



TOURISM BLUES: AUGUST HOTEL GUEST NUMBERS DECLINED 10.4% YEAR-ON-YEAR TO 390,000, OFFICIAL STATISTICS SHOW

P5

MORGAN STANLEY: AMID GROUP VISA HYPE, RECOVERY ONLY APPARENT IN 2024

P5

PUTIN POISED TO ANNOUNCE ANNEXATION OF UKRAINIAN REGIONS

P8



AP PHOTO



Philippines The Asian Development Bank said yesterday it will devote at least \$14 billion through 2025 to help ease a worsening food crisis in the Asia-Pacific. The development lender said it plans a comprehensive program of support to help the 1.1 billion people in the region who lack healthy diets due to poverty and soaring food prices.

AP PHOTO



Japan protested to Russia yesterday over the detention of a Japanese consulate official on espionage allegations, denying the allegations and accusing Russian authorities of abusive interrogation. The official was detained on Sept. 22 and interrogated with his eyes covered, his hands and head pressed and immobilized, Japan's Foreign Ministry said, prompting it to lodge a protest and to demand an apology.

Thailand will allow abortions up to the 20th week of pregnancy under new regulations issued by the Public Health Ministry, a government spokesperson announced yesterday. The regulations, published Monday in the Royal Gazette, come into effect Oct. 26 and liberalize the terms of a law in place since February last year that allowed the termination of pregnancies during the first 12 weeks.

Afghanistan A senior member of the Taliban-run government called the new rulers to reopen schools for girls beyond the sixth grade, saying there is no valid reason in Islam for the ban. The appeal from Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, the Taliban deputy foreign minister, came during a top Taliban gathering in Kabul. It was a rare moderate voice amid the harsh measures imposed by the Taliban.

More on backpage

OVERSEAS CANTONESE

As Cantonese language wanes, efforts grow to preserve it overseas

P6

AP PHOTO



CRIME
BOY ACCUSED OF SEXUALLY ASSAULTING GIRL IN LIBRARY TOILET

P2

SUNCITY TRIAL
CASE DEFENDANT DESCRIBES PARALLEL BETTING AS 'GREY AREA'

P2

**GOV'T SUSPENDS
WEEKLY COVID
PRESS BRIEFING**

The Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre has announced it will suspend the regular press conferences that occur on Thursday, as Macau has "entered the normalization stage of pandemic prevention." In a statement, the bureau pledged it will "closely monitor changes in the epidemiological situation inside and outside Macau, and will continue to release the latest information on the epidemic situation and relevant prevention measures in a timely manner through different channels and methods." In future, press conferences will be held according to the need to answer questions from the media and the public.

**MGTO CELEBRATES
TOURISM DAY WITH
TRAY RACE**

As part of a long-standing tradition, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) organized a 'Tray Race' to celebrate World Tourism Day. Suspended last year because of the pandemic outbreak, the Tray Race resumed this year with a new theme involving Chinese fashion outfits. The Tray Race is divided into male and female categories. The first, second and third prizes and the Best Costume Award are presented for each category. This year, the Best Costume Award was in the limelight. Contestants were encouraged to wear traditional or vintage Chinese outfits to compete for the award.

**DSAL'S INTERNSHIP
PROGRAM GARNERED
NEARLY 1,000
APPLICATIONS**

In collaboration with local enterprises, the Labour Affairs Bureau's 'Job Career Internship Program' has received 983 applications from new graduates. The program aims to allow local young people who have graduated from universities to obtain workplace experience from internships through a three-month work experience program. Vacancies in the financial industry, large-scale leisure enterprises and public affairs enterprises are popular among young people. Companies have accepted 414 people for internships, and 342 of them are willing to participate in internships.

SUNCITY TRIAL

CASE DEFENDANT DESCRIBES PARALLEL BETTING AS 'GREY AREA'

ANTHONY LAM

A defendant in the case concerning Suncity Group has described the practice of parallel betting as falling "within a grey area."

The seventh defendant, Lou Sek Fung, who worked at the Suncity as the head of the Marketing Department, "strongly opposed" the accusations regarding his role as a leader in an illegal gambling syndicate who handled marketing and fundraising.

He pointed out that the Marketing Department only handled administrative work. It was his understanding that, given the decades of parallel betting in Macau, the practice is not illegal. At worst, it is within a grey area of the law.

He added that fundraising is an operational matter and had nothing to do with him. He emphasized that he had never instructed co-workers to promote parallel betting and that there was no evidence that he was involved in the promotion or luring



RENO TO MARQUES

of parallel betting.

It was alleged that Lou was the shareholder of a parallel betting company. In response, the defendant noted he was holding the shares on behalf of a friend. When questioned on the parallel betting training document seized from his home, he explained it was given to him by the then director of Suncity's Marketing De-

partment but had been ignored for two to three years.

Lou pointed to the fifth defendant, Cheong Chi Kin, as being involved in operating parallel betting.

Prosecutor Coordinator Lai U Hou questioned Lou on his part in a chat group that held discussions on parallel betting. Lai cited a message that stated, "Do

not mention parallel betting; after all it's not legal."

Lou responded that the message was sent by a member called Leo who was unrelated to him. He emphasized that, due to the large volume of chats and messages each day from multiple groups, he had muted most of the groups and ignored most of the messages. His colleagues would contact him by phone if important matters arose, he added.

At the same court hearing, the first defendant, Alvin Chau, proactively added that when Lou made suggestions on the credit level to be assigned to UE Company, he told Lou to reply to UE about the matter.

Chau said that as the law was not changed in 2019, he viewed the practice as legal before and after that year. In addition, he emphasized that Suncity's withdrawal from UE was "conducted in broad daylight," while handling customers affected by Suncity's withdrawal was an act of responsibility, he said.

CRIME

Boy accused of sexually assaulting three-year-old in library toilet

STAFF REPORTER

A 12-year-old boy is accused of sexually assaulting a three-year-old child in a library toilet in Taipa, according to the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday.

The PJ received the case from the Public Security Police Force (PSP) on September 23 at 9 p.m. and contacted the victim's mother.

The suspect is a 12-year-old local middle-school student.

During the investigation on September 23 at 5



p.m., police learned that the victim's mother and another parent went to the school to pick up the victim and a five-year-old boy. Both parents went to

the library in Taipa. The victim went to the library toilet with the alleged assailant.

While in the toilet, the suspect allegedly followed the victim into the cubicle and locked the door.

When the victim did not return, the victim's mother went to the toilet and knocked on the door.

The mother allegedly saw the suspect rush from the toilet in a panicked state.

After returning home, the victim told her mother the suspect had removed her pants and tried to tou-

ch her buttocks. Hearing the knock on the door, the suspect helped the victim to put on her pants and fled.

The mother reported the matter to police immediately.

The second boy alleges he saw the whole incident.

The following afternoon, on September 24, the PJ arrested the suspect at a residential building located in Taipa and, with the suspect's mother, returned to the PJ for investigation.

The PJ said the suspect has not admitted to the alleged criminal behavior.

However, with the evidence on hand and with a statement from another boy, the PJ concluded the suspect had engaged in sexual coercion and transferred his case to the Public Prosecutions Office to follow up.

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CONSUMPTION SUBSIDY

Elderlies encounter difficulty spending remaining e-voucher discount amount

STAFF REPORTER

SOME senior citizens reflected that the conditions necessary to receive the upcoming MOP8,000 consumption voucher may not be feasible for them to achieve.

