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THE AMENDMENTS TO THE CIVIL SERVANTS STATUTES FOCUS MOSTLY ON ADDING MOBILITY AND FLEXIBILITY TO THE MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

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BACK TO SCHOOL ARRANGEMENT ‘NOT CONVENIENT’ FOR CROSS-BORDER STUDENTS

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HONG KONG’S POPULATION HAS SHRUNK FOR A SECOND YEAR AS ANTI-VIRUS CONTROLS HAMPERED THE INFLOW OF NEW WORKERS AND BIRTHS DECLINED

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XINHUA



China air force sent fighter jets and bombers to Thailand for a joint exercise with the Thai military yesterday. The training will include air support, strikes on ground targets and small- and large-scale troop deployment, the Chinese Defense Ministry said in a statement posted on its website. China’s expanding military activities in the Asia-Pacific region have alarmed the United States and its allies and form part of a growing strategic and economic competition that has inflamed tensions between the world’s two largest economies. [More on p7](#)

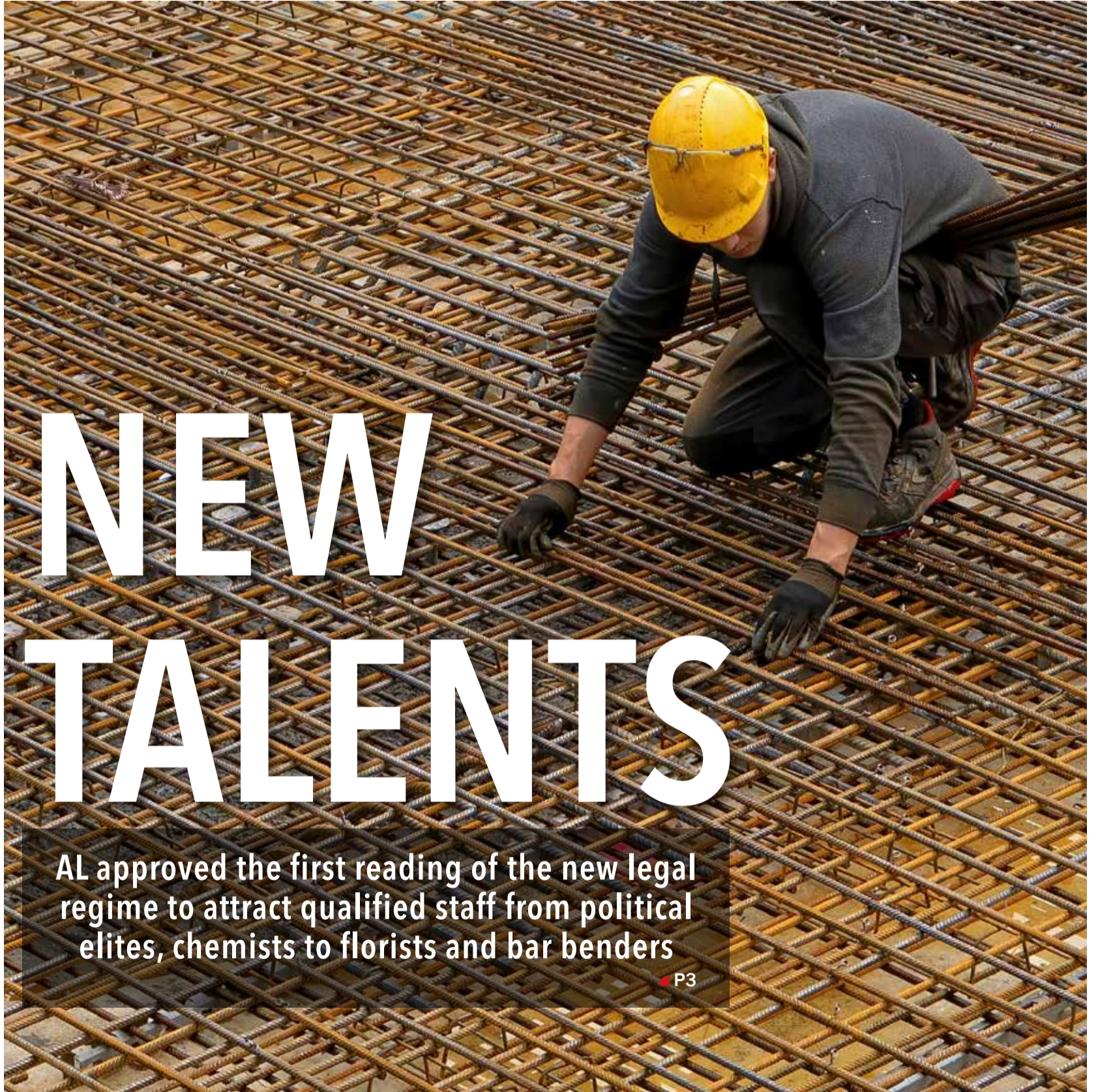
AP PHOTO



China Seven people were killed by a torrent of water that came rushing down a river in a popular recreational spot following mountain rains in southwestern China, authorities said yesterday. Workers and volunteers mobilized to urge people to leave the area after receiving an imminent heavy rain warning about 2:40 p.m. on Saturday, the emergency management bureau in Pengzhou city said.

Indonesia An undersea earthquake shook part of eastern Indonesia yesterday, but there were no immediate reports of deaths or major damage. The U.S. Geological Survey said the 5.7-magnitude quake struck about 158 kilometers off Laikit village in North Sulawesi province. It said the quake was centered about 30 kilometers beneath the sea. The Indonesian Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysical Agency, which put the quake at a 5.9 magnitude and 10 kilometers in depth, said the temblor was unlikely to trigger a tsunami.

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NEW TALENTS

AL approved the first reading of the new legal regime to attract qualified staff from political elites, chemists to florists and bar benders

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SMES FACING HEADWINDS COMPANIES IN DISSOLUTION TOTALLED 171 IN Q2

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RENATO MARQUES



GAMING CASINOS MAY TAKE DEPOSITS BUT MUST ENSURE THEIR SOURCE

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2022MIECF POSTPONED TO DEC. 9

The 2022 Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum & Exhibition (2022MIECF) is postponed to December 9 to 11 due to the need for epidemic prevention and control as well as event preparation. The government-organized event, initially postponed to August 18 to 20, was originally scheduled for March 31 to April 2 under the theme "Commitment to Green Development, Moving Towards the Dual Carbon Goals." The 2022MIECF's exhibitions and forums will focus on topics such as carbon neutrality, green mobility, and technological innovation with the integration of online and offline elements.

MGTO HOLDS QTSAS FOR F&B MERCHANTS

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) held the 2022 "Quality Tourism Services Accreditation Scheme" (QTSAS) Online Assessment Seminar for the Food and Beverage Sector to brief accredited merchants on the assessment criteria and logistics during the supervision period. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, MGTO said it will continue with its alternative plan for QTSAS to not process new applications from the catering sector in 2022. Nonetheless, the office will appraise each accredited catering business by "Mystery Shopping Assessment" twice during the supervision period according to the current assessment mechanism.

