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ELECTORAL BRIBERY IN AL ELECTIONS INVOLVING PROVISION OF 'FREE TOUR, CATERING AND GIFTS' TO SOME 200 CITIZENS SIGNALLED BY CORRUPTION WATCHDOG P3

DRIVING LICENSE MUTUAL RECOGNITION WITH MAINLAND TO HAPPEN SOON: GOV'T P4



WC2022: MESSI, MODRIC CLASH IN SEMIS P11




Pakistan Deadly cross-border shelling by Afghan Taliban forces at a Pakistani border town yesterday [Macau time] killed seven people, Pakistan's military said, as relations continue to sour between the two neighboring countries. The violence hitting Chaman in southwestern Pakistan follows a series of deadly incidents and attacks that have skyrocketed tensions between Islamabad and Afghanistan's Taliban rulers. Chaman is the main border crossing for trade between the countries. The crossing was reopened yesterday morning.

Iran executed a second prisoner yesterday convicted over crimes committed during the nationwide protests challenging the country's theocracy, publicly hanging him from a construction crane as a gruesome warning to others. The execution of Majidreza Rahnavard came less than a month after he allegedly fatally stabbed two members of a paramilitary force after purportedly becoming angry about security forces killing of protesters. The development underscores the speed at which Iran now carries out death sentences handed down for those detained in the demonstrations that the government hopes to put down.



Peru's newest president, Dina Boluarte, gave in to protesters' demands yesterday announcing in a nationally televised address that she will send Congress a proposal to move up elections. Boluarte's decision came after thousands of demonstrators took to the streets around Peru for another day on Sunday to demand that she resign and schedule elections to replace her and Congress. The protests turned deadly, with at least two reported deaths in a remote community in the Andes, according to officials.

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LIVING WITH COVID



Health code, venue code no longer mandatory in most venues, the gov't announced as city enters phase 2 of 'living with Covid' P3

SANDWICH CLASS

NEW HOUSING LAW APPROVED IN FIRST READING

P2



PLENARY

NEW SANDWICH CLASS HOUSING LAW APPROVED IN FIRST READING

RENATO MARQUES

THE new law aiming to establish a new type of publicly built housing dedicated to those who cannot apply for economic housing options for exceeding the income requirements, but also cannot reach a unit on the private market, commonly known as “sandwich class”, has been finally approved by the majority of the lawmakers at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

In a plenary session held yesterday, all lawmakers except Ron Lam voted in favor of the bill to establish the long-awaited new type of public housing.

While presenting the bill to the lawmakers, the Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo do Rosário, said this type of housing will follow standards similar those for the private sector except for some requirements related to car parking.

He also explained that, contrary to other types of public housing, units acquired by residents under this new scheme will be able to be resold, although this comes with extra rules, namely a blackout period of 16 years from the time of acquisition, and the requirement that these units' ownership can only be transferred to another Macau permanent resident.

The rules also stipulate a minimum age of 23 years for applicants if they are single, and 18 years if they are married.

Candidates who fulfill the age, income, and assets requirements can opt for the acquisition of a one-bedroom, two-bedroom, or three-bedroom unit according to their interest and purchasing power.

All future applications for this type of housing will be done exclusively online, Rosário said, noting that such efforts come under the electronic government bid system as well as to accelerate the process of generating the order lists that will be done in a point scale, as for the other types of public housing.

For the time being, the list will not be permanent, expiring after all units have been sold from a given tender.

One of the novelties this new type of housing introduces is a

RENATO MARQUES



new fund of 2% of the value (cost of construction) of the building, which can only be used for major repair works, renovation or fixing of the main equipment of the building.

The Secretary said this comes after the constant evaluation and suggestion of lawmakers to enforce a system that allows unit buyers to solve high-scale maintenance issues that can arise after a few years of using the building more efficiently. This fund will be created with the support of the Monetary Authority of Macao and, to use it, the building owners or the management company must have prior authorization from the Public Works department.

PRICE OF UNITS A MAJOR CONCERN

One of the major concerns expressed by the lawmakers on this topic was about the selling price of the units, with several lawmakers calling on the government side to provide them with an idea of the cost of each square meter in one of these types of housing units, which for the time being, are to be built only at Avenida do Wai Long, in the land plots of the former La Scala development.

Rosário refused to respond to the question saying, “it is too early to define such a price,” adding that it is still a long time until the units will be ready and se-

veral factors could still influence the final price.

He also said the sale price will be established via an order by the Chief Executive at a later stage, so it does not have to be defined in the law.