In yesterday's TDM Macau Forum, interviewed residents expressed concern that the conditions were not flexible for their circumstances, given that many are already unemployed and unable to work.

One caller added that the measure is inconvenient for some older adults, since not everyone is willing to spend; thus it will be difficult to use up the remaining discount amount.

The consumption voucher allows a maximum spend of MOP400 per day, MOP300 of which is deducted from the MOP5,000 subsidy, while MOP100 is deducted from the MOP3,000 discount



subsidy.

Over the weekend, the government announced that another round of the consumption subsidy will be issued on October 28 as part of the second MOP10 billion stimulus the government announced to combat the effects of the pandemic.

Under the plan, all permanent or non-permanent local residents registered for the third round of consumption subsidies are eligible for the new consumption boosts. With no prior registration needed, MOP8,000 will be automatically paid into the bank accounts of eligible residents.

However, the new funds will be deposited either after a recipient has used both the start-up and discount amounts of the current consumption subsidy, or at the end of the current subsidy period, whichever occurs earlier.

"Residents can consume the remaining discount grant amount

depending on their consumption habits. There is no need to rush spending of the money in a short period," said Lau Kit Lon, head of Business Promotion Division of the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED).

"The range for this time allowance is intended to help residents with daily living, not including rent for living and personal outcome," Lau added.

Lau said that as of September 25, around 110,000 residents were already qualified to receive the allowance that is due to be distributed from next month.

According to Lau, since the government launched several rounds of consumption benefits plans in 2020, over MOP14.4 billion has been granted. Of this, around MOP9.35 billion was injected into small and medium enterprises, which is around 65% of total government spending.

CE pledges to take references from national youth group for Policy Address

ANTHONY LAM

CHIEF Executive, Ho Iat Seng, has pledged he will take into account the suggestions and opinions presented at a meeting by the All-China Youth Federation.

The head of the government met with the national group, led by its vice president Alvis Lo, on Monday. Lo is also the director of the government's Health Bureau.

Ho said the government will undertake a comprehensive analysis of the suggestions received at the meeting. The suggestions will be used for policy formulation in related areas next year.

The Chief Executive said education on patriotism should start with understanding the country's Constitution, as well as the city's Basic Law and the Law on Safeguarding National Security.

At the same time, he



added, it is necessary to strengthen younger generations' understanding of the importance of national security. Only in this way can patriotic education develop and the tradition of loving the motherland and Macau be passed on.

In addition, the head of the Unitary Police Service (CPU), Leong Man Cheong, noted his team has done a lot of work to benefit young people. It is hoped the majori-

ty of young people can develop a correct sense of mission and values as they grow up, and become citizens who dare to take responsibility, abide by the law and have good morals.

At the meeting, Lo said that under the care and guidance of the Chief Executive, the members of the All-China Youth Federation Macao Chapter have given full play to their own advantages in different fields.

Meanwhile, lawmaker Becky Song, a member in the Standing Committee of the Federation, expressed her hopes that the government would improve its work in several areas. Such areas include the refinement of social mobility, training on the acknowledgement of the system, the expansion on the areas for youth development and the use of Macau law in Hengqin for arbitration purposes.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES BUREAU 'SHOCKED' OVER GUARDS' ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN PROSTITUTION RING

THE Correctional Services Bureau (DSC) said it is "very shocked and sad" about two prison guards accused of being involved in a sex work syndicate.

On Monday, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced it had busted a criminal syndicate, allegedly engaged in pimping, document forgery and organized crime. The police arrested about a dozen people.

The syndicate has generated an income reaching MOP15 million since it began, the police disclosed.

As two prison guards were allegedly involved, the DSC said it is "highly concerned with" the matter.

The bureau has said in a statement that it will cooperate

fully with the investigation. The bureau has also initiated disciplinary procedures against the two suspects, who are currently suspended from work as a preventive measure.

The bureau has also notified all its departments and divisions about the matter, and requested that all employees be mindful of their "personal behaviors and moral integrity" and abide by the law at all times.

"The DSC reiterates that it has always attached importance to the personal character and law-abiding awareness of its officers. If any officer commits a violation of laws and disciplines, it will be dealt with in accordance with the law," the bureau added. AL



MACAO ONE ACCOUNT

ONLINE PLATFORM ADDS NEW CARDS FOR INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

STAFF REPORTER

To improve the service of digital cards, the Macao One Account launched a new function that adds 24 types of professions such as pharmacists, teachers, lawyers, and architects to the online platform.

In a press conference, authorities announced the cards will be divided into two categories: generic and professional.

The inclusion of professional cards and licenses issued by government departments into the digital card service is designed to make the service more convenient for people to use in their daily lives.

At present, there are 28 generic cards and 12 professional cards that the public can use.

The authorities added several generic cards and licenses for government de-

partments such as a card to register for disability evaluation by the Social Welfare Bureau and a membership card "Friends of IAM."

The 28 generic cards and licenses for the public cover areas such as medical, education, culture and health and environmental protection, among others.

12 professional cards provide around 24 types of professional skilled workers to the public covering government departments such as the Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau, the Land and Urban Construction Bureau, the Labour Affairs Bureau, the Education and Youth Development Bureau and the Macau Lawyers Association.

Furthermore, courts have also allowed the legal profession to submit litigation documents via the service.

"This is convenient for us (lawyer and people who en-

gage in legal profession) in doing anything," said Jorge Neto Valente, president of Macau Lawyers Association, as cited in a TDM report.

"The purpose of adding a professional card service is to facilitate those workers who have professional skills to use the related service when they show their card from the account," said Ng Wai Han, subdirector of the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau.

At present, the number of registered accounts in Macao One Account rose from 67,000 two years ago to over 400,000 now, with over 125,000 users having combined their cards and licenses.

"In mid-October, the authorities will launch a related service with driving licenses. In the future, other types of cards or licenses will be added such as real estate," said Ng.



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URBAN PLANNING COMMITTEE TO DISCUSS RELOCATING FUEL MIDWAY STORAGE

TOMORROW, the Urban Planning Committee will discuss the plan to relocate the fuel midway storage to the New Urban Zone A.

The storage location has been in Ilha Verde for about 10 years.

The draft relocation plan has been published on the committee's website, although an opinion piece has been received querying details on sewage handling and dispersal measures at the future midway storage location.

When built, the new midway storage will be located on the land which currently houses the Macau Border Building of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge. The new Sewage Treatment Plant will also be located nearby.

The facilities will cover a floor area of 3,299 square meters, with a proposed height clearance of 9 meters.

The draft plan also proposes that a wall of no less than 2.5 meters or other



physical barriers be built on the periphery of the land plot. The surrounding grounds of the building must also be landscaped.

The discharge of pollutants must also be strictly controlled, and plans with less impact on the environment will be adopted to ensure the surrounding water bodies will not be affected.

When the draft plan was put online for public viewing, the committee received feedback on the plan. In addition to requesting that the committee or other related government bodies ensure that the future facility be equipped with sewage pipelines and

explain future arrangements for sewage handling and discharge, further information on landscape handling and management at the periphery of the proposed facility was requested.

It was also suggested that the environmental impact evaluation report on the future facility be submitted to the Environmental Protection Bureau for review.