CE CALLS FOR MORE WORK TO BOOST TIES WITH HENGQIN

CHIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng said more work should be done to boost Macau development, and to strengthen the integration of Hengqin and Macau.

Ho spoke during third meeting of the Administrative Committee of the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin on Friday.

For Ho, investment for the Cooperation Zone should be focused on the planned four major industries.

"Effort should be made to ensure that major projects to be based in the Cooperation Zone fulfil requirements of their Master Plan. Talent importation efforts should also align with the needs of the four major targeted industries and be done with a market-orientated approach," Ho suggested, as cited in



a statement issued by Government Information Bureau.

He also called for further effort to be made to advance the special regulatory system by tier district, as well as coordinated development planning, and development of financial services.

This comes after tax incentives policies regarding perso-

nal income tax and company income tax had been in place in the first half of 2022,

For Ho, they were effective in terms of attracting talented people to the Cooperation Zone.

Meanwhile, Governor of Guangdong Province, Wang Weizhong said that the Cooperation Zone had seen

"pragmatic and progressive effort applied in the year since it was officially launched."

However, he mentioned the need to review the Master Plan with a view to further integrate Hengqin and Macau. This was in order to "embrace high-quality opening up, and a higher level of market-access system." LV

Civil servants statute amendments to focus on mobility and flexibility

RENATO MARQUES

THE amendments the government wants to make to the Statute of Personnel of the Public Administration of Macau (ETA-PM) focus mostly on adding mobility and flexibility to the management of human resources from the government, the conclusion of the analysis of the bill by the Executive Council shows.

The bill, which has been now forwarded to the Legislative Assembly (AL), focuses on three different areas including the optimization of the civil servants' mobility regime, the improvement of rules on professional retraining as well as service commission regime system.

The first area aims to merge the current four types of mobility methods into just two, including the "transfer" and "detachment," which will simplify the system by which civil servants from a department or service can be allocated to a different department



of service permanently or temporarily.

The new ETAPM also aims to facilitate the retraining of staff to be able to be relocated to a different service or different duties within the same service or department giving more flexibility to the leadership to manage staff and adjust staff number according to the needs instead of recruiting new staff members.

This strategy seems to be a new attempt to overcome the

complex and time-consuming recruitment process, a problem which consecutive governments have acknowledged but have not been able to solve.

The last of the three areas of focus is mostly related to civil servants that work in Hengqin, improving the regulations on these matters taking into account the perceived need for more civil servants to be allocated to work in the Cooperation Zone in the future.

NAT TEST UNTIL TODAY FOR PATANE RESIDENTS

A crew member of a Hong Kong-Macau cargo ship tested positive for Covid-19 after being a close contact of the confirmed positive crew member reported on August 10.

The imported case is a 64-year-old Macau male resident according to information from the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre.

In order to further assess the risk of Covid-19 transmission in the local community, a Key Area Nucleic acid test (NAT) NAT drive was launched for individuals who live, work, or frequent in the vicinity of the residing place of the

positive case.

From August 13 to 15, individuals living or working in the vicinity of Rua da Ribeira do Patane are required to take the test. Those who have stayed at Avenida de Demétrio Cinatti, Travessa da Guelra, Rua da Ribeira do Patane, Travessa dos Calafates, Calçada do Galo, Calçada das Sortes, Rua da Palmeira, Travessa da Escama for more than half an hour on or after August 8 are also required to undergo the test.

If they have not completed two NATs in three days as required, their health code will be changed to yellow code on August 16. LV



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Bill to attract top-notch talents approved on first reading amid concerns

RENATO MARQUES

The Legislative Assembly (AL) has approved with the unanimous vote of 32 lawmakers the first reading of the new legal regime to attract qualified staff, also known as non-local "talents."

This new bill aims to replace the former regime of granting residency to people based on their qualifications and or investments made in Macau. This former regime was managed by the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) and caused several problems. This included problems that led to the sentencing of the former president of IPIM, Jackson Chang, to five years of imprisonment without probation on charges of corruption, abuse of power and money laundering.

Although the bill's first reading was approved by all lawmakers that comprise the AL, many expressed concerns over several details of the bill and the way the bill will be enforced.

This was amid calls for the government to also institute a regime to attract local residents that are working abroad and who possess high professional qualifications to return to Macau.

On the topic, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong said that if, with this new regime, Macau succeeded in creating a better environment and

RENATO MARQUES



conditions, "local talents who are abroad will surely be interested in returning to Macau."

Chao Chong Hang, representing the Talents Development Committee (SCDT), also said that the committee is working together with the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) to improve the so-called talents database, which he admitted has many flaws and is useless at the moment.

Chao said that the committee is asking DSEDJ to register all local students who receive scholarships

The SCDT 'will create a list that will include a series of international awards and accolades'

and who are studying abroad at universities ranked in the top 100 worldwide to automatically become part of the local talents database.

During the debate in the plenary session, Ao Ieong also said that this new regime to attract hi-

ghly qualified staff, as well as the potential creation of new companies with it, will be the "two pillars that will support Macau's future development."

Lawmakers also raised several concerns that people will soon see their applications approved in matters such as residency rights, criteria, and transparency of recruitment procedures, as well as their role in passing on their skills by teaching and training local residents.

Chao also noted regarding the first type of targeted talent, the so-called Elite level, the SCDT "will

create a list that will include a series of international awards and accolades. It is enough for someone to have been awarded one of those awards or prizes to qualify as a qualified staff of high quality (Elite level)."

As the SCDT disclosed previously, the three-level system included in the new law is based on the skills and recognition of these professionals.

"Elites refer to leaders of a profession who have attained professional licenses or skills in their specialized field, for example, business elites, patent-holding scientists, political elites, and military elites. Qualified professionals generally refer to the group of people who have relatively higher educational qualifications and longer credentials of service, such as specialist physicians, experienced barristers, pilots, electrical & mechanical engineers, land surveyors, and chemists. A skilled person commonly refers to the group of people who have acquired certain vocational skills and make a living with such skills, for example, bus drivers, plumbers, decorators, crane operators, florists, bar benders [construction], and security guards," SCDT notes on the regime Frequent Asked Questions.

During the first reading, the Secretary refused to give many details on the bill, leaving those for the bill specialty discussion.

GAMING

Casinos may take deposits but must ensure their source

RENATO MARQUES

A revised version of the bill which regulates casino operations and is part of the package of new gaming laws provides that casino concessionaires may take deposits from patrons in cash, chips, or other cash transfer methods. Casino concessionaires may also keep casino earnings in accounts established at the casino cashiers.

This clarification was included in the new version of the bill that was sent by the government to the Legislative Assembly (AL) where the bill is now undergoing detailed analysis at the AL's second standing committee.

RENATO MARQUES



In a press briefing after a committee meeting on Friday, the chairman of the committee, lawmaker Chan Chak Mo, revealed that the new version of the bill is

very clear about this issue but, nonetheless, the creation and maintenance of these accounts are restricted to the operators that are subject to anti-money lau-

ndering, counterterrorism financing, and other regulations. This confirms that the source of the money deposited by the patrons is legitimate, Chan said.

