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TWO PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ARRESTED BY THE JUDICIARY POLICE ON SUSPICION OF FORGERY AND UPLOADING FALSE RAPID ANTIGEN TEST RESULTS

P4

GOV'T REFUTES UN'S 'INACCURATE' CLAIMS ABOUT SAR'S CIVIL RIGHTS

P2

CHINA BACKS AWAY FROM GROWTH GOAL, STICKS TO VIRUS CONTROLS

P6



TENDER STARTS TODAY

MACAU ENTERS 'A NEW ERA' IN GAMING: CHEONG

P4,5

AP PHOTO



Japan's push to obtain UNESCO World Heritage recognition for a former gold mine key to the nation's industrialization will be delayed because its application was insufficient, officials said yesterday. The efforts to obtain a UNESCO listing for the Sado Island mine were protested by South Korea and have added to their diplomatic frictions over Japan's colonization of the Korean Peninsula and its actions in World War II.

Japan's automaker Nissan's profit plunged in the last quarter to less than half of what it was a year earlier as the COVID-19 lockdown in China and a global semiconductor shortage slammed production. Nissan Motor Co. reported yesterday that its April-June net profit totaled 47.1 billion yen (\$349 million), down from 114.5 billion yen in the same period of 2021. That change marks a 59% drop. Quarterly sales rose 6% 2.14 trillion yen (\$15.9 billion).

India Seven people, mostly farmers, were killed by lightning in a village in India's northern Uttar Pradesh state, police said yesterday, bringing the death toll by lightning to 49 people in the state this week. The farmers had taken shelter under trees during a drenching monsoon rain when they were struck by lightning Tuesday and died instantly. The victims included four members of a family and some cattle grazers near the city of Kaushambi, according to police officer Hem Raj Meena.

Australia's runaway inflation is forecast to remain too high for the next two years and economic growth will slow without falling into recession, the government's treasurer said yesterday. Treasurer Jim Chalmers outlined to Parliament how the country's economic outlook has deteriorated since the government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was elected in May. "The economy is growing, but so are the challenges," Chalmers said.

More on backpage



COVID-19
HEALTH BUREAU HINTS AT POSSIBLE LOOSENING OF RESTRICTIONS

P3

RENATO MARQUES



CRIME
FIRE BREAKS OUT IN INDUSTRIAL BUILDING, PJ SUSPECT ARSON

P2

GOV'T REFUTES UN'S 'INACCURATE' CLAIMS ABOUT CITY'S CIVIL RIGHTS

LYNZY VALLES

THE Macau SAR government has objected to aspects of a recently published report by the United Nations' Human Rights Committee (UNHRC).

In the report's National Human Rights Institution category, the UNHR expresses concern that China has no plans to establish a national human rights institution because that role is performed by the Commission against Corruption.

"The committee nevertheless remains concerned about the lack of a broad human rights mandate within the Commission and the lack of measures taken to strengthen its independence, including in relation to the appointment of the Commissioner by the Chief Executive," the report read.

In response, the Office of the Secretary for Administration and Justice said that the SAR government believes that, as a human rights treaty body, it is appropriate for the committee to have a constructive dialogue with the party being examined, "avoid politicising the assessment and refrain from making biased and inaccurate conclusions on the basis of unsubstantiated reports or sources."

According to the statement, pursuant to Article 143 of the Macau Basic Law, the power of



interpretation of the Basic Law shall be vested in the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. As a national law adopted by the National People's Congress, it is natural and justified for the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress to interpret Macau's Basic Law.

"The so-called 'concerns' raised by the Committee was due to the lack of understanding of the interpretation system of the Macau Basic Law," the office added.

The UNHRC has urged Macau to establish an independent national human rights institution with a "comprehensive mandate and appropriate powers in full

compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles)."

It has also called on Macau to develop and implement awareness-raising campaigns and activities to address stigma and discriminatory attitudes against

minority and vulnerable groups, "particularly migrant workers and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons."

The UNHR is concerned by reports that, despite the adoption of Law 16/2020 on Employment Agency Activities, recruitment agencies continue to charge migrant domestic workers excessive agency fees.

It further notes with concern that Law 5/2020 on the Minimum Wage for Workers does not apply to non-resident domestic workers, thereby limiting their protection against unduly low pay.

"In this respect, it regrets the lack of specific measure to protect migrant domestic workers, including in relation to their wages, any awareness-raising activities carried out among migrant workers and their employers about the prohibition of abuse and labour exploitation and updated statistics on the number of complaints filed by migrant workers regarding the lack of contract and labour disputes," the committee added.

The local government office, led by Wong Sio Chak, has meanwhile stated that it takes the observations of the committee seriously, and will thus consider and follow up recommendations in the future.

"Macau SAR Government will, as always, continue to take various measures to protect human rights, strive to implement the relevant provisions of the Covenant in accordance with the Macao Basic Law and carry out the spirit advocated by the Covenant," the office stated.

Fire breaks out in industrial building, PJ suspect arson

STAFF REPORTER

A fire broke out in the industrial building located at Avenida do Dr. Francisco Vieira Machado around 9:30 a.m. yesterday, damaging three vehicles. The administrator of the building was notified of the presence of burning trash by a worker at around 9 a.m. The fire was put out by residents before the Fire Services Bureau (CB) arrived at the scene. No one was injured in the incident.

According to the report by the CB, many cigarette butts were found in the burnt garbage. The fire is being treated as suspicious, and the Judiciary Police (PJ) reportedly attended the scene to investigate at 10:15 a.m.

During the inspection they found a burnt plastic garbage bag; no power or heat sources were found near the fire. Both the ceiling and the wall closest to the fire, both of an area of about two meters by three meters, were blackened. Two motorcycles and

a van parked near the trash bin were also involved in the fire.

The tails of the two motorcycles, and the taillights of the light van, had melted in the blaze. The body of the light van was blackened, and two plastic fences were also melted. The damage and repair costs are unknown, according to a statement given by the PJ.

The PJ has initially classified the incident as suspected arson; it has been sent to the arson offences section for further investigation.



Screenshot of a viral video showing large black cloud of smoke

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RENATO MARQUES



COVID-19

Gov't public health doctor hints at possible loosening of measures

ANTHONY LAM

DISEASE control measures may be loosened, when appropriate, if the city's Covid-18 outbreak situation improves, public health doctor Leong Iek Hou, division head at Health Bureau (SSM), affirmed yesterday.

The public health doctor was questioned as to whether there will be a deadline for all regular SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid tests (NATs).

For the past approximately 2.5 years, regular NATs were not required of the majority of local people, unless they worked in certain professions, such as in medicine, airlines, or working as couriers. For other people, NATs were only required on a case-by-case basis, such as when travelling to mainland China or attending certain events.

From last week, NATs have become regular for many people. All those who need to leave home for work are required to take a test every second day.

Leong did not give a direct answer to the aforementioned question at yesterday's daily press briefing. However, she assured the public that disease control measures would be loosened in response to improving conditions, despite the fact that the government has the final say on whether the conditions are improving.

"In our initial plan, the consolidation period will be extended. If ideal results yield from the citywide NAT, we will immediately enter

a period of stability," she said, recapping her Wednesday announcements. "During the stability period, in venues where mask-wearing isn't feasible, entry will be permitted with negative NAT results."

Such venues will include private tuition and continuing education institutions, among other venues.

Moreover, she also said on Wednesday that the NAT drive for key groups will remain for a period of time even after the city goes into the stability period.

In general terms, the public health doctor said that these NAT requirements would persist for some time. However, she added that should conditions remain stable or even improve, these measures may be eased.

"Should the situation remain stable, epidemic control measures may loosen," the public health doctor said. "This has to be based on the stability of our overall epidemic condition."

Today the government will announce details on the upcoming citywide SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test (NAT), which will take place this Saturday and Sunday, Leong said. In addition, she said that there should not be any major change to the NAT drive, although minor adjustments to venues and schedules may be possible.