19 years ago, an unlawful fuel storage facility in Ilha Verde, which was surrounded by lawful storage facilities and residential buildings, exploded, caught fire, and forced hundreds of nearby residents to evacuate. **AL**

GAMING

Morgan Stanley: Amid group visa hype, recovery only apparent in 2024

LYNZY VALLES

BROKERAGE firm Morgan Stanley observed that the recovery of the local gaming sector may only be seen by 2024, despite the long-awaited announcement of group visa reinstatements.

These comments echo similar sentiments issued by industry analysts, as the spending power of group travelers is weaker than that of those holding individual visit scheme (IVS) visas.

“Assuming package tours and IVS e-visas are relaxed in October, we think mainland visitation numbers could reach 45% of 2019 levels and mass revenue of 60%,” the brokerage said in a note.

“Even after the relaxation



of these two factors, we await the HK/Macau border opening and relaxation of Covid test validity periods (from 48 hours currently to seven days) for full economic recovery,” the analysts added.

Earlier, JPMorgan Chase & Co. analyst DS Kim noted the resumption of e-visa and group tours should “alleviate friction of a Macau trip, as

well as signal to many that it’s OK to visit Macau – in turn boosting demand into the year-end holidays and 2023.”

However, Angela Hallee, Bloomberg Intelligence Analyst on APAC Gaming and Hospitality Research, warned that forecasts for the city’s gross gaming revenue (GGR) for this year will not be altered as group tou-

rs have never been a major driver for Macau casinos because their spending power is not high.

Meanwhile, casino stocks are still on the rise.

Leading the pack was Melco International Development with a 9.18% increase, followed by MGM China with a 7.01% increase. Wynn Macau, Sands China and SJM Holdings also recorded increases from 3% to 5%, while Galaxy Entertainment Group had a minor increase of 0.64%.

Gaming shares soared on Monday, with the highest surge recorded in six months following a long-awaited announcement that will bring an end to the tourism drought that has negatively impacted the economy.

TOURISM

AUGUST HOTEL GUESTS DOWN 10.4% Y-O-Y

AUGUST hotel guest numbers declined 10.4% year-on-year to 390,000, data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows.

Mainland guests (263,000) and local guests (104,000) fell 11.4% and 5.0% respectively.

The August average occupancy rate of guest rooms dropped 2 percentage points year-on-year to 36.4%.

In the first eight months of this year, the average occupancy rate of hotel guest rooms decreased 12.9 percentage points year-on-year to 37.6%. The number of guests went down by 26.5% year-on-year to 3,313,000.

The travel sector is optimistic about the upcoming figures due to the weekend announcement that the central government is set to reinstate group tours from main-

land China as soon as late October, along with the reinstatement of digital travel endorsement applications.

Tours will restart gradually from the provinces of Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Fujian and the municipality of Shanghai, with Guangdong being the frontier.

The tourism bureau has also renewed its efforts to attract mainland visitors for the coming National Day Golden Week - a seven-day holiday in China and a typically busy week for Macau pre-pandemic.

Meanwhile, in the first eight months of this year, the number of local tour visitors decreased 40.0% year-on-year to 20,000, while Macau residents purchasing outbound services through travel agencies plunged 81% to 24,000. LV

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First grade teacher Suzy Tom leads a class at the Alice Fong Yu school in San Francisco

OVERSEAS CHINESE

AS CANTONESE LANGUAGE WANES, EFFORTS GROW TO PRESERVE IT

TERRY TANG, HAVEN DALEY & SYLVIA HUI, SAN FRANCISCO

THREE decades ago, finding opportunities to learn Cantonese in San Francisco wasn't hard. But today in the city that's drawn Cantonese speakers from South China for over 150 years, there's fear that political and social upheaval are diminishing a language that is a cultural touchstone.

The Chinese government's push for wider use of Mandarin—already the national language, spoken by 1 billion people—along with the country's changing migration patterns have contributed to an undeniable shift away from Cantonese. It's a change that has reverberated from East to West.

From the United States to the United Kingdom and beyond, there's worry among native and second-generation Cantonese speakers about preserving the language, spoken by some 85 million people worldwide. They fear their children can't communicate with elderly relatives. Or worse, the Cantonese language and culture won't survive another generation.

Ceci Pang, a former kindergarten teacher, runs classes for children at Rainbow Seeds Cantonese school in London. Most of her students are from families with mixed heritage.

"Many (parents) want their kids to be able to communicate with their grandparents," she said. "It's just so hard here, there are so few learning resources and

lots of parents get frustrated and give up. That's usually the point the parents come to me."

In the U.K., as in the U.S., most primary and secondary schools offering Chinese teach Mandarin. That's left many migrant families struggling to find ways to pass on their heritage.

Some turn to social media for advice and camaraderie—a Facebook group called "Cantonese Parents" has thousands of members sharing tips on everything from Cantonese books to YouTube videos. Some organize local Cantonese family meet-ups, while others seek out Cantonese tutors.

Pang said she hasn't noticed many explicit concerns about Cantonese dying as a language. But, she said, that may change as more Hong Kong migrants settle in the U.K. Britain opened its doors last year in response to China's crackdown on civil liberties in the city. Since then, thousands of Hong Kong families have fled to the U.K.

"I think in a few years, when more and more Hong Kong families settle here, there may be more parents worried about their children rejecting Cantonese altogether as they become so immersed in the English environment," she said.

In China, concerns have been voiced for years about a decline in Cantonese, spoken in southeastern Guangdong province and the cities of Hong Kong and Macau. Promoting Mandarin was written into China's constitution in 1982. A suggestion in 2010 to

increase Mandarin programs on a Cantonese TV channel caused such a public backlash in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong, that the government was forced to give reassurance that Mandarin would not replace Cantonese.

Guangzhou, formerly known as Canton, is considered the birthplace of Cantonese. But today it is a hub of manufacturing and tech jobs attracting Mandarin speakers. Nowadays many young people can only understand Cantonese but don't speak the language.

While Cantonese is not dominant in people's lives as it used to be, it's too early to say the language is in crisis in Guangzhou. It's still spoken in homes and among friends, and there are Cantonese TV channels as well as Cantonese announcements on public transport.

In contrast, Cantonese has maintained its primacy in Hong Kong. It's the city's lingua franca, used by 90% of the population, said Lau Chaak-ming, assistant professor of linguistics at the Education University of Hong Kong.

"Everyone who comes to Hong Kong needs to learn some Cantonese. And in order to succeed in most of the careers in Hong Kong, you need to speak fluent Cantonese," said Lau, who started an online Cantonese dictionary in 2014 to help people better learn the language.

While most classes in Hong Kong's schools are still taught in Cantonese, many have added Mandarin to their curriculum as

Beijing tries to strengthen its grip over the semi-autonomous city. The arrival of mainland Chinese for work or education has also boosted Mandarin, and more Hong Kong residents have learned to speak Mandarin to do business with the mainland.

But such changes have not eroded Cantonese, Lau said. "Cantonese has never been stronger in Hong Kong," he said.

That's a far cry from the U.S., where even in San Francisco there are few opportunities to pursue Cantonese in high school and beyond. The San Francisco Unified School District has Cantonese and Mandarin immersion programs for pre-K-8th grades. But in high school, Mandarin is the only option for studying Chinese for foreign language credits.

In 1990, when Grace Yu was hired at City College of San Francisco, there were four Cantonese instructors and a dozen Cantonese classes offered each year. But for the past six years, Yu has been the lone Cantonese professor, teaching only three classes per year.