Additionally, it was explained that no transfers of funds between accounts will be permitted and no other entities such as gaming promoters (junkets) can participate in this model.

The casino concessionaires must not offer any interest or compensation to patrons in exchange for keeping money in these accounts.

Chan explained that the intention of these accounts is to remove the need for patrons to carry money and other valuables with them while traveling, and the accounts may only be provided by the casino as a service.

The purpose of the bill

is to prevent unlawful operations that have occurred in the past, mostly from the so-called VIP rooms operated by junkets that offered high interests in exchange for deposits of gamblers and other people.

In the past, several issues occurred with these kinds of deposits that resulted in accusations of fraud and scams. The issues also led to the loss of millions of patacas from depositors.

Regarded as a bill that mostly regulates the operation of junkets, this bill will continue to be debated in detail today and tomorrow. It is hoped that the bill's final reading and approval will occur this legislative year.

BUSINESS

171 REGISTERED FIRMS CLOSED IN Q2

LYNZY VALLES

COMPANIES in dissolution totalled 171 in the second quarter, and the value of registered capital of these companies amounted to MOP27 million, according to data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

The business sector has faced renewed headwinds under the recent Covid-19 pandemic outbreak that led to the city's partial lockdown.

A total of 261 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) which benefited from government support measures have already closed their doors due to bankruptcy, data from the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDTE). The bureau noted that 80 of these shutdowns were recorded in just the first three months of 2022.

According to the report, 181 companies from a total of 8,354 which benefited from the SME Aid Scheme, one of the most popular support programs, have already gone bankrupt, representing 2.7% of the total number of approved enterprises.

In the first quarter of this year, companies in dissolution totalled 208, and the value of registered capital of these companies



amounted to MOP49 million.

However, when compared year-on-year, the number of newly established firms during this year's first quarter decreased to 1,095.

Several SMEs were also reported to have to face the pressure of landlords not decreasing their

rent while operations of their business are restricted.

According to a sector representative from the Industry and Commerce Federation of Macau Central and Southern District, two-thirds of local SMEs are already considering ceasing operation because of the pressure

they face.

Meanwhile, a total of 923 new companies were incorporated in the second quarter of 2022, a decrease of 518 year-on-year.

Number of new companies operating in Wholesale & Retail Trade (346) and Business Services (237) went down by 121 and

151 respectively, according to data from the DSEC.

The total value of registered capital of the new companies rose by 39.2% year-on-year to MOP322 million, attributable to the incorporation of new companies with relatively large capital in Business Services and Financial Activities during the quarter.

In terms of origin of capital, mainland China contributed MOP251 million (78.0% of total) to the capital of newly incorporated companies; capital from the mainland cities in the Greater Bay Area totalled MOP154 million, of which Zhongshan accounted for 53.0%.

Moreover, capital from Macau and Hong Kong stood at MOP62 million and MOP6 million respectively. Analysed by combination of shareholders, 646 companies were established solely by Macau shareholders, while 96 were joint ventures between shareholders from Macau and other countries or regions.

Analysed by size of registered capital, there were 642 new companies (69.6% of total) registered with capital under MOP50,000, and the value of capital (MOP17 million) made up 5.2% of the total. Meanwhile, 22 new companies were registered with capital of MOP1 million or over, and the value of capital (MOP257 million) constituted 79.8% of the total.

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BACK TO SCHOOL

Arrangement 'not convenient' for cross-border students

STAFF REPORTER

STUDENTS and teaching staff of tertiary and non-tertiary education institutions are required to return to their usual place of residence (Macau, Zhuhai or Zhongshan) 10 days before school starts.

In a statement, the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) stated that students and teachers are required to present a negative nucleic acid test (NAT) result of a test taken within 72 hours of the school opening day for inspection by the school.

"If any teacher or student fails to return to his/her usual place of residence as scheduled, the time for such an individual to return to school should be appropriately postponed," the bureau stated.

However, school principals have requested the DSEDJ release more details of school opening arrangements for cross-border students and NAT arrangements.

Following the aforementioned guidelines, Choi Nong Chi Tai School principal Vong Kuoc Ieng said that this arrangement allows more time for parents to prepare for school reopening.

"Still, I want the DESDJ to provide more details about Covid-19 infection prevention measures, especially in cross-border students," said Vong, as



cited in a TDM report.

In an attempt to limit overcrowding at border posts, particularly the Qingmao Port, local authorities have imposed a limit of one round trip per day to people crossing at the Qingmao and Border Gate checkpoints.

Vong considered that it is challenging for parents who take their children to school across borders.

"Although the authorities have announced that it has allowed cross-border students to apply, the authorities have not provided details such as how to make an application, and whether schools or relevant departments will collect this application," Vong added.

Pui Ching Middle School principal Kou Kam Fai has said that he agreed with the requirements for students and teaching

staff to do NATs.

"The authority should arrange enough NAT stations so the 80,000 students and teachers will not need to line up for a long time," said Kou.

"I hope the authorities will consider the impact of bad weather on testing," Kou further added.

The principal said that the school has not received any notice about whether the NAT will be necessary for as long as the pandemic persists.

He also urges parents to vaccinate children above three years of age before the school year starts.

SUBSIDIZED NURSERIES RESUME TODAY

The Women's General Association of Macau is ready for the resumption of nurseries, provi-

ding services to 1,000 children.

Due to the reduced risk of infection from Covid-19 in Macau, from August 15 subsidized nurseries and all forms of childcare services will resume, according to the Social Welfare Bureau.

Deputy service director of the Women's General Association, Cheong Mei Chi, said that the pandemic prevention measures that will be put in place will be the same as those that were in place in June before the present outbreak.

"Most parents reported to the association that they felt under pressure taking care of their children during the nursing services suspension," Cheong said.

He added that over 90% of the nursing staff have received two doses of vaccination.

CRIME

16 ARRESTED BY CUSTOMS FOR SMUGGLING ACTIVITY

STAFF REPORTER

A total of 16 men and women were arrested last week for suspected smuggling within an industrial building in the northern district, according to the customs authority.

The customs authority and Public Security Police (PSP) jointly inspected one industrial building located at north district last week, where smuggling activity was suspected of taking place.

Both sides of law enforcement took action and entered the target unit immediately.

A total of 16 people were intercepted and accused of engaging in smuggling activity, with about 500 kilograms of frozen ingredient (omasum) found, with a value of around MOP110,000.

The concerned good, purchased in Macau, was disinfected by customs to reduce the risk of virus transmission.

The suspects (14 men and two women) were local and mainland residents.

Customs said that all 16 people were charged with violations of the Foreign Trade Law, by which a maximum fine of MOP50,000 can be imposed. The goods have been seized by the government.

Among the 14, 10 smugglers were charged with violation of the law on the employment of non-resident workers and transferred to the Labour Affairs Bureau for follow-up.

Due to the concern that the unit did not possess an available operation license, the matter was referred to the Financial Services Bureau.