She was also asked whether new key groups or areas for NATs will be designated. On this, the public health doctor said given the proximity of the citywide NAT drive, no

additional key groups or areas will be identified, unless the condition suddenly becomes unstable.

The city's 13 rounds of mass NAT drive did not run completely seamlessly, as another case of test operators losing specimens was reported yesterday at the press briefing. A journalist revealed that some residents had their health codes turn yellow because they were suspected of having skipped NATs, even though they had not.

"If ideal results yield from the citywide NAT, we will immediately enter a period of stability."

DR. LEONG IEK HOU
DIVISION HEAD AT HEALTH BUREAU

In response, Leong admitted to receiving "scattered reports," adding that the health agency is now in negotiations with test operators.

"We are looking for weaknesses in the process and these are only isolated cases," she guaranteed.

LICENSE RENEWAL AWAIT RESUMPTION

As there has still not been a complete resumption of public health center services, parents have been waiting for infant healthcare and vaccination, as some journalists reported at the

press briefing.

During the 10 days of de-facto lockdown, public services were in complete suspension. Infants having regular services at public health centers had their bookings cancelled due to the suspension of the service.

Dr. Lei Wai Seng, medical director at the public hospital, tried to calm concerned parents by announcing that the health agency is gradually contacting affected parents to rebook them for infant healthcare and vaccination.

The medical doctor implied that a week or two's delay in infant vaccination would not be a serious problem. With packed schedules, health centers are trying their best to accommodate all delayed bookings as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, health centers are prioritizing emergencies, Lei added.

Protests were raised at the briefing about elderly people who could not get their driving licen-

ses renewed as they could not get their eyesight tested at the public health centers.

Reiterating that the centers are focused on more urgent cases for the time being, Lei asked affected people to take the test at private clinics.

Later, it was revealed that the complaints came from people above 65 years of age. Drivers in this age group must undergo their health check-up, including eye sight tests, at government health facilities. On this, the public hospital doctor did not provide a response.

Moreover, when asked about resumption of the public service, Lei asked affected service users to access websites or directly contact the concerned bureaus for information on arrangements for emergencies. Services available online should be conducted so, he said, adding that non-emergency matters should be suspended until full resumption.

PRIVATE COURSE DIFFICULTIES

It was raised at the press briefing that some parents could not agree with private tuition or extracurricular education institutions on teaching arrangements for their children's courses.

On this, Leong I On, division head at Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), said that, so far, 60 parents had contacted the bureau for assistance, concerning a total of 25 such institutions.

"The requests were, in general, about institutions adjusting the mode or time of services," the education official said, adding that these parents could not agree with service providers, so they invited DSEDJ to intervene in the matter.

Progress has been made since then, the education official highlighted, with a majority of these 60 parents having made deals with respective service providers. Only a handful could still not do so, the education official said.

For these cases, additional procedures and legal apparatus are needed, Leong said.

"For example, other government bureaus or departments will be invited to take part in negotiations and employ legal tools, such as arbitration," Leong disclosed, assuring that the education bureau would continue its efforts in intervening in such disputes.

75 MORE RESIDENTS DISCHARGED FROM QUARANTINE

YESTERDAY saw 75 more people discharged from either quarantine or hospitalization, with 39 from the former and 36 from the latter. Since June 18, the city has seen 1,218 released from

confinement. Six deaths with Covid-19 have been recorded so far, all patients with chronic illnesses. Since June 18, the city has identified 1,819 positive cases.

GAMING

NEW ERA REQUIRES DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP

RENATO MARQUES

THE president of the new Commission for Gaming Licenses Tender and Secretary for Administration and Justice, André Cheong, said that Macau is to enter a whole new era for the local gaming industry, with different goals and purposes than those held in the previous 2001 tender.

Questioned on the differences between the members that compose the current Commission in charge of evaluating the gaming licenses and the one established back in 2001, he explained that those new goals require different sectors and government departments to be in charge of the tender.

"One of the requirements is the expansion of the gaming sector into foreign markets, this will bring a new era for the gaming sector in Macau," said Cheong during a press conference yesterday.

Back in 2001, it was the Secretary for Economy and Finance that was the chairman of the Commission and also the director of the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ), and other government officials had the leading roles.

"At that time, what was on the line was gaming liberalization and the focus was on boosting Macau's economic development from the gaming sector so that this was reflected in the composition of the members of the Commission," said Cheong.

"This time, and after 20 years have passed, we already have a certain scale and so the government does not want and will not reinforce the infrastructure of the casinos. We will not do that.

RENATO MARQUES



We will pay more attention to the non-gaming elements as well as support for the small and medium Enterprises (SMEs) and the expansion into foreign markets," Cheong explained in detail,

He added that not only would the nine members of the Commission play an important role, but also a lot of other government departments that are under their umbrella.

"Later we will have works that are related to the Cultural Affairs Bureau and the Sports Bureau, and other services and departments that are under the Secretariat of Economy and Finance, among others. They all going to participate in this work. I can say that all departments under the tutelage of the three secretaries [Economy and Finance, Administration and Justice, and Social

Affairs and Culture] will be involved," Cheong said, noting, "this is not just a new licensing but also a very important work regarding the future development of the gaming sector and Macau, and this is why the Commission now has more [and different] members."

THE ONLY DEADLINE IS DECEMBER 31

Although the tender will still have to pass through several stages, including the submission of the bids, evaluation, negotiation between the Commission and bidders, the issuing of a provisional list, temporary concessions, and final concession contract, among others, Cheong says that the only focus in terms of deadline is December 31 this year, a date when all casino venues from

the current concessions will be temporarily reverted to the government before being redistributed to the new concessions.

Besides that, the timing for all other stages except the submission of applications is "flexible and will depend on the work progress," he said, expressing confidence that this deadline can be fulfilled without major issues.

The same official also said that, like the government, those that have an interest in being part of this tender have already been working on it for some time, and so the process would be straightforward.

INCOMPLETE REGULATIONS

Cheong does not believe that all regulations regarding the gaming industry, namely the ones that aim to regulate the business

of gaming promoters, commonly known as junkets, are a priority.

The Secretary notes they are well-aware that there are several laws and administrative regulations that need to be approved, amended, and reviewed, but said that none of those works are a prerequisite for the gaming tender, saying that such regulations can come later, as long as they are done before the deadline of December 31.

"Regarding the legislation, the Legislative Assembly still has some laws to debate. This is a matter between the government and the [Standing] Committee, which is addressing the bill to see the progress of that work, but I believe that these laws will not influence the tender that we will start from [today]."

CRIME

Two arrested for uploading fake positive RAT results

STAFF REPORTER

TWO people have been arrested by the Judiciary Police (PJ) on suspicion of forgery and uploading false Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) results.

The PJ was notified by the Health Bureau (SSM) on July 27 of two Vietnamese male employees who uploaded the fake positive RAT results. The PJ suspects the two employees' identity information was being used by others to upload fake positive NAT results.

After investigating, the PJ arrested a woman and her husband at a building unit in northern area of Macau.

According to the inspection, Uong, is a 22-year-old female Vietnamese catering waiter; her husband, Tran, is a 26-year-old cleaner. Uong and two men jointly rented and lived in the same unit.

She was reportedly unhappy with noise made by the two men in their apartment.

For revenge, she obtained the personal information of the two men and uploaded

false positive NAT results on their behalf.

At the same time, it was discovered that Uong had declared her own negative NAT result as her husband's.

Uong has been charged with computer forgery, and both she and her husband have been charged with document forgery. The PJ transferred both individuals to the Public Prosecutions Office.

The PJ is calling on the public to not violate the pandemic prevention measures of the SAR, as it is a crime.

JOHN CAMERON



RENATO MARQUES



GAMING

New concessions tender starts today

RENATO MARQUES

TODAY the international public tender for the issuing of the new licenses to operate casinos in Macau has officially started and will take place until September 14, the Secretary for Administration and Justice (DSAJ), André Cheong, announced in a specially organized press conference yesterday at the government headquarters.