Others, like Leong Sun Iok, wanted the government to collect information on housing typologies before building them so the government could adjust the offer to be made on the residential towers to market demand, avoiding having units for which there is no demand and which cannot be sold.

On the other hand, Ella Lei said the law advances very little when compared with the eco-

nomical housing rules, being, in some aspects, less evolved. Ron Lam said the bill is at the level of the economic housing scheme from 2011 that has been already updated.

“There is no articulation with the market as those who applied for economic housing cannot apply for this. Some had previously acquired a one-bedroom apartment, but now they might need a bigger house and they cannot be considered,” Ella Lei said, calling, as other lawmakers also did, for an interlinked system that allows residents to opt for different public housing units at different times in the now five-level system that includes the economic rental, economic acquisition, elderly residences, and sandwich class, as well as the private market.

BLACKOUT PERIOD TOO LONG?

Another criticism aimed at this bill was regarding the blackout period of 16 years for a unit to be able to be resold. Several lawmakers protested against this provision, comparing it to the neighboring region of HK where this period is only five years.

Several lawmakers suggested changes ranging from five to 10 years, instead of the 16 defined by the bill. This matter will continue to be a hot topic in the discussion on the new law, they said.

On this issue, Rosário said the government intends to ensure these houses are not used for speculation purposes.

Lam, the only lawmaker openly against the bill, accused the government of attempting to repress demand by establishing a minimum income limitation for the applications.

Lam said the government must change its mentality and stop trying through a disguised method to control the real estate market. In his vote declaration, he accused the government of lacking real housing policies and making use of this bill at this time as a way to control a higher drop in the value of the units in the private market.

In reply, Rosário justified the minimum ceilings for applications as concern over the inability of applicants to face the repayment of mortgages, a matter the lawmaker said does not fall under the competence of the Secretary for Transport and Public Works but on the economy and finance analysts.

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COVID-19

Health code, venue code no longer mandatory in most venues

ANTHONY LAM

THE presentation of health codes and footprint recording has become non-mandatory for most venues across the city, the Health Bureau (SSM) has announced.

Health codes are still needed for government offices, medical facilities, social services entities (including nurseries) and non-tertiary education institutions, but are unnecessary for public transport.

Venue operators or owners may still request health codes, the SSM said.

Venue operators or owners who admit people holding yellow or red health codes should make special arrangements to lower their chance of interacting with green code holders.

Catered gatherings with 300 or more people will require attendees to show negative results from a SARS-CoV-2 same-day rapid antigen test (RAT) or a 24-preceding-hour nucleic acid test (NAT) for admission.

Performance venues will have 75% capacity limit, but the requirement



ANTHONY LAM

for two doses of vaccine or 24-preceding-hour NAT has been dropped.

The treatment of positive cases will be changed from tomorrow.

A new digital platform will evaluate the medical needs of people testing positive. Questions will be asked, such as the existence of symptoms and, if any, their severity, as well as personal health data, including the existence of chronic diseases and the medical treatment being undertaken.

Despite the evaluation platform, the SSM has said people who experience shortness of breath or

other emergency conditions skip the evaluation and call 999 immediately.

After evaluation, each positive case will be categorized as per medical needs and will require various means of handling, namely isolation at home, seeking medical services at the Covid-19 outpatient clinics, proceeding to the community clinic at the Macao Dome, or calling an ambulance to relocate to the public hospital.

Special bus services will transport positive cases to the Macao Dome.

Those without digital literacy, such as some elderly people, will be allowed

to contact the Covid-19 outpatient clinics directly.

Positive cases will be allowed to work if their occupation is essential.

Close contacts, such as co-habitants, will get yellow codes but these will not be delivered to any public facilities. They will be required to self-manage until the fifth day after the co-living positive case tests negative of RAT or NAT.

Close contacts are allowed to go to work but need to take a RAT before leaving home.

The SSM has conducted simulated operations at the three outpatient clinics at ZAPE, Bairro da Ilha Verde and the Macao Stadium Roundabout.

Yesterday, the SSM registered 204 new positive cases (120 asymptomatic), leading to a total of 541 cases since November 28.

RENATO MARQUES



AL ELECTIONS

OVER 200 RESIDENTS VIOLATE ELECTORAL BRIBERY LAWS OVER 'FREE CATERING, GIFTS'

LYNZY VALLES

ELECTORAL bribery in the seventh Legislative Assembly (AL) Elections involving provision of "free tour, catering and gifts" to some 200 citizens has been detected by the corruption watchdog.

The Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) has alleged a nomination committee trustee provided gifts in exchange for voters' signatures on application forms to the AL Elections Affairs Management Committee.

The investigation allegedly showed the trustee of the group and a tour guide, who were responsible for coordinating a half-day tour, arranged catering and gifts, including laundry liquid and umbrellas on which the slogan asking people to vote for that group was published, "successfully lured more than 200 voters to write down their personal information and

sign the forms."

All of the aforementioned items were paid for by the trustee.

During the investigation by the CCAC, many people admitted learning about a free tour and catering by signing the forms through their mobile software or word of mouth. Right before the tour, they were persuaded to be part of a group photo in front of the Public Administration Building.

The concerned trustee of the group, the tour guide and more than 200 voters allegedly violated electoral bribery laws under the Electoral Law of the AL.

The case has been referred to the Public Prosecutions Office. The CCAC has reminded all citizens that offenders committing electoral bribery are liable to a maximum of eight-years' imprisonment. Suspended sentences or alternative penalties including a fine are not allowed.

CONGRESS

NPC MACAU DELEGATION PROVISIONALLY HAS 12 NEW-TERM REPRESENTATIVES

THE Macau delegation of the National People's Congress (NPC) yesterday chose 12 future representatives from 15 candidates.

The provisional list of 12 representatives' names are Ho Sut Heng, Kevin Ho, Ng Sio Lai, Si Ka Lon, Iong Weng Ian, Kou Hoi In, José Chui Sai Peng, Chan Hong, Vong Hin Fai, Wan Neng Hon, Lao Ngai Leong and Sio Chi Wai.

A group of 486 electors attended the election meeting, and cast their votes yesterday.

This provisional list is still

subject to confirmation by a qualification review body at the NPC.

The three candidates who did not win a seat are Ma Chi Seng, Cheng Son Meng and Lao Ka U. In the order of votes garnered, Ma Chi Seng and Lao Ka U will substitute representatives of the Macau delegation should any of the 12 depart from their position in the future.

Secretary-General Yang Zhenwu of the NPC's Standing Committee, who visited Macau for the occasion,

congratulated the group of provisional representatives, on behalf of the entire NPC Standing Committee and Chairperson Li Zhanshu of the committee.

He believes the new term of representatives will embody One Country Two Systems during the upcoming five years of work. He also expressed appreciation for the past term of representatives.

Pursuant to the Chinese Constitution, the NPC "is the highest state organ of power." **AL**

AD



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CHINA'S MARITIME COURTS ENJOY GROWING INT'L RECOGNITION: REPORT

Chinese maritime courts have earned growing international credibility and influence, according to a report released by China's Supreme People's Court yesterday, as cited in a Xinhua report. In an increasing number of cases in which neither the parties nor the accident in question has any link to China, the decision of the parties to file lawsuits in a Chinese maritime court indicates their acknowledgment and trust in the quality of the country's maritime trials, the report said. From 2018 to 2021, maritime courts at three levels nationwide accepted 10,397 cases involving foreign elements and 2,693 cases involving Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan elements, according to the report.

NEW APPROVED RESIDENTIAL MORTGAGE LOANS DROP 49%

The new approvals of Macau's residential mortgage loans (RMLs) decreased in October this year while those of commercial real estate loans (CRELs) increased in the month, the monetary watchdog said yesterday. According to the statistics released by the Monetary Authority of Macao, the new RMLs approved by Macau banks in October dropped 48.8% month-on-month to 985.1 million patacas. The new RMLs to residents, representing 99.4% of the total, fell 48.8% to 979.1 million patacas. The non-resident component also decreased 48.3% to 6.0 million patacas.

MACAU HOSTS CARBON-NEUTRAL FORUM, EXHIBITION ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The 2022 Macao International Environmental Cooperation Forum and Exhibition, the first carbon-neutral expo held in the SAR has concluded. Hosted by the local government, the three-day event focused on green development and China's "dual carbon" goal to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060, attracting around 420 exhibitors online and offline. Nearly 20 forums and meetings took place. Lei Wai Nong, Secretary for economy and finance of the government, said at the opening ceremony that the exhibition fully played Macau's role as a platform linking China and other countries, contributing to the transfer of environmental protection technologies and sustainable development of various places.

DRIVING LICENSE MUTUAL RECOGNITION WITH MAINLAND TO HAPPEN SOON

ANTHONY LAM

SECRETARY for Transport and Public Works Raimundo do Rosário has been officially authorized by Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng to sign agreements with competent mainland authorities on mutual recognition of driving licenses.