Marine rescue plan approved

STAFF REPORTER

FOLLOWING the fire that broke out in the Inner Harbour in April, a committee has submitted an optimized marine rescue plan to the SAR government in May, which has since been approved.

The Follow-up Committee of Public Administration Affairs held a meeting to discuss the safety of fishing boats on the water and the marine rescue plan.

After the meeting, president of the committee Zheng Anting quoted the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA)



Inner Harbour fire consumes half dozen ships in April

as saying that it has created a WeChat group with fishermen to strengthen safety and patrol practices, and to inspect the equipment of fishing boats regularly.

According to Zheng, one of its plans include deploying one bigger-sized rescue boat and two middle-sized rescue boats. All three boats are slated to arrive in the se-

cond half of 2024.

The customs service will also extend the membership structure of the marine rescue team to strengthen rescue work, and set up a new

course for marine rescue.

The Fire Services Bureau will deploy robot firefighters.

The director of the DSAMA Wong Soi Man said that it completed the notice of fishing boat docked in the Inner Harbour, and communicated with two fisherman associations.

The concern notice will be published on August 17, and will take effect from September 1.

Wong hopes to improve safety of the fishing boats in the inner port through strengthening the relevant measures and improving the hiring and training of the staff of the authorities, as well as optimizing the equipment of patrol boats.



MARKETS

Three Chinese corporate giants leaving NY stock exchange

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

THREE state-owned Chinese corporate giants announced plans Friday to remove their shares from the New York Stock Exchange, adding to a growing financial separation between the biggest global economies in the midst of a dispute over scrutiny of company audits.

PetroChina Ltd., China Life Insurance Ltd. and China Petroleum & Chemical Co. made no mention of the auditing dispute or U.S.-Chinese tensions over Taiwan, security, technology and human rights.

The companies, in similarly worded statements issued within 30 minutes of each other, cited the small trading volume of their shares in New York. They said shares still would be traded in Hong Kong, which is open to non-Chinese investors.

Washington has warned Chinese companies including Alibaba Group, the world's biggest e-commerce company, might



be forced to leave U.S. stock exchanges if Beijing refuses to allow regulators to see the records of their corporate auditors.

American authorities say other governments have agreed

to that step, which is required by U.S. law, and China and Hong Kong are the only holdouts. China says talks are making progress but U.S. officials say important issues are unresolved.

Americans also are barred under a November 2020 order by then-President Donald Trump from investing in the stocks, bonds and other securities of dozens of companies cited by the Pentagon as possibly supporting China's military development. The three companies that announced their departure from U.S. markets on Friday aren't on that blacklist.

Friday's announcement follows moves by Chinese companies that are increasing the role of Hong Kong in connecting them with foreign investors.

China's biggest ride-hailing service, Didi Chuxing, left the New York Stock Exchange on June 10 and joined the Hong Kong exchange. Alibaba announced plans in July to upgrade the status of its Hong Kong-traded shares to make them accessible to mainland investors.

PetroChina, China Life and China Petroleum & Chemical, known as Sinopec, said the securities affected were American depositary shares, or ADS, that

represented shares traded in Hong Kong. They said the Hong Kong shares still would be traded.

The Chinese securities regulator said their decision to leave the U.S. stock market is "based on their own commercial considerations." In a brief statement, it promised to "maintain communication" with foreign regulators to "jointly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of enterprises and investors."

PetroChina cited the expense of complying with rules in multiple stock markets.

Exchanges in Hong Kong and Shanghai are "strong alternatives" that can "satisfy the company's fundraising requirements," the PetroChina announcement said.

Private companies including Alibaba have raised billions of dollars on U.S. exchanges because they were largely shut out of the Chinese financial system, which serves state-owned companies.

Foreign stock exchanges matter less to state-owned companies. Shares traded in China or Hong Kong usually represent the bulk of their market value.

The New York Stock Exchange announced plans in January 2021 to end trading of shares of China's three main state-owned phone carriers under Trump's order. The exchange temporarily withdrew the plan but later said the expulsion would go ahead. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

Population shrinks for second year under virus curbs

HONG Kong's government says its population has shrunk for a second year as anti-virus controls hampered the inflow of new workers and births declined, but it made no mention of an exodus of residents following a crackdown on a pro-democracy movement.

The population as of mid-2022 declined by 1.6% from a year earlier to 7,291,600, the Census & Statistics Department announced Thursday. It said there was a net outflow of 113,200 residents while only 18,300 new residents arrived.

The announcement gave no indication how many thousands of people might have left due to the crackdown and a national security law that left lawyers and business consultants uneasy



about what they were allowed to say to clients.

Hong Kong spent two years under some of the world's stringent travel controls, mimicking mainland China.

"It is believed the pandemic and related quarantine requirements would have impacted talent inflow," the state-

ment said. "The problem could be resolved when the quarantine and social distancing measures relaxed."

Many of those leaving are young couples and recent university graduates who are a "very critical part" of the workforce, Paul Yip, a population expert at the University

of Hong Kong, told government broadcaster RTHK.

"The magnitude of the outflow has been increasing in the past two years," Yip said. That "might have an impact on the economic development in Hong Kong."

There were 35,100 births in the first six months of 2022, the government reported, down from 38,500 reported in the same period a year earlier.

Hong Kong's birth rate already was among the lowest in Asia and declined steadily over the past five years, the government said. It said that might have been aggravated since early 2020 by the coronavirus pandemic.

It said the death rate also has risen gradually due to the aging of the population. **MDT/AP**

MORE US LAWMAKERS VISITING TAIWAN 12 DAYS AFTER PELOSI TRIP

A delegation of American lawmakers is visiting Taiwan just 12 days after a visit by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that angered China.

The five-member delegation, led by Democratic Sen. Ed Markey of Massachusetts, will meet senior leaders to discuss U.S.-Taiwan relations, regional security, trade, investment and other issues, the American Institute in Taiwan said. The institute represents the U.S. government, which does not have official ties with Taiwan.

A Taiwanese broadcaster showed video of a U.S. government plane landing about 7 p.m. yesterday at Songshan Airport in Taipei, the Taiwanese capital. While it wasn't confirmed who was on board, the American Institute issued a brief statement soon af-

ter announcing the delegation would be in Taiwan yesterday and today as part of a trip to Asia.

The other members of the delegation are Republican Rep. Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen, a delegate from American Samoa, and Democratic House members John Garamendi and Alan Lowenthal from California and Don Beyer from Virginia.

Chinese warplanes have been crossing the midpoint of the Taiwan Strait on a daily basis even after the conclusion of the military exercises, with at least 10 doing so yesterday, Taiwan's Defense Ministry said.

The 10 fighter jets were among 22 Chinese military aircraft and six naval ships detected in the area around Taiwan by 5 p.m. yesterday, the ministry said on its Twitter account.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

MILITARY

China sending fighter jets to Thailand for joint exercises

THE Chinese air force sent fighter jets and bombers to Thailand for a joint exercise with the Thai military yesterday.

The training will include air support, strikes on ground targets and small- and large-scale troop deployment, the Chinese Defense Ministry said in a statement posted on its website.