The conference was the first by the new Commission for Gaming Licenses Tender and also provided an opportunity for Cheong to announce that he had been elected as Committee chairman, while the Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, will be the Committee secretary.

In his initial speech, Cheong also said that the government is firm on the implementation of all the rules of the recently approved new gaming law so that the gaming industry can expand to include more non-gaming elements as well as expand its market sources into foreign markets "to reinforce the economy of Macau as well as to reinforce the position of Macau as a World Tourism and Leisure Centre," the same official noted.

As Cheong reaffirmed to media inquiries, "non-gaming elements are not just restaurants or hotels, but include others forms of entertainment and events such as MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Con-

ferences, and Exhibitions) events as well as performances and others," adding, "in other regions, non-gaming elements have significant results [for] the revenue of the gaming concessionaires. We are not urging them to have these elements; we are now demanding those elements."

According to the same official, the Commission will take into account the guidelines and goals set by the new gaming law, which aims to reinforce Corporate Social Responsibility in respect of the new concessionaires, including the creation of more job opportunities for resident workers as well as career promotions for those who had already been working within these companies for several years.

The public tender will run for a period of 48 days, more than the first tender back in 2001, when the application period was only 33 days, the official mentioned, advancing that it was taking into account difficulties related to the pandemic.

The Secretary for Administration and Justice also noted that many issues have become known from the 21 years of accelerated development in the sector, including the fact that the gaming industry has been supporting itself from one single source (the mainland), a fact that

he classified as "not very healthy."

Addressing questions about the goals of the government for the upcoming decade, Cheong said that government wants gaming operators to expand and open to foreign markets as well as perfect the demographic of their clientele, noting, "these are important elements that the bidders should pay attention to and emphasize in their proposals."

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLD AND NEW

To the many inquiries from the media, Cheong reaffirmed that both the current concessionaires as well as new players that might have an interest in running in the international tender will be evaluated in the same way and without any prejudice or favoritism towards the companies that hold the current concessions.

The government wants gaming operators to expand and open to foreign markets as well as perfect the demographic of their clientele

"This public tender is open to all interested who have the financial capacity and intention to

invest in Macau. Foreign entities may also participate," Cheong said, adding, "there will be a maximum of six concessionaires according to law, but this does not mean we will have six concessionaires at the end of the tender. Reputability and finance capacity as well as other elements including the operation of non-gaming activities are crucial. If they [the bidders] do not comply with these rules, we might not attribute all the licenses."

EXPANSION ONLY INTO FOREIGN MARKETS

One of the topics that gathered broad attention was the requirement that new concessions must attract new clientele from foreign markets instead of focusing on the Chinese internal market.

The rule, clearly part of the criteria for evaluating the new concessions, is not just a hassle for the concessionaires but also clashes with the current border restrictions, that forbid foreign visitors from entering Macau.

On the topic, Cheong said that such a rule applies for the period of the licensing, that is, 10 years counted from January 1, 2023, a time by which the government believes that Covid-19 will have subsided and there will be no more restrictions

related to the pandemic.

"Of course, now we are being affected but the tender aims to enforce new licenses from January 1 [2023] to enter a new phase. This is a new direction to promote the sector starting next year. The epidemic will surely have passed by then. What the bidders must do is assume this compromise of expansion to foreign markets [at their tender proposals]."

Questioned about whether there was a contradiction between this idea of attracting visitors from abroad while Macau has been closed to this type of visitor for almost three years, Cheong said that he does not see any contradiction.

"The policy of [Covid-19] 'zero cases' in the community is to protect the population and is according to people's desires. Of course, this limits the arrival of foreign visitors. But, as I mentioned, this is not only for this year but for the upcoming 10 years starting from next year. With the recovery of the tourism sector, I think the concessionaires will do all they can to get foreign clients," he remarked.

Questioned on how to quantify the compliance of the casino concessions with the foreign attraction rule, Cheong said that such a ceiling will be defined clearly in an Administrative Regulation that the government is still producing.

"On the phase of evaluation of the bids, we will negotiate with the bidders and define the indicators to follow on that matter as well as the percentage of international clients. We will have a plan for that," he said, explaining that in his view this is not necessary to be defined in advance and before the tender.

AP FILE PHOTO



DIPLOMACY

XI, BIDEN TALK BY PHONE FOR MORE THAN TWO HOURS

PRESIDENT Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping held the fifth conversation of their presidencies late yesterday, speaking for more than two hours as they chart the future of their complicated relationship at a time of simmering economic and geopolitical tensions.

The call began at 8:33 a.m. EDT and ended at 10:50 a.m. EDT, according to the White House. It took place as Biden aims to find new ways to work with the rising global power as well as strategies to contain China's influence around the world. Differing perspectives on global health, economic policy and human rights have

long tested the relationship — with China's refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine adding further strain.

The latest pressure point has been House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's potential visit to Taiwan, the island that governs itself democratically and receives informal defensive support from the U.S., but which China considers part of its territory. Beijing has said it would view such a trip as a provocation, a threat U.S. officials are taking with heightened seriousness in light of Russia's incursion into Ukraine.

"If the U.S. insists on going its own way and challenging China's

bottom line, it will surely be met with forceful responses," Zhao Lijian, a spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry, told reporters earlier this week. "All ensuing consequences shall be borne by the U.S."

Pelosi would be the highest-ranking U.S. elected official to travel to Taiwan since Republican Newt Gingrich visited the island in 1997 when he was House speaker. Biden last week told reporters that U.S. military officials believed it was "not a good idea" for the speaker to visit the island at the moment.

John Kirby, a U.S. national security spokesman, said yesterday

that it was important for Biden and Xi to regularly touch base.

"The president wants to make sure that the lines of communication with President Xi remain open because they need to," Kirby told reporters at a White House briefing. "There are issues where we can cooperate with China on, and there are issues where obviously there are friction and tension."

Biden and Xi last spoke in March, shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"This is one of the most consequential bilateral relationships in the world today, with ramifications well beyond both individual

countries," Kirby said.

The conversation comes as Biden has moved to shift U.S. reliance off Chinese manufacturing, including Senate passage Wednesday of legislation to encourage semiconductor companies to build more high-tech plants in the U.S. Biden wants to marshal global democracies to support infrastructure investments in low- and middle-income nations as an alternative to China's "Belt and Road Initiative," which aims to boost China trade with other global markets.

Kirby listed a number of areas of U.S.-China friction that he said would be part of the conversation, including "tensions over Taiwan, tensions over ... China's aggressive course of behavior in the Indo-Pacific outside of Taiwan, tensions in the economic relationship" and over China's reaction to Russia's war in Ukraine.

Biden, who has kept in place Trump-era tariffs on many Chinese-manufactured goods in order to maintain leverage over Beijing, is weighing whether to ease at least some of them in a move to lessen the impact of soaring inflation on American households.

U.S. officials have also criticized China's "zero-COVID" policy of mass testing and lockdowns in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 in its territory, labeling it misguided and fretting that it will further slow global economic growth.

Other points of strain include China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims, its militarization in the South China Sea, and global campaign of economic and political espionage.

China has vehemently condemn those accusations in several occasions and instances, considering them as manipulative and not factual. **MDT/AP**

China backs away from growth goal, sticks to virus controls

JOE MCDONALD,
BEIJING

CHINA'S leaders effectively acknowledged the struggling economy won't hit its official 5.5% growth target this year and said yesterday they will try to prop up sagging consumer demand but will stick to strict anti-COVID-19 tactics that disrupted manufacturing and trade.

The announcement after a Communist Party planning meeting reflected the high cost President Xi Jinping's government has been willing to incur to stop the virus in a politically sensitive year when Xi is widely expected to try to extend his

term in power.

The party promised to "strive to achieve the best results" in the second half. It didn't directly address the growth goal but dropped references in earlier statements about targets, effectively acknowledging the economy will fall short after growing just 2.5% over a year ago in the first half.