"Vacancies were not replaced with Cantonese instructors. Instead they hired Mandarin instructors," said Yu.

She described her situation as "kind of lonely."

Still, there is a glimmer of hope. One of City College's trustees—who grew up speaking Cantonese—proposed a resolution to preserve the Cantonese program with at least one instructor. The board approved it this spring.

"Cantonese classes will not be

canceled if I retire," Yu said.

Like Yu, Sik Lee Dennig was the lone Cantonese lecturer at Stanford University until she retired last year. After more than 20 years, the school opted not to renew her contract, which effectively eliminated the Cantonese language program. A "save Cantonese" petition prompted an endowment. But the university would only restore half the classes.

That prompted Dennig to strike out on her own and start a nonprofit, the Cantonese Alliance, to help teachers and interested learners worldwide. The online resource includes podcasts, videos and handouts, as well as Cantonese pop music and comic books.

"Cantonese is not a dialect of Mandarin" as some people mistakenly think, Dennig said recently over a Cantonese dim sum meal of pork and shrimp dumplings.

Cantonese can be especially challenging to learn. In writing, Mandarin and Cantonese use the same Chinese characters. But spoken, the tonal languages—where even the subtlest word inflection can change the meaning—are not similar or interchangeable. Mandarin has four basic tones. Cantonese has nine, which can be difficult to differentiate.

Meanwhile, independent Chinese schools are helping fill the void as Cantonese-speaking communities grow—and not just in Chinatowns.

Aleyda Poe has been overseeing the Cantonese kindergarten at Merit Chinese School in Plano, Texas, for over a decade. Initially a parent who enrolled her two sons to pass along her cultural roots, she is now doing that for other families.

"I hope it's not a dying language," Poe said. "But you know, we'll do our part and see how long they'll take us." **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Akie Abe, wife of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, carries a cinerary urn containing his ashes at his state funeral yesterday, in Tokyo

JAPAN

Former leader Abe honored at divisive state funeral

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

JAPAN'S assassinated hawkish former leader, Shinzo Abe, was given a rare state funeral yesterday that was full of military pomp and surrounded by throngs of mourners as well as by widespread protests, with thousands taking to the streets in opposition.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said the publicly financed ceremony was a well-deserved honor for Japan's longest-serving modern political leader, but it has deeply split public opinion.

The event was attended by U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, Japanese Crown Prince Akishino and other foreign and Japanese dignitaries.

It began with Abe's widow, Akie Abe, in a black formal kimono, walking slowly behind Kishida into the funeral venue, carrying an urn in a wooden box wrapped in a purple cloth with gold stripes. Soldiers in white uniforms took Abe's ashes and placed them on a pedestal filled with white and yellow chrysanthemums and decorations.

Attendants stood while a military band played the Kimigayo national anthem, then obser-

ved a moment of silence before a video was shown praising Abe's life in politics. It included his 2006 parliamentary speech vowing to build a "beautiful Japan," his visits to disaster-hit northern Japan after the March 2011 tsunami and his 2016 Super Mario impersonation in Rio de Janeiro to promote the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Kishida, in a 12-minute eulogy, praised Abe as a politician with a clear vision for post-World War II economic growth who promoted national security, the development of Japan and the world and a "free and open Indo-Pacific" as a counter to China's rise. Kishida also noted Abe's trademark phrase of from the postwar regime" under the

"You were a person who should have lived much longer," Kishida said as he looked up at a massive photo of Abe. "I had a firm belief that you would contribute as a compass showing the future direction of Japan and the rest of the world for 10 or 20 more years."

Kishida said Abe will be re-

membered not just as the nation's longest-serving leader but for what he achieved, and he pledged to carry on Abe's policies for Japan and the region.

During the ceremony, Harris sat in the third row next to Rahm Emanuel, the U.S. ambassador to Japan, and they later joined others by placing a branch of chrysanthemums on a table near Abe's photo.

At a protest in downtown Tokyo, thousands of people marched toward the hall, banging drums and shouting their opposition

Abe was cremated in July following a private funeral at a Tokyo temple days after he was assassinated while giving a campaign speech on a street in Nara in western Japan.

Tokyo was under high security for the state funeral, especially near the venue, the Budokan martial arts hall.

At a protest in downtown Tokyo, thousands of people marched toward the hall, some banging drums and many shouting or holding banners and signs stating their opposition.

"Shinzo Abe has not done a single thing for regular people," participant Kaoru Mano said.

Japan's main political opposition parties boycotted the funeral, which critics say was a reminder of how prewar imperialist governments used state funerals to fan nationalism.

The government maintains that the ceremony was not meant to force anyone to honor Abe. But the decision to give him the rare honor, which was made without parliamentary debate or approval, the high cost and other controversies have led to anger about the event.

Kishida has also been criticized because of a widening controversy over decades of close ties between Abe and the governing Liberal Democratic Party with the Unification Church, accused of raking in huge donations by brainwashing adheren-

ts. The suspect in Abe's assassination reportedly told police he killed Abe because of his links to the church, which he said took large amounts of money from his mother, bankrupting his family and ruining his life.

"The fact that the close ties between the LDP and the Unification Church may have interfered with policymaking processes is seen by the Japanese people as a greater threat to democracy than Abe's assassination," Hosei University political science professor Jiro Yamaguchi wrote in a recent article.

Abe's grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, helped the South Korean-based church take root in Japan and is now seen as a key figure in the scandal. Opponents say holding a state funeral for Abe is equivalent to an endorsement of the governing party's ties to the church.

"One big problem is that there was no proper approval process," retiree Shin Watanabe said during the demonstration yesterday. "I'm sure there are various views. But I don't think it's forgivable that they will force a state funeral on us when so many of us are opposed."

Outside the Budokan hall, thousands of people carrying bouquets queued for several blocks to lay flowers in a nearby park.

"I'm emotionally attached to him and I've been supporting the LDP, too," Masayuki Aoki, a 70-year-old business owner, said, recalling that he shared a fist bump with Abe at a campaign stop in Yokohama days before his assassination. "I came to offer him flowers."

In what some see as an attempt to further justify the honor for Abe, Kishida has held meetings this week with visiting foreign leaders in what he calls "funeral diplomacy." The talks are meant to strengthen ties as Japan faces regional and global challenges, including threats from China, Russia and North Korea.

He was to meet about 40 foreign leaders through Wednesday, though no Group of Seven leaders are attending. Following the funeral service, Kishida greeted each of the leaders at a reception at the Akasaka state guest house.

U.S. Vice President Harris, who had a tour of Zojoji temple, where Abe's family funeral was held in July, credited Abe with coming up with a term for regional cooperation.

"There has been much that has been said in honor of his long leadership to Japan but also to the United States. It was he who coined the term 'free and open Indo-Pacific,' and as a member of the Indo-Pacific region, as America, we cherish those principles, and we stand by it," she said. **MDT/AP**

PUTIN'S WAR

Vote in Ukraine's Russia-held areas stokes tension with West

ADAM SCHRECK
& JON GAMBRELL, KYIV

REFERENDUMS that are expected to serve as a pretext for Moscow to annex Russian-held regions of Ukraine reached their final day of voting yesterday as the preordained outcome of the Kremlin-orchestrated votes heightened tension between Russia and the West.