China's expanding military activities in the Asia-Pacific region have alarmed the United States and its allies and form part of a growing strategic and economic competition that has inflamed tensions between the world's two largest economies.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited Thailand in June as part of an effort to strengthen what he called America's "unparalleled network of alliances and partnerships" in the region.

The Falcon Strike exercise will be held at the Udon Royal Thai Air Force Base in northern Thailand near the border with Laos. Thai fighter jets and airborne early warning aircraft from both countries will also take part.

The training comes as the U.S. holds combat drills in Indonesia with Indonesia, Australia, Japan and Singapore in the largest iteration of the Super Garuda Shield exercises since they began in 2009.

It also follows China's sending warships, missiles and aircraft into the waters and air around



Air force and naval aviation corps of the Eastern Theater Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) fly planes at an unspecified location in China, Aug. 4, 2022

Taiwan in a threatening response to a visit by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to the self-ruled island, which China claims as its territory.

Kurt Campbell, a top advisor to President Joe Biden on the Indo-Pacific, said Friday that the U.S. would take resolute steps to support Taiwan, including sending warships and aircraft through the 160-kilometer wide waterway that separates Taiwan and China.

"We'll continue to fly, sail and operate where international law allows, consistent with our longstanding commitment to freedom of navigation," he said in a call with reporters. "And that includes conducting standard air and maritime transits through the Taiwan Strait in the next few weeks." MDT/AP

VETERAN INDIAN INVESTOR RAKESH JHUNJHUNWALA DIES AT 62

VETERAN stock market investor and Indian billionaire Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, nicknamed India's own Warren Buffet, died yesterday in Mumbai city, Press Trust of India news agency reported. He was 62.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the tributes for the business magnate, who had an estimated net worth of \$5.8 billion, according to Forbes.

"Rakesh Jhunjhunwala was indomitable. Full of life, witty and insightful, he leaves behind an indelible contribution to the financial world," Modi tweeted, and also expressed his condolences to Jhunjhunwala's family.

His cause of death has not yet been released, although he was said to be suffering from various

health issues, local media reported.

Jhunjhunwala, a chartered accountant from the northern state of Rajasthan, began investing in the stock market while he was still in college, starting off with capital of just 5,000 rupees (\$63). He went on to establish and manage RARE Enterprises, an asset management firm. As his net worth steadily rose, he became one of India's richest men with investments in some of the country's biggest companies.

In his latest venture, he teamed up with two Indian airline CEOs to launch the low-cost Akasa Air, which took its first flight last week. Jhunjhunwala was seen at the launch in a wheelchair, local media reported. MDT/AP

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MGM Wins Gold in Best HR Communication Strategy at Employee Experience Awards 2022

MGM has been awarded **Gold Award for Best HR Communications Strategy** at the **Employee Experience Awards 2022**, recently held in Hong Kong. Being the only recipient of gold in the category, the Company is committed to creating effective and energizing communication campaigns and provide creative and heartwarming engagement experience for our valued employees. The Company's sincere efforts were recognized by a panel of top HR leaders in this renowned Award.



Guided by our holistic view on the well-being and development of our team members, MGM has embraced technological changes and various styles of storytelling such as employee app, video storytelling and bite-size learning. The Company's engagement is well established in its culture of storytelling, telling stories about employee success, craftsmanship spirit, community care and passion for sustainable development. M life INSIDER, the Company's employee portal that deliver articles, videos, and announcements to team members. It has served as a communications platform for the team to facilitate collaboration and share enriching ideas and inspiration.

"Storytelling plays a vital role in our employee experience. In addition to our consistent motivation to tell the story of the Golden Lion team and foster a culture of excellence and innovation through storytelling, we have a robust communications strategy to help the team stay connected when many employees are physically away from the workplace during the pandemic." said **Keith Lei, Vice President of Human Resources**.

Believing that everyone of the Golden Lion Team has brilliant stories to inspire, MGM launched "P-Pride", a storytelling series dedicated to telling stories about their personal pursuit of greatness. The series has curated inspiring stories of team members, who are professional photographer, basketball coach, triathlon runner and a FPV drone pilot.

MGM also launched the "Communicating Beyond Words", an ongoing Sign Language learning program aiming to promote sign language and enhance social inclusion in its workplace. In addition to bite-sized learning videos on the platform, MGM has in addition developed various activities and roadshows to integrate sign language into our workplace.



During the latest wave of outbreak in Macau, M life INSIDER rolled out the "Staying Home Safe & Connected" series, where talented team members shared easy and fun activities to do at home, such as handicrafts, stretching exercises and cooking. All of these endeavors are to strengthen team bonding, especially amid these uncertain times.



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EXPLAINER

Despite public anger, no progress in Iraq political deadlock

WEEKS after followers of an influential cleric stormed parliament, Iraq's political crisis shows no signs of abating, despite rising public anger over a debilitating gridlock that has further weakened the country's caretaker government and its ability to provide basic services.

Iraq's two rival Shiite political camps remain locked in a zero-sum competition, and the lone voice potentially able to end the rift — the revered Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani — has been conspicuously silent.

For now, hundreds of supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr, a firebrand Shiite cleric, are still camped outside the legislative building in Baghdad, ready to escalate if their demands are not met.

Al-Sadr has called for early elections, the dissolution of parliament and constitutional amendments. He has given the judiciary an end-of-the-week deadline to dissolve the legislature.

His Shiite rivals in the Iran-backed camp have conditions of their own. They accused him of violating the constitution, prompting counter-protests that have spurred fears of bloodshed.

Neither faction seems willing to compromise to end the 10-month-old political crisis, the longest since the 2003 U.S. invasion reset the political order. The caretaker Cabinet — unable to pass laws or issue a budget — grows more feeble by the day, while the public lashes out in protest against poor services, including power cuts during the scorching summer heat.

UNITING THE WARRING FACTIONS

When al-Sadr commanded thousands of followers to storm Baghdad's heavily fortified government zone on July 30, he paralyzed state institutions and prevented his political rivals from proceeding with the formation of a government.

Al-Sadr might have felt emboldened by the silence of the 92-year-old al-Sistani, a revered spiritual figure whose word holds enormous sway among leaders and ordinary Iraqis.

Three officials at al-Sista-



A protester holds a poster depicting Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr on a bridge leading towards the Green Zone area in Baghdad, Iraq, July 30, 2022

ni's seminary in the holy city of Najaf said he has not used his influence because he did not want to appear to take sides in the most acute internal Shiite crisis since 2003. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

"The Marjaiya is watching the situation with concern," said one of the officials, referring to the ayatollah. He said al-Sistani "will not interfere at the present time. His entry may be perceived as benefiting one party over another."

Al-Sistani has seldom intervened in political matters, but when he has, it has altered the course of Iraqi politics.

In 2019, his sermon led to the resignation of then-Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi amid mass anti-government protests, the largest in Iraq's modern history. Mustafa al-Kadhimi's administration was sworn in with the goal of holding early elections, which took place in October.