"Policymakers implicitly walked back from the original growth target," said Larry Hu of Macquarie Group in a report. "It means that they no longer view 5.5%, or even 5%, as achievable for this year."

Party leaders promised to "actively act in expanding demand" and to

make up for lack of consumer and business spending.

Retail sales, a major driver of growth, were off 0.7% from a year earlier in the first half after plunging 11% in April following the temporary shutdown of Shanghai and some other major cities to fight virus outbreaks.

Yesterday's statement affirmed support for the anti-COVID-19 strategy despite its rising economic cost and social disruption.

"We should resolutely and conscientiously implement the policies and measures for the prevention and control of COVID-19," the statement

said. "We should do a good job in tracking virus mutations and developing new vaccines and drugs."

Forecasters don't expect Beijing to ease anti-virus controls until at least after a ruling party congress in October or November, when Xi is expected to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as party leader.

China rebounded quickly from the pandemic in 2020, but activity weakened as the government tightened controls on use of debt by its vast real estate industry, which supports millions of jobs. Economic growth slid due to a slump in construction and housing sales.

AP PHOTO



Repeated shutdowns and uncertainty about business conditions have devastated entrepreneurs who generate China's new wealth and jobs. Small retailers and restaurants have closed. Others say they are struggling to stay afloat. **MDT/AP**



NORTH KOREA

Kim threatens to use nukes amid tensions with Washington, Seoul

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un warned he's ready to use his nuclear weapons in potential military conflicts with the United States and South Korea, state media said yesterday, as he unleashed fiery rhetoric against rivals he says are pushing the Korean Peninsula to the brink of war.

Kim's speech to war veterans on the 69th anniversary of the end of the 1950-53 Korean War was apparently meant to boost internal unity in the impoverished country amid pandemic-related economic difficulties. While Kim has increasingly threatened his rivals with nuclear weapons, it's unlikely that he would use them first against the superior militaries of the U.S. and its allies, observers say.

"Our armed forces are completely prepared to respond to any

crisis, and our country's nuclear war deterrent is also ready to mobilize its absolute power dutifully, exactly and swiftly in accordance with its mission," Kim said in Wednesday's speech, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

He accused the United States of "demonizing" North Korea to justify its hostile policies. Kim said regular U.S.-South Korea military drills that he claimed target the North highlight U.S. "double standards" and "gangster-like" aspects because it brands North Korea's routine military activities — an apparent reference to its missile tests — as provocations or threats.

Kim also alleged the new South Korean government of President Yoon Suk Yeol is led by "confrontation maniacs" and "gangsters" who have gone further than previous South Korean conservative governments. Since taking office

in May, the Yoon government has moved to strengthen Seoul's military alliance with the United States and bolster its own capacity to neutralize North Korean nuclear threats including a preemptive strike capability.

"Talking about military action against our nation, which possesses absolute weapons that they fear the most, is preposterous and is very dangerous suicidal action," Kim said. "Such a dangerous attempt will be immediately punished by our powerful strength and the Yoon Suk Yeol government and his military will be annihilated."

South Korea expressed "deep regret" over Kim's threat and said it maintains a readiness to cope with any provocation by North Korea in "a powerful, effective manner."

In a statement read by spokesperson Kang In-sun, Yoon's presidential national security office

said South Korea will safeguard its national security and citizens' safety based on a solid alliance with the United States. It urged North Korea to return to talks to take steps toward denuclearization.

Earlier yesterday, South Korea's Defense Ministry repeated its earlier position that it's been boosting its military capacity and joint defense posture with the United States to cope with escalating North Korean nuclear threats.

In April, Kim said North Korea could preemptively use nuclear weapons if threatened, saying they would "never be confined to the single mission of war deterrent." Kim's military has also test-launched nuclear-capable missiles that place both the U.S. mainland and South Korea within striking distance. U.S. and South Korean officials have repeatedly said in the past few months that North Korea is ready to conduct its

first nuclear test in five years.

Kim is seeking greater public support as his country's economy has been battered by pandemic-related border shutdowns, U.S.-led sanctions and his own mismanagement. In May, North Korea also admitted to its first COVID-19 outbreak, though the scale of illness and death is widely disputed in a country that lacks the modern medical capacity to handle it.

"Kim's rhetoric inflates external threats to justify his militarily focused and economically struggling regime," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "North Korea's nuclear and missile programs are in violation of international law, but Kim tries to depict his destabilizing arms buildup as a righteous effort at self-defense."

Experts say North Korea will likely intensify its threats against the U.S. and South Korea as the allies prepare to expand summer-time exercises. In recent years, the South Korean and U.S. militaries have canceled or downsized some of their regular exercises due to concerns about COVID-19 and to support now-stalled U.S.-led diplomacy aimed at convincing North Korea to give up its nuclear program in return for economic and political benefits.

During Wednesday's speech, Kim said his government recently set tasks to improve its military capability more speedily to respond to military pressure campaigns by its enemies, suggesting that he intends to go ahead with an expected nuclear test.

But Cheong Seong-Chang at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea said North Korea won't likely conduct its nuclear test before China, its major ally and biggest aid benefactor, holds its Communist Party convention in the autumn. He said China worries that a North Korean nuclear test could give the United States a justification to boost its security partnerships with its allies that it could use to check Chinese influence in the region.

MDT/AP

PAKISTAN

Australian, Canadian climbers die on K2

AN Australian and a Canadian mountain climber died last week in northern Pakistan while attempting to scale K2, the world's second-highest mountain, officials said yesterday.

The death of Matthew Eakin was announced by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which expressed its "condolences to his family

and friends." His body was found through drone video yesterday.

A Pakistani mountaineering official and the Canadian Press said the body of Richard Cartier, who went missing in a separate incident on the same mountain on July 19, had finally also been spotted by a search team on K2. Cartier was 60 and an experienced climber.

K2, on the Chinese-

-Pakistani border in the Karakorum Range, has one of the deadliest records, with most climbers dying on the descent, where the slightest mistake can trigger an avalanche and become fatal. Only a few hundred have successfully reached its summit. In contrast, Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain, has been summited more than 9,000 times.

Eakin's devastated friends posted tributes on social media to honor him, saying his death was a huge loss to the mountaineering community. One friend, Felicity Symons, said about their 23 years of friendship: "I will always see your smile in the clouds. Rest easy my dear friend on the mountains you loved."

Karrar Haidri, the deputy chief of the Pakistan Alpi-

ne Club, which coordinates search and rescue missions with Pakistan's government and military, confirmed the deaths of Eakin and Cartier.

"We extend our condolences to the friends and family members of the Australian and Canadian climbers who died on K2," Haidri told The Associated Press.

Also last week, a third climber, Ali Akbar Sakki from Afghanistan, died on K2. Sakki suffered a heart attack while trying to scale the summit, Haidri said.

The Canadian Embassy in Islamabad did not imme-

diately respond to a request for comment.

The Dawn, one of Pakistan's English-language newspapers, reported earlier this week that the two climbers had been spotted between Camp 1 and Camp 2 on K2 after they both went missing on July 19 in separate incidents.

K2 is also among the coldest and windiest of climbs. At places along the route, climbers must navigate nearly sheer rock faces rising 80 degrees, while avoiding frequent and unpredictable avalanches. MDT/AP



Malian women sift wheat in a field near Segou, central Mali

NEW COLD WAR

Russia and West vie for influence in Africa

ANDREW MELDRUM & MOGOMOTSI MAGOME, JOHANNESBURG

RUSSIAN, French and American leaders are crisscrossing Africa to win support for their positions on the war in Ukraine, waging what some say is the most intense competition for influence on the continent since the Cold War.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and French President Emmanuel Macron are each visiting several African countries this week. Samantha Power, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development, went to Kenya and Somalia last week. The U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Linda Thomas-Greenfield, will go to Ghana and Uganda next week.