The annexation of the four occupied regions in southern and eastern Ukraine, which could happen as soon as Friday, sets the stage for a dangerous new phase in the seven-month war in Ukraine.

Russia warned it could resort to deploying nuclear weapons to defend its own territory, including newly acquired lands.

After the balloting, "the situation will radically change from the legal viewpoint, from the point of view of international law, with all the corresponding consequences for protection of those areas and ensuring their security," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has talked up Moscow's nuclear option since last week following a Ukrainian counteroffensive that led to recent battlefield setbacks and has the Kremlin's forces increasingly cornered.

The balloting that started Friday in the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Donetsk regions and a call-up of Russian military reservists ordered by Putin are other strategies aimed at buttressing Moscow's exposed position.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of the Russian Security Council chaired by Putin, spelled out the threat in the bluntest terms yet.

"Let's imagine that Russia is forced to use the most powerful weapon against the Ukrainian regime that has committed a large-scale act of aggression, which is dangerous for the very existence of our state," Medvedev wrote on his messaging app channel. "I believe that NATO will steer



Exodus: Russians lineup after crossing the border at Verkhny Lars between Georgia and Russia yesterday

clear from direct meddling in the conflict in that case."

The United States has dismissed the Kremlin's nuclear talk as scare tactics.

Jake Sullivan, the U.S. national security adviser, responded to Putin's nuclear threats from last week. Sullivan told NBC on Sunday that Russia would pay a high, if unspecified, price if Moscow made good on threats to use nuclear weapons in the war in Ukraine.

The referendums ask residents of the regions in southern and eastern Ukraine whether they want the areas to become part of Russia. But the voting has been anything but free or fair.

Tens of thousands of residents had already fled the regions amid the war, and images shared by those who remained showed armed Russian troops going door-to-door to pressure Ukrainians into voting.

Western allies are standing firm with Ukraine, dismissing the referendum votes as a sham.

French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said while visiting Kyiv yesterday that France was determined "to support Ukraine and its sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Meanwhile, the mass call-up of Russians to active military duty has to some degree backfired on Putin.

It has triggered a massive exodus of men from the country, fueled protests in many regions across Russia and sparked occasional acts of violence. On Mon-

day, a gunman opened fire in an enlistment office in a Siberian city and gravely wounded the local chief military recruitment officer. The shooting came after scattered arson attacks on enlistment offices.

With Putin's back against the wall amid Ukraine's battlefield successes, Russian media speculated he might follow up on last week's partial mobilization order by declaring martial law and shutting the nation's borders for all men of fighting age.

Russian officials announced plans to set up a military recruitment office right on the border with Georgia, one of the main routes of the exodus.

As Moscow works to build up its troops in Ukraine, Russian shelling continued to claim lives. At least 11 civilians were killed and 18 others wounded by Russian barrages in 24 hours, Ukraine's presidential office said.

Among the casualties were eight people, including a 15-year-old boy, who were killed by a Russian strike on the town of Pervomaiskyi in the northeastern Kharkiv region.

Pavlo Kyrylenko, governor of the eastern Donetsk region where shells killed three people, said that "every day of the referendum we count more dead in the Donbas, and those sad numbers show Russia's real goals."

Donetsk and Luhansk, which Moscow-backed separatists have partly controlled for eight years, together make up Ukraine's

industrial Donbas region.

The Ukraine war is still gripping world attention, as it causes widespread shortages and rising prices not only for food but for energy, inflation hitting the cost of living everywhere, and growing global inequality. The talk of nuclear war has only deepened the concern.

Misery and hardship are often the legacy of Russia's occupation of Ukrainian areas now recaptured by Kyiv's forces. Some people have had no gas, electricity, running water or internet since March.

The war has brought an energy crunch for much of Western Europe, with German officials seeing the disruption of Russian supplies as a power play by the Kremlin to pressure Europe over its support for Ukraine.

The German economy ministry said yesterday that the Nord Stream 1 pipeline leading from Russia to Europe has reported a drop in pressure, only hours after a leak was reported in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in the Baltic Sea off Denmark. Both pipelines were built to carry natural gas from Russia to Europe.

The extent of the damage means that the pipelines are unlikely to be able to carry any gas to Europe this winter even if there was the political will to bring them online, analysts at the Eurasia Group said.

Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said the problems were "very alarming" and would be investigated. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1964 KENNEDY MURDER WAS 'NO CONSPIRACY'



There was no conspiracy surrounding the death of President Kennedy but there were serious failures by those responsible for his protection, according to a government report.

The 300,000-word document, prepared by a special commission set up by President Johnson to investigate the assassination, ends months of speculation about the death of the president on 22 November 1963 in Dallas, Texas.

The commission, led by Chief Justice Earl Warren of the Supreme Court, concludes in its report that gunman Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone when he fired three rifle shots at the president from the Texas School Book Depository.

It rules out suggestions that Oswald, 24, had an accomplice and that shots were fired from an overpass situated in front of the president's car.

It states that Oswald was also to blame for shooting a police officer with a revolver approximately three-quarters of an hour later on a Dallas street.

Ballistics analysis revealed both guns were owned by Oswald.

The report also found that Jack Ruby, 53, who shot Oswald dead two days after the president's death at a Dallas police station also acted on his own initiative.

But the security services responsible for protecting the president were severely criticised by the report.

The Secret Service was criticised for not taking adequate safety precautions prior to the trip and for not liaising enough with other government departments.

It is understood the Federal Bureau of Intelligence (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Office of Naval Intelligence all had dossiers on Oswald prior to the shooting following his defection from Russia to America in 1961.

The Secret Service, however, was unaware of his existence, the report stated.

The FBI was criticised for taking "an unduly restrictive view of its responsibilities in preventive intelligence work prior to the assassination."

The press and the media were also criticised for turning Dallas police station into "bedlam" after the assassination and the police officers themselves were condemned for not following correct interviewing procedures when quizzing Oswald about the shooting.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

President Johnson immediately appointed a committee to look into the recommendations in the report.

In the years since the assassination there has been much debate about who actually killed JFK.

In 1979 the US Congress House Select Committee on Assassinations said four shots could be heard on audio tape of the assassination, and they appeared to come from two different locations.

The committee concluded Oswald probably did not act alone. However, the sound of shots cannot be distinguished as such by the ear and the committee's report was later described as "seriously flawed" by the US National Academy of Sciences.

US scientists are in the process of digitising the original tape, never heard by the Warren Commission, and which is now too fragile to be played.

A number of conspiracy theories ranging from an elaborately staged suicide to a right-wing government conspiracy have been suggested.

Oliver Stone's 1992 movie "JFK" supported the conspiracy theorists however an official government review in 1998 again concluded there had been no conspiracy.

The debate still continues with strong opinions on both sides.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Travel opportunities should be your first choice. You'll find love and you'll get into tiptop shape at the same time. Voice your opinions and contribute to the debate.

TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

If you've been under stress and worrying about older members of the family, it's time to come to terms with the situation. Don't reveal anything about your personal life that could be used adversely.

GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Your diplomacy will be of utmost importance today. You may have problems with skin, bones, or teeth if you haven't been taking proper care of yourself.

CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

One sided attractions are likely. Don't let your partner put you down. You may have been too agreeable to someone who just wanted to use you.

LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You can make money if you put your mind to it. Clear up domestic chores that have remained undone for some time. Don't allow someone to do a job that was designated specifically for you.

VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Look after financial transactions today. Your mind is on moneymaking ventures. You need to spend time with friends and family.

LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You will find that superiors may not see situations as you do. Drastic financial losses may be likely if you lend money. Reciprocate by offering helpful hints.

SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

You need time to put your house in order and sort out what you are going to do about your personal direction. You can make money if you are careful not to let it trickle through your fingers.

SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Relationships will become stronger. You can make personal changes that will enhance your appearance and bring about greater social activity. Don't overspend to impress someone who interests you.

CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You mustn't be so trusting. You can accomplish a lot if you work out of your home today. Your communication skills may win you points.

AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

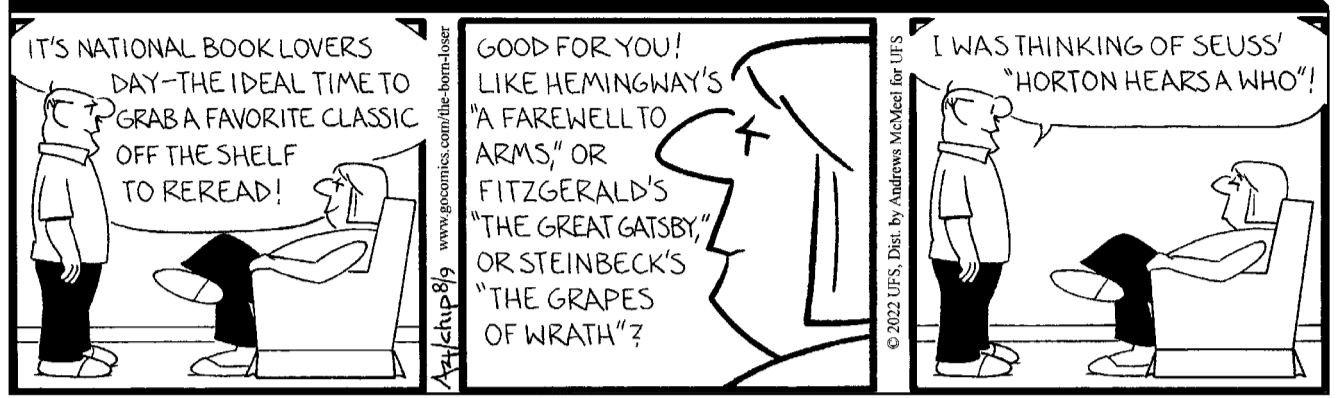
Entertain those who can provide you with valuable information and knowledge. You can't always have your own way. You have the stamina and determination to succeed.

PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You should get into some of those creative hobbies that you always said you wanted to do. Good day for romance. Renovations to your domestic scene will pay high rewards.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

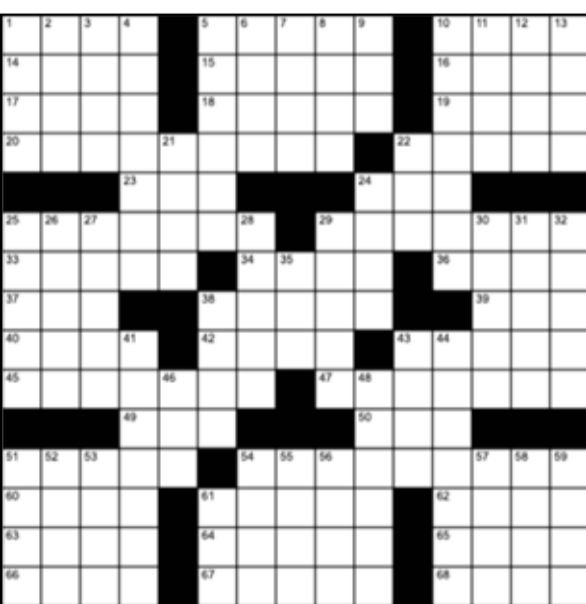
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	16	29	cloudy
Changchun	15	26	fine
Chengdu	17	25	fine
Chongqing	19	23	overcast
Fuzhou	25	34	cloudy
Guangzhou	24	34	cloudy
Guiyang	16	22	overcast
Haikou	25	29	rain
Hangzhou	20	28	overcast
Harbin	15	24	cloudy
Hefei	18	27	cloudy
Nanjing	20	25	rain
Shanghai	20	27	overcast
Taipei	25	30	cloudy
Wuhan	20	28	cloudy
Hong Kong	28	32	showers
WORLD			
Moscow	7	17	rain
Frankfurt	5	14	rain
Paris	7	16	overcast
London	8	16	overcast
New York	12	22	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Blue dye source; 5- Squeeze; 10- Alleviate; 14- Electronics giant; 15- Brides walk down it; 16- Soprano Gluck; 17- Mild oath; 18- Word on a ticket; 19- Defeat decisively; 20- Concentrated; 22- Last letter of the Greek alphabet; 23- Gerund suffix; 24- "Aladdin" monkey; 25- First; 29- Building; 33- Shifted; 34- Escudo replacement; 36- Make tracks; 37- "Xanadu" band; 38- Merits; 39- Proverb ending?; 40- Swabbies; 42- Wife of Osiris; 43- Fluff, as bangs; 45- You don't bring me flowers. ____; 47- Resounding noise; 49- Big galoot; 50- Stipulations; 51- Chosen; 54- Intrepid; 60- Confer; 61- Facial hair; 62- "Hard ____" (sailor's yell); 63- River to the Seine; 64- Vessel; 65- Opinion; 66- Tenn. neighbor; 67- Twisted expression?; 68- Hearing organs;

DOWN 1- Wait ____; 2- Canceled; 3- ____ uproar; 4- High explosive; 5- Monetary unit of Tonga; 6- Disencumbers; 7- Salinger girl; 8- Lost traction; 9- What the sun does in the west; 10- Cold weather head protector; 11- Lotion ingredient; 12- Complacent; 13- I could ____ horse; 21- Geraint's beloved; 22- Japanese sash; 24- Flurries; 25- ____ man with seven wives; 26- Atari founder Bushnell; 27- Creamy white; 28- Buy alternative; 29- Dadaist Max; 30- Greek epic poem; 31- ____ and desist; 32- Conger catcher; 35- Mentalist Geller; 38- Leprechaun land; 41- Dollar; 43- Clump of hair; 44- Shackles; 46- Choose; 48- Hamper; 51- School founded by Henry VI; 52- Not of the cloth; 53- Socialite Maxwell; 54- Faculty head; 55- Swiss river; 56- Hankering; 57- "East of Eden" director Kazan; 58- Psychic; 59- Puts in stitches; 61- Small shot;



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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HELLENE G. 3 BEDS	HKD 12,500
SAN ON 2 BEDS	HKD 8,500
COLOANE V. 1 BED	HKD 9,300
COLOANE V. 2 BEDS	HKD 10,500
COLOANE V. 2 BEDS	HKD 10,000

FOR SALE

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NOVA TAIPA 4 BEDS	HKD 11,475,000
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
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AP PHOTO



SOCIAL MEDIA

META DISABLES RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA NETWORK TARGETING EUROPE

DAVID KLEPPER

A sprawling disinformation network originating in Russia sought to use hundreds of fake social media accounts and dozens of sham news websites to spread Kremlin talking points about the invasion of Ukraine, Meta revealed yesterday.