The ayatollah has grown weary of current Iraqi political dynamics, the official in Najaf said. He has not resumed his usual Friday sermons, which were suspended during the pandemic. His doors remain closed to Iraq's political elites, a sign that he disapproves of them.

The seminary in Najaf is also divided over al-Sadr.

Some fear his audacity is deepening the Shiite divide, while others agree with his anti-corruption and reformist rhetoric. Dozens of students from the seminary recently joined the protests.

Al-Sistani does have red lines that, if crossed, would compel him to intervene, the officials said. They include bloodshed and attempts to erode what are seen as Iraq's democratic foundations.

"Muqtada knows these red lines and will not cross them," one official said.

SEARCHING FOR A WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS

Even if the Shiite rivals were to agree to hold elections, fundamental differences remain about electoral rules. There's no legal precedent to guide decision-makers.

Al-Sadr has hinted he will escalate protests if the judiciary does not dissolve parliament by the end of the week. The judiciary says it does not have the power to disband the legislature.

His rivals in the Coordination Framework alliance, made up of largely Iran-backed Shiite parties, claim al-Sadr's pressure on the judiciary is unconstitutional. They don't object to new elections, provided there is a national consensus on how the vote will be conducted.

Such a consensus seems unattainable.

Al-Sadr wants to use the

same rules as in the October election, when Iraq was divided into 83 electoral districts. The current law benefits parties with a strong grassroots base like al-Sadr's, who grew his seat tally from 54 to 73, while the Iran-backed parties saw a decrease from 48 to 16.

The Framework wants the law to be amended. However, the parliament building is closed, with hundreds of al-Sadr's followers camped outside preventing MPs from entering.

WHAT THE REST OF IRAQ THINKS

Ordinary Iraqis are increasingly frustrated because the caretaker government is struggling to provide basic services, such as electricity and water.

The political crisis comes at a time of growing unemployment, particularly among young Iraqis. The country has endured consecutive droughts that severely damage agriculture and fisheries industries, further diminishing prospects for jobs.

Protests in southern Iraq turned violent last week after stone-throwing demonstrators clashed with security forces outside oil fields in the provinces of Missan and Dhi Qar. More than a dozen protesters were detained, and more than a dozen members of the security forces were injured.

this day in history

1945 ALLIED NATIONS CELEBRATE VJ DAY



Japan has surrendered to the Allies after almost six years of war.

There is joy and celebration around the world and 15 August has been declared Victory in Japan day.

The end of war will be marked by two-day holidays in the UK, the USA and Australia.

After days of rumour and speculation, US President Harry S Truman broke the good news at a press conference at the White House at 1900 yesterday.

He said the Japanese Government had agreed to comply in full with the Potsdam declaration which demands the unconditional surrender of Japan.

Supreme Commander General Douglas MacArthur will receive the official Japanese surrender, arrangements for which are now under way.

Later, in an address to a crowd that had gathered outside the White House President Truman said: "This is the day we have been waiting for since Pearl Harbor. This is the day when Fascism finally dies, as we always knew it would."

But he warned that the task of creating a lasting peace still lay ahead.

At midnight, the British Prime Minister Clement Atlee confirmed the news in a broadcast saying, "The last of our enemies is laid low."

He expressed gratitude to Britain's allies, in the Dominions of Australia and New Zealand, India, Burma, all countries occupied by Japan and to the USSR. But special thanks went to the United States "without whose prodigious efforts the war in the East would still have many years to run".

The day coincides with the state opening of Parliament which took on an air of a victory parade.

Thousands braved the rain to watch King George VI and the queen driven down the Mall in an open carriage.

Later tonight, the King addressed the nation and the Empire in broadcast from his study at Buckingham Palace at 2100.

"Our hearts are full to overflowing, as are your own. Yet there is not one of us who has experienced this terrible war who does not realise that we shall feel its inevitable consequences long after we have all forgotten our rejoicings today."

The Royal Family greeted cheering crowds from the Palace balcony. Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret later mingled with the crowds outside the Palace.

Historic buildings all over London are floodlit and throngs of people have crowded onto the streets of every town and city shouting, singing, dancing, lighting bonfires and letting off fireworks.

But there were no celebrations in Japan - in his first ever radio broadcast, Emperor Hirohito blamed the use of "a new and most cruel bomb" used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki for Japan's surrender.

"Should we continue to fight, it would not only result in the ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation but would lead also to the total extinction of human civilisation."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Allies had delivered Japan an ultimatum to surrender on 28 July 1945.

When this was ignored, the US dropped two atomic bombs on Hiroshima on 6 August and Nagasaki on 9 August, the day Soviet forces invaded Manchuria.

The Allies celebrated victory over Japan on 15 August 1945, although the Japanese administration under General Koiso Kuniaki did not officially surrender with a signed document until 2 September. Both dates are known as VJ Day.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Discuss your problems and complaints if you wish to rectify them. Take care of yourself or you can expect to suffer from minor illness. Coworkers may not be completely honest with you; try not to rely on help from others.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 You can become obsessed with detail and must be sure to divide your time appropriately. Social activity with friends and relatives will be most successful. This will not be the best day for communication or travel.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 There is not much you can do to alleviate the problem, but consider putting some extra work into your house. Take the time to do your job correctly or you may find yourself looking for a new one.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Don't let your personal partner hold you back or slow you down. Focus on your domestic scene. Get together with friends or relatives. Instant romance could be yours if you go out with friends.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Get back to basics and reevaluate what is important in life. Your emotions are fluctuating, so be careful not to say things you'll regret. Look into attending seminars that can expand your perception.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Someone left a real mess for you to sift through. Cultural activities will prove to be quite enlightening for everyone. Over spending or unexpected bills could set you back.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 You don't want to give anyone fuel for the fire. Today will be rather hectic on the domestic scene. A new you could help your attitude. Look into projects that you feel would contribute something to your appearance.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Use discrimination and play hard to get. You can make major gains professionally by completing projects on time. Your courage and willpower will enable you to get rid of destructive habits as well.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 You will have original ideas for ways to make extra money. Electrical problems may be an issue. Ask those in key positions to help you overcome the delays and to support your concerns in order to move on.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 You may not want to spend time around family or your home. Don't fall for damaging rumors, and refuse to get involved in gossip. Do not get involved with individuals who are already committed to others.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Be careful not to reveal private information. You will have some wonderful ideas that should bring you extra money. Situations you can't change should be forgotten for the present.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Do not make rash decisions about your personal life. A romantic dinner, followed by a quiet evening with the one who is enticing you, should be most satisfying.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	23	34	cloudy
Changchun	18	24	rain
Chengdu	27	38	overcast
Chongqing	33	42	cloudy
Fuzhou	27	39	fine
Guangzhou	25	35	cloudy
Guiyang	21	31	cloudy
Haikou	25	32	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	29	40	fine
Harbin	18	25	thunderstorms
Hefei	26	39	fine
Nanjing	30	40	cloudy
Shanghai	29	40	cloudy
Taipei	26	31	fine
Wuhan	30	39	fine
Hong Kong	28	31	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	18	29	overcast
Frankfurt	16	29	overcast
Paris	19	27	rain
London	18	29	showers
New York	20	28	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Hit with an open hand; 5- Violist's clef; 9- Assist, often in a criminal act; 13- Word in many college names; 14- "The Merry Widow" composer; 16- Indifferent; 17- Dept. of Labor division; 18- ___ barrel; 19- Thin stratum; 20- Jury member; 21- Driver's aid; 22- Winged child; 24- Lotion ingredient; 26- "The Lion King" villain; 27- Validation; 29- Renegade; 33- Island greeting; 34- Switch back?; 35- Husky burden; 36- Composer Delibes; 37- Pungent bulb; 38- Primate with a short tail or no tail; 39- Fill completely; 41- Mont. neighbor; 42- What girls will be; 44- Legendary king of Ithaca; 46- Paddled boat; 47- Bamboo stem; 48- Function; 49- Area with coin-operated games; 52- Cad or heel; 53- Coal-rich region; 57- Office fill-in; 58- Fab Four name; 60- Make weary; 61- It's blown among the reeds; 62- Capital city of Yemen; 63- "___ Tu": 1974 hit; 64- Window piece; 65- ___ never work!; 66- Hey, over here!