"It's like a new Cold War is playing out in Africa, where the rival sides are trying to gain influence," said William Gumede, director of Democracy Works, a foundation promoting good governance.

Lavrov, in his travels across the drought- and hunger-stricken continent, has sought to portray the West as the villain, blaming it for rising food prices, while the Western leaders have accused the Kremlin of cynically using food as a weapon and waging an imperial-style war of conquest

— words calculated to appeal to listeners in post-colonial Africa.

Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has been working to win support in Africa for several years, reinvigorating friendships that date back a half-century, when the Soviet Union backed many African movements fighting to end colonial rule.

"Now that campaign has gone into high gear," Gumede said.

Moscow's influence in Africa was on display in March during the U.N. vote to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While 28 African nations voted in favor of the resolution, a significant minority of countries on the continent — 25 — either voted to abstain or did not vote at all.

Russia's top diplomat this week visited Egypt, Congo, Uganda and Ethiopia, pledging friendship and charging the U.S. and European countries with driving up food prices by pursuing "reckless" environmental policies. He also accused them of hoarding food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The situation in Ukraine did additionally negatively affect food markets, but not due to the Russian special operation, rather due to the absolutely inadequate reaction of the West, which an-

nounced sanctions," Lavrov said in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital.

Lavrov was warmly received in Uganda by President Yoweri Museveni, who for years has been a U.S. ally but has refused to criticize Russia over the invasion. Museveni even suggested at the outbreak of the war that Putin's actions might be understandable because Ukraine is in Russia's sphere of influence.

Lavrov voiced support for reform of the U.N. Security Council to give African countries permanent seats and greater influence.

Appearing with Lavrov, the Ugandan leader spoke fondly of old ties with Russia, asking how he could spurn Moscow when he has good relations with countries that participated in slavery.

Museveni, an opinion leader on the continent who has held power for three decades, is an obvious choice for Russia as someone to strengthen ties with, said Ugandan political analyst Asuman Bisiika.

"Uganda is the center of gravity in East Africa," Bisiika said.

Museveni, 77, has been strictly wearing a mask in public since the COVID-19 outbreak. But he did not have one on when greeting Lavrov in front of photographers, apparently wanting to show

warmth to the Russian. Museveni had a mask back on in his next public appearance a day later.

Russia is also courting African public opinion through its state television network, RT, formerly known as Russia Today. RT has announced that it will open a new bureau in Johannesburg.

RT was abruptly removed from Africa's biggest pay-TV platform in Africa, Johannesburg-based Multichoice, in March after the European Union and Britain imposed sanctions against Russia. It is not clear whether establishing the new bureau will enable RT to resume broadcasts to Africa through Multichoice, which claims nearly 22 million subscribers on the continent.

"For Russia, it is the battle to be heard in Africa. It is not important for the actual war effort but for their long-term political influence," Anton Harber, professor of journalism at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. "They see it as fertile ground to cultivate their influence, and, of course, votes in the U.N. are important."

On his tour of Africa, France's Macron accused the Kremlin of using TV channels like RT to spread propaganda in support of the war. And he charged the Kremlin with blackmailing the world by thwarting the export of grain from Ukraine.

"They are blackmailing because they are the ones who blocked cereals in Ukraine. They are the ones who regulate their cereals," he said in Benin. His itinerary also included Cameroon and Guinea-Bissau.

Macron appealed to Africans to side against Russia.

"I'm telling you here in Africa, a continent that has suffered from colonial imperialism: Russia is one of the last colonial, imperial powers. She decides to invade a neighboring country to defend her interests," he said. "That's the reality."

Power, the top U.S. AID official, was in East Africa to pledge aid to help the region's fight against hunger amid a devastating multi-year drought. She did not hold back in criticizing Russia.

"By blockading Ukraine's grain exports and restricting the trade of Russia's own fertilizer, Putin's actions have had the consequence of inflicting pain on the people of Kenya and on other countries throughout the world," Power said in Nairobi. "He is hurting the people of Kenya in order to benefit his own situation."

MDT/AP

this day in history

1981 CHARLES AND DIANA MARRY



Crowds of 600,000 people filled the streets of London to catch a glimpse of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer on their wedding day.

The couple were married at St Paul's Cathedral before an invited congregation of 3,500 and an estimated global TV audience of 750 million — making it the most popular programme ever broadcast.

Britons enjoyed a national holiday to mark the occasion.

Lady Diana, 20, arrived almost on time for the 1120 BST ceremony after making the journey from Clarence House in the Glass Coach with her father, Earl Spencer.

She made the three-and-a-half minute walk up the red-carpeted aisle with the sumptuous 25 ft (7.62 m) train of her Emmanuel designed, ivory taffeta and antique lace gown flowing behind her.

Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Robert Runcie led the traditional Church of England service, but he was assisted by clergymen from many denominations.

The bride's nerves showed briefly when she mixed up the Prince's names — calling him Philip Charles Arthur George, rather than Charles Philip.

Charles, 32, in the full dress uniform of a naval commander, slightly muddled his vows too, referring to "thy goods" rather than "my worldly goods".

After a brief private signing ceremony the Prince and Princess of Wales walked back down the aisle to the refrain of Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance.

The newlyweds took the open-topped state landau to Buckingham Palace where they emerged on the balcony at 1310 BST to give the crowds the kiss they had been longing to see.

Afterwards Charles and Diana retired from the public gaze to enjoy toasts and a wedding breakfast with 120 family guests.

A "just married" sign attached to the landau by Princes Andrew and Edward raised smiles as the married couple were driven over Westminster Bridge to get the train to Romsey in Hampshire to begin their honeymoon.

CourtesyBBCNews

IN CONTEXT

In less than a year the couple produced their first child, William, on 21 June 1982.

A second son, Prince Harry, was born on 15 September 1984.

By that time Prince Charles' long-running relationship with Camilla Parker-Bowles was putting strain on his marriage.

Princess Diana's relationship with the rest of the Royal Family deteriorated and she developed bulimia.

The couple separated in 1993.

Diana spoke publicly about her problems and her own and her husband's infidelities in a Panorama documentary in November 1995.

The marriage formally ended with a decree absolute in August 1996.

Diana was killed in a car crash in 1997.

Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles married on 9 April 2005.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
It might be time to pick up the slack and do your share. You always seem to spend more than you make. Get involved in a competitive sport that will bring the challenges you thrive on.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Look into ways that you can make extra cash. Sign up for seminars that will expand your business awareness. Your greatest enjoyment will come through social activities and pleasure trips.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Plan to do things with your faithful pet or with youngsters who have interesting hobbies. Don't hesitate to look for alternatives that will enable you to raise the kind of donations you need to do the job right.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
You may find your mate somewhat perturbed. You have more energy than the rest of the people you live with anyway. Don't let others bully you into agreeing with them.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
You will feel so much better about yourself if you can control your addictions. Think about starting your own small business. Try not to lend or borrow money today.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
This could be a serious relationship. You may win favors if you present your ideas and include your family. You may be confused emotionally. Try not to jump to conclusions.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
You should get into programs that will enhance your appearance and help you to be the best that you can. Pay attention to small but important details. Don't take your frustrations out on loved ones.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You should be raising your self esteem and confidence in order to promote your work. Sudden changes at home will affect family members more than you anticipated.