The company, which owns Facebook and Instagram, said it identified and disabled the operation before it was able to gain a large audience. Nonetheless, Facebook said it was the largest and most complex Russian propaganda effort that it has found since the invasion began.

The operation involved more than 60 websites created to mimic

legitimate news sites including The Guardian newspaper in the United Kingdom and Germany's Der Spiegel. Instead of the actual news reported by those outlets, however, the fake sites contained links to Russian propaganda and disinformation about Ukraine. More than 1,600 fake Facebook accounts were used to spread the propaganda to audiences in Germany, Italy, France, the U.K. and Ukraine.

The findings highlighted both the promise of social media companies to police their sites and the peril that disinformation continues to pose.

"Video: False Staging in Bucha Revealed!" claimed one of the fake news stories, which blamed

Ukraine for the slaughter of hundreds of Ukrainians in a town occupied by the Russians.

The fake social media accounts were then used to spread links to the fake news stories and other pro-Russian posts and videos on Facebook and Instagram, as well as platforms including Telegram and Twitter. The network was active throughout the summer.

"On a few occasions, the operation's content was amplified by the official Facebook pages of Russian embassies in Europe and Asia," said David Agranovich, Meta's director of threat disruption. "I think this is probably the largest and most complex Russian-origin operation that we've disrupted since the beginning of the

war in Ukraine earlier this year."

The network's activities were first noticed by investigative reporters in Germany. When Meta began its investigation it found that many of the fake accounts had already been removed by Facebook's automated systems. Thousands of people were following the network's Facebook pages when they were deactivated earlier this year.

Researchers said they couldn't directly attribute the network to the Russian government. But Agranovich noted the role played by Russian diplomats and said the operation relied on some sophisticated tactics, including the use of multiple languages and carefully constructed imposter

websites.

Since the war began in February, the Kremlin has used online disinformation and conspiracy theories in an effort to weaken international support for Ukraine. Groups linked to the Russian government have accused Ukraine of staging attacks, blamed the war on baseless allegations of U.S. bioweapon development and portrayed Ukrainian refugees as criminals and rapists.

Social media platforms and European governments have tried to stifle the Kremlin's propaganda and disinformation, only to see Russia shift tactics.

A message sent to the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C., asking for a response to Meta's recent actions was not immediately returned.

Researchers at Meta Platforms Inc., which is based in Menlo Park, California, also exposed a much smaller network that originated in China and attempted to spread divisive political content in the U.S.

The operation reached only a tiny U.S. audience, with some posts receiving just a single engagement. The posts also made some amateurish moves that showed they weren't American, including some clumsy English language mistakes and a habit of posting during Chinese working hours.

Despite its ineffectiveness, the network is notable because it's the first identified by Meta that targeted Americans with political messages ahead of this year's midterm elections. The Chinese posts didn't support one party or the other but seemed intent on stirring up polarization.

"While it failed, it's important because it's a new direction" for Chinese disinformation operations, said Ben Nimmo, who directs global threat intelligence for Meta. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Oktoberfest returns to MGM in special edition



Oktoberfest Macau at MGM will rock the town again this October with a new party concept revamped under the

theme, "Cheers, Macau!". To be held at the MGM Theater of MGM Cotai, the "Cheers, Macau!" party ni-

ght this year will be a continuation of Oktoberfest Macau held at MGM over the past 11 years, enhanced with "new music and entertainment and customized visual and acoustic effects that are unique to MGM and Macau," the gaming operator said in a statement.

The event flaunts a lineup of bands and musicians, including the award-winning Chinese rock band, Tarzan, Chinese pop stars Liu Wenjun and Fu Xinyao, together with local bands Amulets and Gimme 5.

The "Cheers, Macau!" Oktoberfest Macau will be held between October 20 and 30 from 6 p.m. to 12 a.m.

Sands China donates MOP1m to local tertiary institutions



Sands China Ltd. recently presented ceremonial cheques totalling MOP 1.08 million to representatives of seven higher education institutions at a ceremony at The Venetian Macao, as

part of the company's ongoing support for higher education in Macau. It is the 16th consecutive year of the annual initiative, which provides scholarship and fellowship money to Macau

tertiary institutions.

Wilfred Wong, president of Sands China Ltd., said, "Sands China is pleased to continue our annual practice of supporting local tertiary education through these scholarship and fellowship donations. It is our hope that they will help nurture the growth of local youth and support the development of diversified talent in Macau, adding to Macau's pool of human resources."

Including this year's donation, Sands China has donated MOP 13.5 million for tertiary scholarships and fellowships in Macau, which have benefitted almost 1,600 students since 2006.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

FOOTBALL

Italy advances in Nations League; England, Germany draw 3-3

STEVE DOUGLAS

PART one of the healing process is complete for Italy.

Looking to regain respect after failing to qualify for a second straight World Cup, the Azzurri advanced to next year's finals tournament in the Nations League by winning at Hungary 2-0 thanks to goals by Giacomo Raspadori and Federico Dimarco on Monday.

By topping a group also containing England and Germany, the Italians joined the Netherlands and Croatia in qualifying for the final four, which will be hosted by the Dutch in June.

Portugal or Spain will complete the lineup when they face off today [after press time].

Unlike Italy, England and Germany will be going to the World Cup in Qatar in less than two months and they'll head to the Middle East on the back of a wild 3-3 draw at Wembley Stadium, where all the goals were scored in



Germany's Kai Havertz scores his side's third goal in dramatic 6-goal draw

the second half.

Trailing 2-0, England scored three goals in a 12-minute span from the 71st — through Luke Shaw, Mason Mount and Harry Kane's penalty — only for Kai Ha-

vertz to pounce on a fumble by England goalkeeper Nick Pope to equalize in the 87th.

England's winless run stretched to six games, with Gareth Southgate's team finishing its Na-

tions League campaign without a victory and relegated.

Germany isn't in much better shape ahead of the World Cup, with just one win in its last seven games.

Under pressure for his starting place in England's team, Harry Maguire didn't help his cause against Germany.

The Manchester United center back was at fault for Germany's 52nd-minute opener from the spot by Ilkay Gundogan — Maguire initially gave the ball away to Jamal Musiala, then clumsily fouled the teenager in the area moments later — and was then dispossessed in midfield to allow the Germans to break, culminating in a curling finish from the edge of the area by Havertz.

Italy won Group A3 with 11 points, one more than Hungary, which went into the game in Budapest needing only a draw to reach the Nations League final four for the first time.

The Italians are finding it easier to qualify for Nations League

finals than World Cups.

They also got to the 2021 tournament, losing to Spain in the semifinals on home soil in their first few months as the reigning European champion.

Plenty has changed in the team since beating England in the European Championship final at Wembley last year, not least up front where Raspadori is making his mark.

Three days after scoring the winner against England in Milan, the Napoli striker put Italy ahead after Adam Nagy's back-pass came up short.

Wilfried Gnonto challenged goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi for the ball, which bounced free and Raspadori was alert to round Gulacsi and convert his finish in the 27th.

Gianluigi Donnarumma produced a string of diving stops — including a triple save in a matter of seconds — before Nicolò Barella played a ball through at the other end to Bryan Cristante, who crossed for Dimarco to score from close range for his first goal for Italy.

Late pressure from Hungary failed to yield a goal.