DOWN 1- Discontinue; 2- ___-majesté; 3- Aspirin target; 4- Ancient Egyptian king; 5- Many; 6- Embankment; 7- For whom the bell tolls; 8- Scull; 9- Maintains; 10- Joburg settler; 11- Son of Isaac and Rebekah; 12- Grave; 15- Nocturnal carnivore; 23- Contains; 25- Mauna ___; 26- Ghost; 27- Make one's case; 28- Like tubers; 29- Met highlights; 30- Budget alternative; 31- Home on the range; 32- Paradise; 33- Likewise; 34- To provide with a quality; 37- Solidarity; 40- One on the run; 42- ___-Mart; 43- Ragtime dance; 45- Blue; 46- Horse pen; 48- Bucolic; 49- At the apex of; 50- First name in country; 51- Let's go!; 52- Pious platitudes; 54- Melodies; 55- War god; 56- Breather; 59- Mai ___;

Friday's solution

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

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PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	



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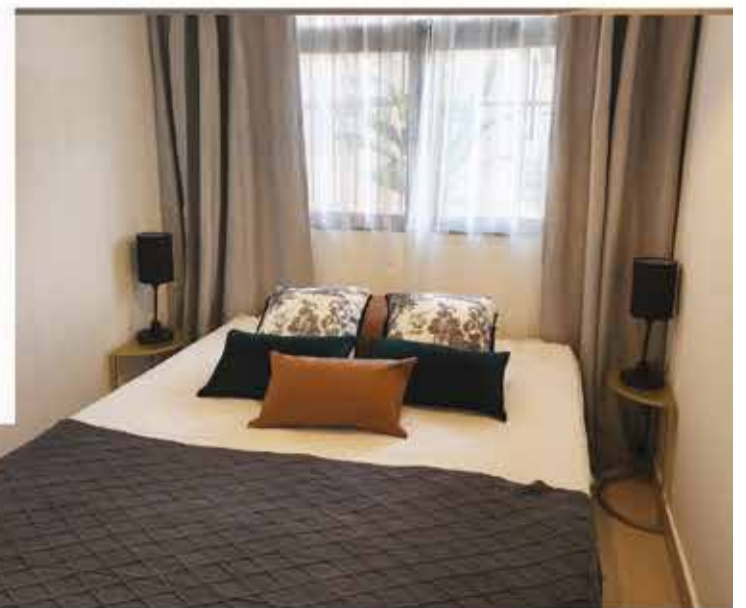
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GOLF

Cameron Smith has claret jug and now eyes No. 1 in the world

DOUG FERGUSON, MEMPHIS

B RITISH Open champion Cameron Smith has spent all week ignoring queries about reports he will be the latest to leave the PGA Tour for Saudi-funded LIV Golf. His only concern was try to win the FedEx Cup playoffs.

Now there's another perk at stake: No. 1 in the world.

Even as J.J. Spaun picked up a pair of late birdies for a 2-under 68 to main a one-shot lead over Sepp Straka, and Will Zalatoris moved into contention for his first PGA Tour title, Smith is who got everyone's attention Saturday in the FedEx St. Jude Championship.

He birdied his last hole for a 67, leaving him among those two shots out of the lead and fully aware that a win takes him to No. 1 in the world.

"That's been one of my goals probably since the start of the year is to try to get to that top spot," Smith said. "Try and chase it down."



J.J. Spaun watches his putt on the 18th green during the third round of the St. Jude Championship golf tournament, Saturday

A week that began with a federal judge delivering a blow to LIV Golf by denying the request from three of its players to be part of

the postseason could very well end with a new No. 1 that appears headed for the rival series.

Distractions don't seem to be a

problem for the Aussie, and there is no shortage of them.

"There's definitely been a few more, but for me, I'm just trying

to hit the best shot I can," Smith said. That's what I'm here to do is to hit good golf shots and make birdies."

Spaun had a two-putt birdie on the par-5 16th and holed an 18-foot birdie putt on the next hole to claim the 54-hole lead a 13-under 197. Straka was right there with him until he failed to save par from the bunker on the 18th for a 68 that left him one shot behind.

Both are first-time winners on the PGA Tour this year, and a victory in a FedEx Cup playoffs even carries even more weight — \$2.7 million to the winner and a guaranteed spot at East Lake for the FedEx Cup finale.

Zalatoris is just as hungry for a win. He has been a tough customer in the majors, losing in a playoff at the PGA Championship and finishing one back in the U.S. Open. He is No. 14 in the world. And he has yet to win on the PGA Tour.

Zalatoris opened with a 71 that put him in such a hole that even his fiancee wanted to know their plans if he didn't make it to the weekend.

"I told her, 'Let's cross that bridge when he get there,'" Zalatoris said with a smile. He decided to let his new caddie, Joel Stock, read putts in their second official round together. Zalatoris shot a 63 and followed with a 65 on Saturday.

He also was two behind, along with Trey Mullinax (66). **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily

Xinhua Commentary

**WHITE PAPER ON TAIWAN
 QUESTION TO POOL
 STRENGTH FOR NATIONAL
 REUNIFICATION,
 REJUVENATION**

A white paper, titled "The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era," will give a significant boost to efforts to pool strength for national reunification and rejuvenation.

The white paper, published by the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and the State Council Information Office on Wednesday, comprehensively elaborates on the position, principles and policies of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese government on advancing and realizing national reunification in the new era.

It bears great significance in strengthening the trend of opposing "Taiwan independence" and advancing national reunification, resolutely curbing separatist activities and interference from external forces, and firmly safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Resolving the Taiwan question and realizing China's complete reunification is a shared aspiration of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation. The CPC, the Chinese government, and the Chinese people have striven for decades to achieve this goal.

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012, the CPC and the Chinese government have adopted new and innovative measures in relation to Taiwan. They have continued to chart the course of cross-Straits relations, safeguard peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits, and promote progress towards national reunification.

The achievements in advancing the peaceful development of cross-Straits relations and peaceful national reunification in the new era have once again demonstrated that the CPC has always been the backbone of the Chinese nation, exercising strong leadership in realizing national rejuvenation and reunification.

However, in recent years the Taiwan authorities, led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), have redoubled their efforts to divide the country, and some external forces have tried to exploit Taiwan to contain China, prevent China from achieving complete reunification, and halt the process of national rejuvenation.

The actions of the DPP authorities in advocating "Taiwan independence" have resulted in tensions in cross-Straits relations, endangering peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits. They are obstacles that must be eliminated in the process of advancing peaceful reunification.

External interference is another obstacle to China's reunification. Still lost in delusions of hegemony and trapped in a Cold War mindset, some forces in the United States insist on perceiving and portraying China as a major strategic adversary and a serious long-term threat. They do their utmost to undermine and pressurize China, exploiting Taiwan as a convenient tool.

It is the sacred right of every sovereign state to safeguard national unity and territorial integrity. It goes without saying that the Chinese government is entitled to take all measures necessary to settle the Taiwan question and achieve national reunification, free of external interference.

China is firmly committed to peaceful development. At the same time, it will not flinch in the face of external interference, nor will it tolerate any infringement upon its sovereignty, security and development interests. Relying on external forces will achieve nothing for Taiwan's separatists, and using Taiwan to contain China is doomed to fail.

"We will work with the greatest sincerity and exert our utmost efforts to achieve peaceful reunification," the white paper says. "But we will not renounce the use of force," it adds, stressing that the use of force would be the last resort taken under compelling circumstances.

National reunification is an essential step toward national rejuvenation. The future of Taiwan lies in China's reunification, and the wellbeing of the people of Taiwan hinges on the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, an endeavor that bears on the future and destiny of the people on both sides of the Taiwan Straits.

A fire ripped through a packed church during morning services in Egypt's capital yesterday, killing at least 41 worshippers and injuring 14. The church quickly filled with thick black smoke, and witnesses said several trapped congregants jumped from upper floors to escape. "Suffocation, suffocation, all of them dead," said a distraught witness, who only gave a partial name, Abu Bishoy.

The cause of the blaze in the Abu Sefein church in the working-class neighborhood of Imbaba was not immediately known. An initial investigation pointed to an electrical short-circuit, according

to a police statement.

Footage from the scene circulated online showed burned furniture, including wooden tables and chairs. Firefighters were seen putting out the blaze while others carried victims to ambulances. Families waited for word on relatives who were inside the church.

Witnesses said there were many children inside the building when the fire broke out. "There are children we didn't know how to get to them," said Abu Bishoy. "And we don't know whose son this is, or whose daughter that is. Is this possible?"

MEXICO

**PRESIDENT TO BYPASS
 CONGRESS TO KEEP
 ARMY IN STREETS**

MARIA VERZA,
 MEXICO CITY

MEXICO'S president has begun exploring plans to sidestep congress to hand formal control of the National Guard to the army, a move that could extend the military's control over policing in a country with high levels of violence.

That has raised concerns because President Andrés Manuel López Obrador won approval for creating the force in 2019 by pledging in the constitution that it would be under nominal civilian control and that the army would be off the streets by 2024.

Neither the National Guard nor the military have been able to lower the insecurity in the country, however. This past week, drug cartels staged widespread arson and shooting attacks, terrifying civilians in three main northwest cities in a bold challenge to the state.

Still, López Obrador wants to keep soldiers involved in policing, and remove civilian control over the National Guard, whose officers and commanders are mostly soldiers, with military training and pay grades.

But the president no longer has the votes in congress to amend the constitution and has suggested he may try to do it as a regulatory change with a simple majority in congress or by an executive order and see if the courts will uphold that.

López Obrador warned Friday against politicizing the issue, saying the military is needed to fight Mexico's violent drug cartels. But then he immediately politicized it himself.

"A constitutional reform would be ideal, but we have to look for ways, because they (the opposition) instead of helping



Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (left) surveys National Guard troops as the new force is presented at a ceremony, in Mexico City, June 30, 2019

us, are blocking us, there is an intent to prevent us from doing anything," López Obrador said.

The two main opposition parties also had a different positions when they were in power. They supported the army in public safety roles during their respective administrations beginning in 2006 and 2012.

When López Obrador was running for president, he called for taking the army off the streets. But being in power — and seeing homicides running at their highest sustained levels ever — apparently changed his mind.

He has relied heavily on the military not just for crime-fighting. He sees the army and navy as heroic, patriotic and less corruptible, and has entrusted them with building major infrastructure projects, running airports and trains, stopping migrants and overseeing customs at seaports.

Mexico's army has been deeply involved in policing since the start of the 2006 drug war. But its presence was always understood as temporary, a stop-gap until Mexico could build trustworthy police forces.

López Obrador appears to have abandoned that plan, instead making the military and quasi-military force like the National Guard the main solution. "Their mandate has to be prolonged," he said.

"I think the best thing is for the National Guard to be a branch of the Defense Department to give it stability over time and prevent it from being corrupted," he said. He also wants the army and the navy to help in public safety roles beyond 2024, the current dateline established in a 2020 executive order.

The force has grown to 115,000, but almost 80% of its personnel were drawn from the ranks of the military.

The United Nations and human rights groups have long expressed reservations about having the military do police work. and Mexico's Supreme Court has yet to decide on several appeals against what critics say are unconstitutional tasks given to the National Guard.

The U.N. Human Rights High Commissioner's office said last week that militarizing civil institutions, such as policing, weakens democracy. MDT/AP



Israel A Palestinian gunman opened fire at a bus near Jerusalem's Old City early yesterday, wounding eight Israelis in an attack that came a week after violence flared up between Israel and militants in Gaza, police and medics said. Two of the victims were in serious condition, including a pregnant woman with abdominal injuries and a man with gunshot wounds to the head and neck, according to Israeli hospitals treating them.



Ukraine's health minister has accused Russian authorities of committing a crime against humanity by blocking access to affordable medicines in areas its forces have occupied since invading the country 5 1/2 months ago. In an interview with The Associated Press, Ukrainian Health Minister Viktor Liashko (pictured) said Russian authorities repeatedly have blocked efforts to provide state-subsidized drugs to people in occupied cities, towns and villages.

German businesses and public institutions should heat their offices no higher than 19 degrees Celsius this winter to help reduce the country's consumption of natural gas, Germany's economy minister said Saturday. Germany, the European Union's biggest economy, is quickly trying to wean itself off using natural gas from Russia in response to Moscow's attack on Ukraine. However Germany uses more Russian gas imports than many other EU nations.

UK Thousands of U.K. train drivers walked off the job Saturday in a strike over jobs, pay and conditions, scuppering services across much of the country. The action was the latest in a spreading series of strikes by British workers seeking substantial raises to offset soaring prices for food and fuel. The 24-hour strike by members of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen halted trains on major routes, including the main lines between London and Scotland and commuter services around the capital.