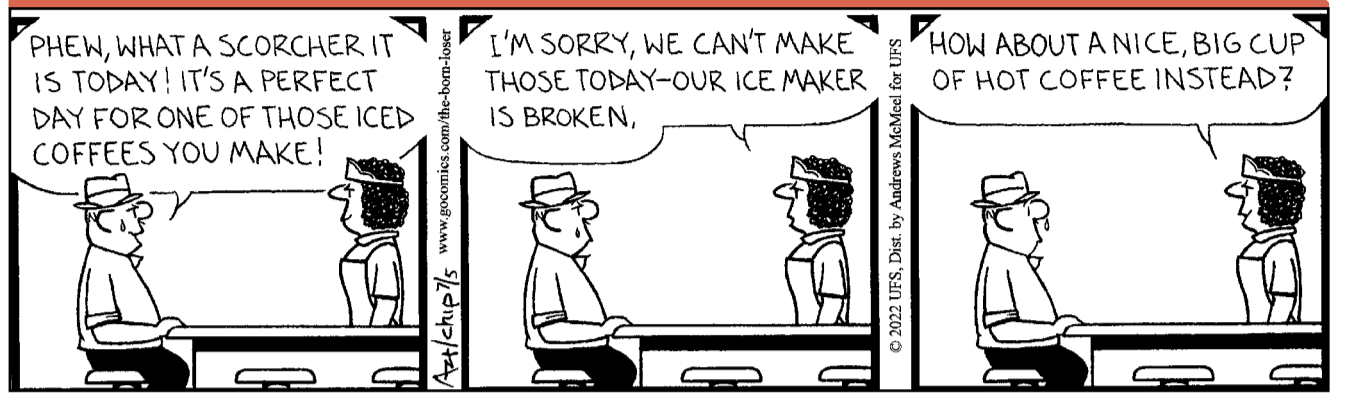
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Try not to be too harsh with loved ones; there will always be two sides to an Issue. You may find that children are not as accepting as you have been. You may be looking through rose colored glasses.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Get them to pitch in, if you need help. You can learn from those who have had similar experiences. Don't trust others with private information that could be used against you.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Your partner may be erratic today if you haven't paid enough attention to him or her. You could expand your circle of friends if you get involved in unusual activities.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
You may have problems with skin, bones, or teeth if you haven't been taking proper care of yourself. Get back down to earth and to basics. Be on your best behavior.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

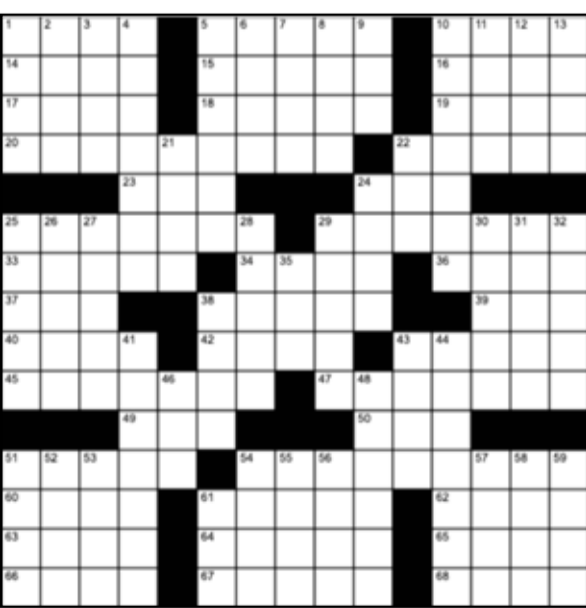
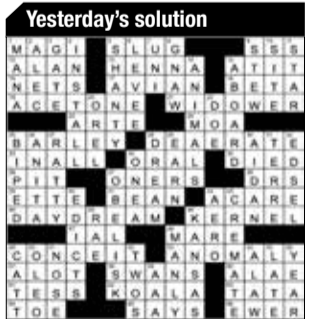
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	21	33	cloudy
Changchun	22	27	rain
Chengdu	23	34	cloudy
Chongqing	26	37	fine
Fuzhou	26	37	rain
Guangzhou	27	37	cloudy
Guiyang	20	28	showers
Haikou	27	34	cloudy
Hangzhou	26	36	fine
Harbin	21	27	rain
Hefei	25	32	thunderstorms
Nanjing	27	34	thunderstorms
Shanghai	28	34	overcast
Taipei	26	32	cloudy
Wuhan	24	32	rain
Hong Kong	31	36	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	13	25	overcast
Frankfurt	14	28	rain
Paris	16	27	overcast
London	17	29	overcast
New York	21	31	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- One with will power?; 5- European ermine; 10- Trim; 14- Years in old Rome; 15- Freight; 16- Black cuckoos; 17- Balkan native; 18- Shed ___; 19- School orgs.; 20- Predecessor; 22- Surface; 23- Circle segment; 24- Louis XIV, e.g.; 25- Bluster; 29- Danced at Oktoberfest, perhaps; 33- Martinique volcano; 34- Farm females; 36- Rent-___; 37- Fam. member; 38- Squalid; 39- From ___ Z; 40- Biblical land; 42- Brain wave; 43- Divest; 45- Tidal river; 47- Gives slack; 49- ___-Foy, Quebec; 50- Former coin of France; 51- Patti LuPone role; 54- Inaptitude; 60- 1972 Kentucky Derby winner ___ Ridge; 61- Old; 62- Rink leap; 63- Chemical used on trees; 64- Western; 65- Paul Sorvino's daughter; 66- E-mail command; 67- Clogs, e.g.; 68- Bit of gossip;

DOWN 1- Clasp for a door; 2- Cabinet dept.; 3- Memo opener; 4- Enclosure formed by the chest bones; 5- Rarely encountered; 6- Uses a shuttle; 7- Black-and-white cookie; 8- Lab gel; 9- Rocky peak; 10- Red powdery condiment; 11- Opposed to; 12- Narrow inlets; 13- Being, to Brutus; 21- Hankering; 22- "You've got mail" co.; 24- Cheerful; 25- Carousal; 26- Garden intruders; 27- Dole out; 28- Like marshes; 29- Foot-operated lever; 30- Without ___ in the world; 31- Kind of kitchen; 32- Falls; 35- Elf; 38- Foal's father; 41- Condiment; 43- Smoke deposit; 44- Large sea wave; 46- Loss leader?; 48- Willows; 51- Important times; 52- Objectionable; 53- Lend of tennis; 54- Beehive State; 55- Defense grp. since 1949; 56- Head for the hills; 57- Leave; 58- Parched; 59- Close with force; 61- Message in a bottle?;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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- BAI YUEN GRD. | 3 BEDS HKD 12,800,000
- MANHATTAN | 3 BEDS HKD 12,980,000
- 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 HKD 10,800,000

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BOOK IT

'Proving Ground' profiles first women programmers

WHEN the world's first general-purpose, programmable, electronic computer, known as ENIAC, debuted in 1946, great fanfare was given to the men who created it, John Mauchly and J. Presper Eckert Jr., among others.

But little attention was given to six women who played big parts behind the scenes, spending months figuring out how to program the computer with little more to go on than diagrams of the huge, complicated machine.

In "Proving Ground," author Kleiman aims to rectify that, tracking down four of the six women for interviews and restoring them all to their rightful place in history. She chronicles how six young women from different backgrounds and regions of the U.S. — Kathleen McNulty, Frances Bilas, Frances Elizabeth Snyder, Marlyn Wescoff, Ruth Lichterman, and Betty Jean Jennings — were enlisted to create the first computer program for ENIAC.

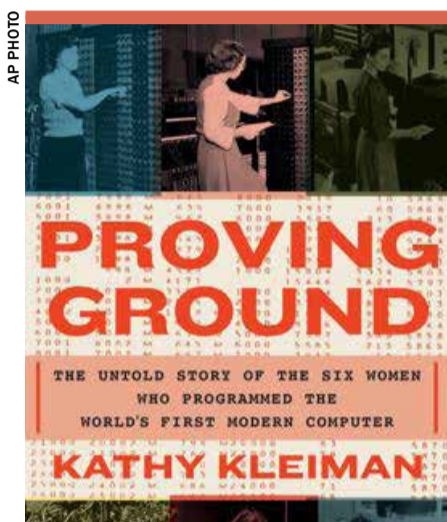
The women came together after a shortage of male mathematicians during World War II cau-

sed the Army to seek out women, placing a notice in newspapers: "Looking for Women Math Majors," and reaching out to college campuses.

Mathematicians were needed to calculate ballistic trajectories at a Philadelphia arm of the Army's Ballistic Research Laboratory based at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Aberdeen, Maryland.