"We were excellent for 70 minutes, the last 20 I didn't like too much," Italy coach Roberto Mancini said. "We're happy — it's important to have reached the Nations League final four for the second time." **MDT/AP**

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MELONI'S VICTORY
ANOTHER SIGN OF
PUBLIC DISCONTENT
IN EUROPE

With her party, Brothers of Italy, winning the most votes in the country's national election, Giorgia Meloni is set to become Italy's first female prime minister.

That has aroused widespread worries in Europe, as the Brothers of Italy is a euroskeptic, far-right, populist party, and the only major political party that refused to join outgoing Mario Draghi's national unity government. Draghi resigned on Thursday after losing a vote of confidence within the coalition. Yet it might be too early to worry about politics in Italy making a turn to the ultra-right. Some Italian voters have voted in favor of Brothers of Italy, which has neo-fascist roots, but that does not necessarily mean Italy is turning fascist.

Although the union formed by the centrist and right-wing parties gained about 44 percent of the votes in Sunday's election, of which Brothers of Italy won 26 percent, the turnout for the election was a historic low of 64 percent and about 30 percent of voters chose a different party than they did in the 2018 elections. Analysts say the meteoric rise of Brothers of Italy is symptomatic of the Italian public's dissatisfaction with the status quo rather than a significant surge to the right.

Italy's economy has been suffering as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global economic recession. In 2021, the unemployment rate in the country reached 9.83 percent, which prompted almost all the major political parties to promise tax cuts, more jobs and better welfare in their election campaigns.

However, Italy's public debt has been more than 150 percent of its GDP for two consecutive years, and its financial deficit is expected to be as high as 5.6 percent. No one knows where the money needed to fulfill the promises will come from.

Despite her euroskeptic rhetoric, Meloni will not want to jeopardize the 191.5 billion euros that is Italy's share of the European Union's 750 billion euro pandemic recovery package, which comes with certain reform and investment conditions.

Nonetheless, her success is further evidence of a rightwing, EU-skeptic swing in public sentiment in Europe. If the EU is to hold together, more concrete actions are needed to improve people's livelihoods to counter the centrifugal force of public dissatisfaction.

It has become convenient for Western politicians to blame China for their countries' ills, and adopt a tough stance toward the country to show they intend to remedy the problems. Meloni has been no exception. Yet when it comes to the crunch they know that China is a key partner of their countries. The bilateral trade volume between China and Italy, for instance, was \$55.2 billion in 2020, 0.4 percent higher than that of 2019. And in the first 10 months of 2021 alone, the volume jumped by 37 percent year-on-year to \$60.3 billion.

For the benefits of both countries it is to be hoped the new Italian government continues to be practical in its policy toward China, as there is huge potential to be tapped in their cooperation.

ITALY GETS NEW TRANCHE OF EU FUNDS
AS DUST SETTLES FROM VOTE

The European Commission signed off yesterday on the next 21-billion-euro (\$20.2 billion) tranche of Italy's pandemic recovery funds, a welcome infusion that comes amid questions about whether Giorgia Meloni and her euroskeptic party, which won the national election, will be able to keep the funding coming.

The outgoing government of Premier Mario Draghi, a former European Central Bank chief, secured the funds after having achieved 45 milestones required by Brussels to receive the money. They included enacting reforms of public administration, education and health care, and investments in technology, research,

tourism and culture. A first allotment of 21 billion euros, also tied to reforms and investments, was transferred to Italy in April.

Italy received the largest share of the European Union's recovery fund, around 191.5 billion euros, since it was the European country hardest hit financially by the pandemic's first wave.

Meloni's Brothers of Italy, which has its roots in a neo-fascist party and campaigned on a nationalist program, won 26% of the vote. It is poised to lead a center-right coalition government alongside the anti-immigrant League and the Forza Italia party of ex-Premier Silvio Berlusconi.

THE
BUZZ

CCTV VIA AP PHOTO



XI REAPPEARS ON
STATE TV AMID
RUMORS OVER ABSENCE

CHINESE President Xi Jinping reappeared on state television yesterday after a several-day absence from public view that sparked rumors about the 69-year-old leader's political fortunes.

Xi was shown visiting a display at the Beijing Exhibition Hall on the theme of "Forging Ahead into the New Era."

Accompanied by Premier Li Keqiang and other top leaders, Xi, who is also head of the ruling Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army, viewed some of the displays and commented on China's economic progress over the past decade.

The visit was Xi's first appearance on television since he returned from a regional summit in Uzbekistan last weekend.

Under Chinese pandemic regulations, he would need to stay in quarantine for a week after returning.

China's system frequently gives rise to rumors of political infighting or attempted coups, despite the stable nature of the authoritarian surveillance state that cracks down relentlessly on any

sign of dissent. Xi is widely considered China's most powerful leader in decades, has no known active challengers, and has removed constitutional term limits, allowing him to rule for life should he wish.

It is not unusual for Chinese leaders to drop out of sight for days or even weeks, for example to attend informal political meetings held at the beachside resort of Beidaihe each summer.

"I think it's wishful thinking maybe in Hong Kong and elsewhere. I wouldn't think it very credible."

KERRY BROWN
PROFESSOR, KING'S COLLEGE

However, the timing of Xi's absence just weeks before the convening of a key party congress held once every five years provided grist to the rumor mill. Xi is expected to receive a third five-year term as party leader at the congress beginning Oct. 16, in a break with recent tradition that limited leaders to two terms.

China politics expert Kerry Brown said he was highly skeptical that there was anything more to be read into Xi's brief absence.

"I guess if there was deep dissatisfaction with Xi's leadership in the elite ... we would have seen at least a bit of evidence," said Brown, professor of Chinese Studies and director of the Lau China Institute at King's College London. "And I don't think we've seen much evidence of that."

The party is inherently risk averse, and any person or group seeking to pull off such a radical action would have a very tough time attacking an edifice that has been built almost entirely around Xi, Brown said.

Rumors of coups and infighting are not unusual ahead of sensitive political dates, but the People's Liberation Army — the party's military wing — has been disciplined by a sweeping anti-corruption campaign.

"I think it's wishful thinking maybe in Hong Kong and elsewhere," he said. "I wouldn't think it very credible." MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Russia More than a dozen people wounded in a school shooting in central Russia will be taken to Moscow for further treatment, authorities said, a day after a gunman killed 17 people and wounded 24 others. Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said a medical evacuation is planned for 15 of the injured, including 13 children and two adults. He said three of them are in critical condition.

Germany More than 60 police officers raided a luxury yacht in northern Germany linked to a Russian businessman in connection with alleged breaches of sanctions and money laundering rules, officials said yesterday. The statement by Frankfurt prosecutors identified the suspect only as a 69-year-old Russian businessman. But German weekly Der Spiegel identified him as oligarch Alisher Usmanov, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin.

AP PHOTO



Germany The influx of Ukrainian refugees has pushed the country's population to a new all-time high of more than 84 million, the German Federal Statistical Office said. By the end of June, the country's population increased by 843,000 people, or 1%, compared to the end of 2021. In comparison, the population grew by 82,000 people, or 0.1%, in the entire year of 2021.

AP PHOTO



Poland A series of unusual leaks on two natural gas pipelines running from Russia under the Baltic Sea to Germany triggered concerns about sabotage Tuesday, overshadowing the inauguration of a long-awaited pipeline that will bring Norwegian gas to Poland in efforts to bolster Europe's energy independence from Moscow. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki called the events "an act of sabotage," while Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said she could not rule it out after three leaks were detected over the past day on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines.