, health, and political empowerment.

A breakdown by country gave top marks to Iceland, followed by several Nordic countries and



New Zealand, as well as Rwanda, Nicaragua and Namibia. Germany, Europe's biggest economy, came in 10th place in the report of 146 countries. Further down the list were the world's biggest economies: the U.S. was at No. 27, China at No. 102 and Japan at No. 116.

Saadia Zahidi, managing director at the forum, says women have been disproportionately affected by the cost-of-living crisis following labor market losses during the pandemic and insufficient "care infrastructure" — such as for the

elderly or children.

"In face of a weak recovery, government and business must make two sets of efforts: targeted policies to support women's return to the workforce and women's talent development in the industries of the future," she said. "Otherwise, we risk eroding the gains of the last decades permanently and losing out on the future economic returns of diversity."

The report, now in its 16th year, aims to track shocks to the labor market that can impact the gender gap. MDT/AP

Germany The government unveiled a new package of climate measures yesterday to close the emissions gap in the transport and housing sectors as part of the country's plan to become carbon neutral by 2045. Transport Minister Volker Wissing said his department planned to boost the installation of electric vehicle charging stations, expand public transport and build more bicycle lanes in the hopes that people will leave their gasoline-powered cars at home.



Vatican Pope Francis yesterday named three women to serve as members of the Vatican office that vets bishop nominations, in another first for women to have a say in Catholic Church governance. The Dicastery for Bishops oversees the work of most of the church's 5,300 bishops, who run dioceses around the world. The dicastery's members, who include cardinals, bishops and now women, meet periodically to evaluate proposed new bishops whose names are forwarded by Vatican ambassadors.

Italy Hundreds of taxi drivers in Italy yesterday left their cars idle for a second day to protest the Italian government's plans to allow more competition, including from share-ride services. On Tuesday, a handful of drivers chained themselves together in protest in the square outside Premier Mario Draghi's office, and they were still chained there yesterday as the wildcat work stoppage continued.



Portugal A spate of wildfires is scorching Western Europe, with firefighters battling blazes in Portugal, Spain and southern France yesterday amid an unusual heat wave that authorities are linking to climate change. In Portugal, Civil Protection commander André Fernandes said that multiple fires have caused the evacuation of more than 600 people. About 120 people needed medical treatment, with two people suffering serious injuries.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

AP Photo/NASA



A sparkling landscape of baby stars. Image shows the edge of a nearby, young, star-forming region NGC 3324 in the Carina Nebula, captured by the \$10 billion James Webb Space Telescope.