The women used mechanical desktop computers — large machines with elevated buttons and gears — to make analog computations for ballistic trajectories. The calculation for one trajectory could take 30 to 40 hours.

Meanwhile, the Army was building a top secret electronic computer aimed at speeding computations, called the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer, or ENIAC. When finished, it was 8 feet tall, 80 feet wide, arranged in a U-shape, and filled with vacuum tubes, cables,



"Proving Ground: The Untold Story of the Six Women who Programmed the World's First Supercomputer" by Kathy Kleiman

wires and switches.

As experts in ballistic trajectories, the "ENIAC 6" were tasked with creating a program for the ENIAC to perform the same calculations they had done with the desktop calculators. But without an instruction manual for the ENIAC or any existing programming languages, they had to invent the program on their own.

MAE ANDERSON, MDT/AP

tTUNES

'ABOUT LAST NIGHT..' CAPTURES WHIRLWIND NIGHT OUT

IF you've ever sent a "So, about last night" text, Mabel's newest album is for you. A follow-up to the English singer's 2019 debut album, "About Last Night..." is a blend of disco, dance and pop that captures every emotion experienced during a cathartic night out.

One moment she's confidently showing off on the dance floor with her new man ("Animal" and, ironically, "Shy"), in another she's giving a bathroom pep talk to a friend ("Good Luck") or crying in the club herself ("Take Your Name").

Mabel rallies with "Let Love Go (feat. Lil Tecca)," only to fall victim to the emotions that stir when going out and seeing an ex on "Overthinking" and "Crying on The Dance Floor." By the time the party comes to an end, it's morning already, and there's the question of "what now?" on the aptly titled "When The Party's Over." This wrap-up to a whirlwind night could be a metaphor for any exciting chapter of life coming to a close.

As far as takeaways from this album, while there is an awful lot of focus on ex-partner drama, there's an accompanying fair sha-



"About Last Night..." Mabel (Capitol Records)

re of empowerment songs that stand out like "Let Them Know," an encouragement to go out and show 'em your worth, or "LOL," a delightful slap in the face for an ex who is trying to come back into your life.

Conceived in lockdown, this album is a snapshot of a simpler time and is just one of many products of female pop artists who have been able to create party anthems during a pandemic. Is that strange? Resilient? Strangely resilient? Jury's still out on that one, but for now, maybe we can just enjoy joining Mabel on her night out. KIANA DOYLE, MDT/AP

AD

合夥人 PARTNERS:
官樂怡 Rui José da Cunha °
山度士 Álvaro Rodrigues °
馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata °
趙魯 Zhao Lu *
馬傑安 João Nogueira Marques

大律師 ASSOCIATES:
高文軒 Adelino Correia °
羅善齡 Zelina Rodrigues *
馬潔冰 Maria João Marques
陶義德 António Isó de Azeredo
白穎怡 Iclia Berenguel
沈玲鳳 Mariana Afonso Esteves
馬秀文 Sofia Mendes Martins
飛嘉華 Carlos dos Santos Ferreira °
杜力信 Nelson de Azevedo
莫永誠 Rui Velez de Moura
安東尼 António Manuel dos Santos
巴慧雅 Vera Bastos
歐文傑 Miguel Evaristo
陳芷喬 Joana Chan
顏曉蓉 Teresa Xiaorong Yan
諾瑪莉 Maria Noras
康靜雅 Viviana Hong
梁淑嵐 Ana Leon
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SINCE 1996

DRIVE IN

Loneliness and hope both eternal in 'A Love Song'

MARK KENNEDY, MDT/AP
ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

THE first shots of "A Love Song" are a signal for the rest of the film — stubborn flowers and shrubs pushing through dry, stony earth in southwest Colorado. They're rough beauties, been through a lot, and yet are still captivating in their rawness.

Max Walker-Silverman's film is also a spare beauty, delicate but strong and tenacious, exploring time, love and nature. Though it is rated PG, "A Love Song" is very much an adult film, quiet and slow and very, very restrained. It may require the viewer to relearn how to be patient amid all the rival Marvel-boom nonsense offerings at the theaters these days.

Dale Dickey, of "Winter's Bone," stars as a woman late in life who has set up an RV at a campsite along a lake, pulling

crayfish out of the water to eat and looking hopeful whenever anyone nears. She's clearly waiting for someone and passes her time studying the stars and the birds.

Walker-Silverman, who also supplied the script — which literally could have fit on a few index cards — keeps the actors' motives and background unclear until they reveal them, leaving huge chunks of unspoken film work.

Dickey is absolutely up to the challenge, somehow communicating longing and loneliness while gruffly busying herself with day-to-day life, keeping to a routine but also seeming to yearn to break it one day. Each time she hears a car on the gravel path, she fusses with her hair like a school-girl.

Well, one day a man shows up with a clutch of tough-looking flowers — who also nervously fusses with his hair.

It's Wes Studi playing a long-lost would-be lover from 10th grade. Can sparks fly a second time, decades apart?

"Reckon you can still love something that ain't there no more?" she asks. He answers: "I know you can. Don't you?"

We'd be boorish if we gave it away, but Walker-Silverman grounds his study in absolute soulful humanity. While waiting for her new-old man, our heroine visits another couple camping — Michelle Wilson and Benja K. Thomas — and they're at a romantic standoff. Even the mailman has some overly poignant moments. The filmmaker has a tendency to make every word hang in the air importantly since there are so few of them.

The only thing that seems to unbalance the film is the appearance and reappearance of a local precocious and overly polite girl and her four older and silent brothers. There's so-



Wes Studi (left) and Dale Dickey in a scene from "A Love Song"

something slightly surreal and Wes Anderson about them. As dry humor, they don't really work, threatening to mar a subtle piece.

The title comes from our heroine's tendency to turn on her transistor radio and spin the dial, letting fate send her a message through the radio waves. "Always plays the perfect song even if in the moment you ain't sure why," she says. The film's soundtrack has Michael Hurley's "Be Kind To Me," Dick Flood's "The Man Who Walks Alone" and Valerie June's "Slip Slide One By."

As a viewer, you may leave the theater with more answers than when you arrived — and that's refreshing. Walker-Silverman has no interest in putting pretty bows on things, loads of past histories or sentimentality. This is what love looks like with wrinkles and sorrow but also sunshine and joy — it pushes through the harshness of life and blooms with possibility.

"A Love Song," a Bleeker Street release, is rated PG for "mild thematic elements." Running time: 81 minutes. ★★★★★

AD

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OPINION

China Daily
 Liu Jianna, China Daily

SHOW US HOW ZHOU BECAME SUPER-RICH

Never flaunt your wealth is a well-known ancient Chinese maxim. Obviously, Zhou Jie, a 28-year-old employee of the State-owned Capital Operation Holding Group in eastern China's Jiangxi province, doesn't take the ancient saying seriously. The young man has triggered an online storm by flaunting his wealth and family background, and boasting of his connections with officials on the internet.

It's time the authorities, independent of the company, conducted further investigations and gave the public an explanation about his claims of having connection with officials.

According to screenshots on his WeChat moments, between September 2019 and June 2020, the junior employee led an extravagant lifestyle that could not be supported by his known sources of income.

For instance, he claimed to have had tea costing 400,000 yuan (\$59,148) a kilogram, and said his mother had bought him 10 apartments and he attended high-level gatherings where he was cared for by some big names. He even claimed to be a close associate of some high-ranking officials in the landlocked province where wages are relatively low.

His open display of money and power has raised eyebrows and led to speculation among the public on how his family had accumulated wealth beyond their known sources of income. If they have accumulated the wealth through illegal means, then Zhou's open display of his possessions and connections can be seen as a challenge to the decade-long campaign against corruption.

To clear the air, the company he works for made an announcement on Wednesday, saying that Zhou's father is a middle-level official at the Office of Freight Logistics of Jiangxi Integrated Transportation Development Center, having reached his position through promotion as per rules. His mother was a deputy manager at the Nanchang Changyun Corporation before retiring. The family owns six properties and two shops worth 8.45 million yuan (\$1.25 million), but they have also taken 2.53 million yuan as loan. And the company has suspended Zhou.

It is natural for ordinary people to be furious about the flagrant display of wealth that may not have been acquired through legal means.

As for the company's announcement, it sparked more doubts and speculation over corruption and possible abuse of power. Many netizens have asked whether what the company said is the full truth as the family's wealth far outweighs their known sources of income.

The people deserve an in-depth investigation. And the investigation should be free of the company's influence so that the truth about the Zhou family's wealth can be unearthed.

Only a thorough investigation can address the public's concerns and reveal the truth about Zhou and his family.

RUSSIA STEPS UP STRIKES ON UKRAINE AMID COUNTERATTACKS

Russian forces yesterday launched massive missile strikes on Ukraine's Kyiv and Chernihiv regions, areas that haven't been targeted in weeks, while Ukrainian officials announced an operation to liberate an occupied region in the country's south.

Kyiv regional governor Oleksiy Kuleba said on Telegram that a settlement in the Vyshgorod district of the region was targeted early yesterday; an "infrastructure object" was hit. It wasn't immediately clear if there were any casualties.

Vyshgorod is located 20 kilometers north of downtown Kyiv. Kuleba linked the strikes with the Day of Statehood, which

Ukraine was marking for the first time yesterday.

"Russia, with the help of missiles, is mounting revenge for the widespread popular resistance, which the Ukrainians were able to organize precisely because of their statehood," Kuleba told Ukrainian television. "Ukraine has already broken Russia's plans and will continue to defend itself."

Chernihiv governor Vyacheslav Chaus reported that multiple missiles were fired from the territory of Belarus at the village of Honcharivska.

Russian troops withdrew from the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions months ago after failing to capture either.

GLOBAL AIDS FIGHT AT CROSSROADS AFTER SETBACKS DURING COVID

LAURAN NEERGAARD

HARD-WON progress against HIV has stalled, putting millions of lives at risk, according to an alarming report yesterday (Macau time) on how the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises are jeopardizing efforts to end AIDS.

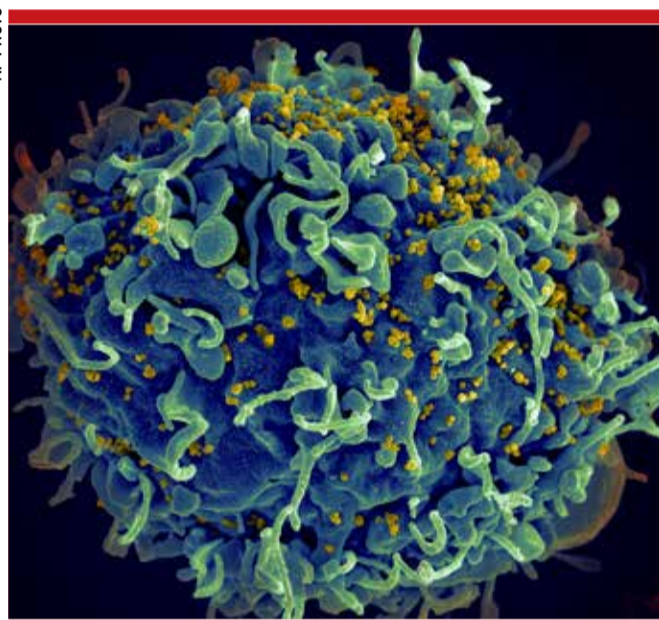
Worldwide, the year-long decline in new HIV infections is leveling off. Worse, cases began climbing in parts of Asia and the Pacific where they previously had been falling, according to the United Nations agency leading the global AIDS fight.

The number of people on lifesaving HIV treatments grew more slowly last year than it has in a decade. Inequities are widening. Every two minutes last year, a teen girl or young woman was newly infected — and in sub-Saharan Africa, they're three times as likely to get HIV as boys and men the same age. And 650,000 people died from AIDS-related illnesses last year, the report found.

"This is an alarm to the world to say that COVID-19 has blown the AIDS response significantly off track," said Matthew Kavanagh, deputy executive director of UNAIDS.

The U.N. set a goal of fewer than 370,000 new HIV infections by 2025. Last year, there were about 1.5 million — meaning it would take a major turnaround to get anywhere near that target. Yet low- and middle-income countries are \$8 billion short of the funding needed, as international aid also has dropped, the report found.

Things might be even worse considering that HIV testing slowed or even stopped in many places when COVID-19 hit, potentially leaving even more virus spread



This electron microscope image made available by the U.S. National Institutes of Health shows a human T cell, in blue, under attack by HIV, in yellow, the virus that causes AIDS

uncounted.

"People are exhausted with epidemics and pandemics," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's leading AIDS expert. "We have to fight twice as hard to get HIV back on the radar screen where it belongs."

The sobering news comes as the International AIDS Conference begins this week in Montreal — where some promising science is being reported. Among the highlights:

— A man who had lived with HIV for about 30 years is in long-term remission and just might be one of only a handful of people worldwide ever considered cured, thanks to a special bone marrow-like transplant.

That rigorous treatment is only an option for HIV patients who also develop leukemia and need transplanted blood stem cells to fight the cancer. This man's donor happened to carry a rare gene mutation that makes the newly transplanted cells resistant to HIV.

The man, now 66, underwent the transplant in 2019. Soon after, the COVID-19 pandemic began and he decided to stay on HIV medication until he could get vaccinated. He's

now been off anti-AIDS medication for 17 months with no signs of HIV, Dr. Jana Dickter of City of Hope, a California cancer research center, said.

That makes him the oldest and longest-living person with HIV to undergo this potentially curative transplant. Scientists hope these rare cases might offer clues that eventually lead to better care for more people.

Also yesterday, University of Barcelona researchers reported that a woman's own immune system seems to have kept her HIV tamped down to an undetectable level for 15 years. The woman was part of a research study in 2006 that included some immune-boosting treatments but it's not clear why she's faring so well.

— Another study presented yesterday found that taking an antibiotic after unprotected sex could reduce the chances of getting gonorrhea, chlamydia or syphilis.

Those sexually transmitted diseases are caused by different types of bacteria. They are a rising threat, especially among people who also have — or are at high risk for — HIV. MDT/AP

Hawaii A U.S. defense contractor and his wife who lived for decades under the identities of two dead Texas children have been charged with identity theft and conspiring against the government, according to federal court records unsealed in Honolulu. Walter Glenn Primrose (left) and Gwynn Darle Morrison, both in their 60s, who allegedly lived for decades under the names Bobby Edward Fort and Julie Lyn Montague, respectively, were arrested Friday in Kapolei on the island of Oahu.

USA The Fed's latest hike, by three-quarters of a percentage point, lifts the benchmark short-term rate to its highest level since 2018. The aim is to bring surging inflation under control. An update on the economy will come later today [Macau time] with second quarter U.S. GDP data. Analysts said that after going backward from January through March, the U.S. economy probably didn't do much better in the spring.



Germany A large wildfire on the German-Czech border is spreading and threatening to destroy a forested national park popular with tourists. The fire in the region called Bohemian Switzerland on the Czech side and the Saxon Switzerland national park on the German side had seemed to be under control, but spread again yesterday, German news agency dpa reported. Hundreds of firefighters on both sides of the border and with help from neighboring Poland and Slovakia were battling the flames, while local authorities warned tourists to stay away.



Gaza Strip Gaza's Hamas rulers have imposed a slew of new taxes on imported clothes and office supplies just ahead of the new school year, sparking limited but rare protests in the impoverished coastal strip. The move by the militant group comes at a time when Gaza's 2.3 million people are suffering not only from a 15-year Israeli-Egyptian blockade, but also from a new jump in prices caused by global supply-chain issues and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.