Executive Order 48/2022 was released yesterday in the digital Official Gazette to announce the authorization.

Ho has authorized Rosário "with all the necessary power to represent the Macao Special Administrative Region to sign with the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China the agreement concerning mutual recognition and redemption of driving licenses between Macau and mainland China."

The idea of mutual recognition was first mentioned in 2013 by then Chief Executive Fernando Chui Sai On. The proposal was scrapped due to widespread objections.

During the past decade of debate, Rosário has said he could not understand why people objected to the proposal, given Macau and mainland China are of the same country. On the question of pressure on traffic and the road network if more drivers are allowed to drive in



Macau with mutual recognition, Rosário indicated it was a non-topical, as traffic congestion is a reality anyway.

On the other hand, Transport Bureau (DSAT) leader Kelvin Lam Hin San has said the mutual recognition system was proposed for the benefit of Macau residents, as more of them had become interested in road trips on the mainland. Mutual recognition would erase inconvenience.

During the decade of debate, data had been sought from Hong Kong, which had allowed mutual recognition with mainland China. In a commentary published by local media Son

Pou on April 19, 2018, it was said that a documented reply from the Hong Kong government to its parliament's Finance Committee showed there were 25% more traffic accidents concerning beneficiaries of direct-issue driving licenses under mutual recognition from 2015 to 2018.

As of the commentary time, Hong Kong had seen 260,000 driving licenses issued to mainland drivers without a test.

It was also revealed that the then Macau government did not anticipate that many mainland residents would choose to drive in Macau even with mutual recognition of driving licenses, because "most mainland visitors

had relied on public transport."

Another commentary published by local media Chit Pou on Nov. 17 argued it was drivers' sense of safety that avoids or causes traffic accidents. The writer, Ngau Iat, also argued the relation between more driving licenses and more cars on the road. The writer also did not see grounds for mainland drivers to work as illegal drivers in Macau.

The writer then resorted to emotion to support the proposal that Macau should recognize mainland driving licenses, which matched former lawmaker Sulu Sou's accusation of equating driving license recognition with identity recognition.

PUBLIC WORKS

Association calls for improvements community facilities in Zone A

ANTHONY LAM

THE Association of Synergy of Macao called for improvements in proposed community facilities and density in the New Urban Zone A.

Led by lawmaker Ron Lam, the group has recently made submissions about the planning of the Zone.

For example, recapping Lam's earlier written enquiry, the group demands the government consider experiences of places like Singapore and Hong Kong and standardize density in community facilities. Such facilities include green areas, spor-

ting grounds, and wet market stalls.

Moreover, the group requests a citywide standard be compiled as well.

In support of their requests, the group highlights the fact that the Zone is a newly reclaimed area, meaning that conditions for development are based on standardized criteria.

The group again questions the decision to establish only one health centre at the Zone.

The government insists that a single, large health centre will be able to handle the healthcare and medical needs of the planned population

of nearly 100,000 in the Zone.

In fact, in 2018, the government had planned to establish two health centres in the Zone.

Lam's group pointed out that although the legal requirement for the facility is a health center per 50,000 to 100,000 people, the planned center in Zone A will see the upper limit of its service capacity.

The group doubts that one health centre will be able to provide good service to people residing or working in the Zone. It also argues that establishing one facility for such a large population

would impact any possible benefit to the quality of life that may otherwise have been expected from expanding the size of Macau with reclaimed land.

On sport grounds, the group suggests the government build large-scale sport grounds, such as an on-standard stadium and an ice-skating range. This will not only correct the lack of such facilities in Macau, but will also benefit the "campus village" – planned for Zone A – as well as existing schools in the Northern District.

The group suggests the government make use of the planned reclaimed waterway for the cons-

truction of sport grounds. It also suggests building two health centers on the Zone.

The group also believes that wet markets are a critical facility. It presented the case at the Seac Pai Van Government Housing District as an example to prove that many local residents are still accustomed to doing grocery shopping at wet markets.

Moreover, the plan of single supermarket at Seac Pai Van, if introduced to Zone A, will likely force these residents to travel to another district for grocery shopping, which will eventually lead to heavier traffic.

Also recapping Lam's earlier inquiry, the group calls on the government to improve its rental evaluation mechanism, so that rental prices will not be forced to increase amid an economic downturn.

2022 Galaxy Entertainment Macao International Marathon Concludes



GEG has titled sponsored the Macao International Marathon for 19 consecutive years.

Jointly organized by the Sports Bureau of the Macau SAR Government and the General Association of Athletics of Macau, the 2022 Galaxy Entertainment Macao International Marathon concluded on December 4. In support of the Macau SAR Government's emphasis on promoting sports tourism, GEG has titled sponsored the Macao International Marathon for 19 consecutive years to facilitate Macau's development as a "World Center of Tourism and Leisure". This year, with the help of the the organizers, GEG introduced a variety of activities and promotions to make the atmosphere surrounding the marathon more interactive and encourage community participation. These included the Most Creative Costume Award and the 2022 Galaxy Entertainment Macao International Marathon Carnival.

The race kicked off when air horns were blasted by Mr. Pun Weng Kun, President of the Sports Bureau of the Macau SAR Government; Mr. Lam Hin Fu, President of the General Association of Athletics of Macau; Mr. Jorge Neto Valente, Group Advisor of GEG; and Ms. Eileen Lui, Group Director of Human Resources & Administration of GEG. Among the runners, GEG had the largest number of employees participating in the Mini Marathon and received a Marathon Group Trophy for the 18th consecutive year.

In addition to once again sponsoring the highly popular Most Creative Costume



The 2022 Galaxy Entertainment Macao International Marathon concludes on December 4.



GEG has the largest number of employees participating in the Mini Marathon and received a Marathon Group Trophy for the 18th consecutive year.



GEG unveils the 2022 Galaxy Entertainment Macao International Marathon Carnival at Broadway Food Street.



The carnival encapsulates various elements, such as gourmet, leisure and entertainment, cultural arts, sports, and fitness.



GEG Runner's Club develops marathon racing strategies with MSO to help MSO members prepare for the race.

Award, GEG also launched various Marathon-limited food and beverage promotions for the public and participated in the accommodations package offered to marathon enthusiasts.

MARATHON CARNIVAL

The eight-day carnival featured an array of attractions. Residents and tourists experienced the vitality and excitement of

the marathon through free game booths, special delicacies, marathon-themed photo corners, entertaining performances and lucky draws. There were additional innovative elements designed to encourage interest and participation in sports. These included a medal exhibition, a marathon-themed souvenir crafting experience, and sports and fitness SME retail outlets.

GEG X MSO RUN WITH A PARTNER

GEG also proactively promoted social inclusion through sports. This year, GEG again joined hands with Macau Special Olympics (MSO) to co-launch the Run with a Partner program. After months of regular training with members of the GEG Runner's Club, two MSO members completed the Half Marathon, achieved their personal bests and gaining long-standing friendships.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



“organized and planned,” occurred over two decades and that Lai had used his media organization as “an umbrella of protection.”

He said Lai did not feel guilty about the moves, so there was no basis for the court to reduce his jail term.

Lai's former colleague Wong Wai-keung, who was convicted on a single charge of fraud over the case, must serve 21 months in jail, Chan added.

Lai's legal team earlier asked the United Nations to investigate his imprisonment and multiple criminal charges as “legal harassment” to punish him for speaking out. The tycoon was previously sentenced to 20 months in jail for his role in unauthorized assemblies.

His national security trial, initially scheduled to begin on Dec. 1, was postponed after Hong Kong leader John Lee asked China to effectively block him from hiring a British defense lawyer. If convicted, Lai faces up to life imprisonment.

The enactment of the security law has led to the arrests of many prominent democracy activists in the semi-autonomous Chinese city.

It has also damaged faith in the future of the international financial hub, with increasing numbers of young professionals responding to the shrinking freedoms by moving abroad. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG COURT JAILS MEDIA TYCOON LAI OVER FRAUD

A Hong Kong court sentenced a pro-democracy media tycoon to five years and nine months in prison over the weekend over two fraud charges linked to lease violations, the latest of a series of cases against prominent activists that critics say are aimed at crushing dissent in the city.

Jimmy Lai, who was arrested during a crackdown on the city's pro-democracy movement following widespread protests in 2019 and under the National Security Law imposed by Beijing, was also fined 2 million Hong Kong dollars (\$257,000).

His media company, Next Digital, published the now-defunct pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily. The publication was forced to close following the arrests of its

top executives, editors and journalists last year.

In October, Lai was found guilty of fraud for subletting part of the office space to a secretarial firm, which was also controlled by him, between 2016 and 2020. The second fraud count was for letting the same firm use the media outlet's office space in an alleged breach of lease agreements from 1998 to 2015.

The court at that time ruled the moves had violated lease agreements with the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corp. and that Lai had hidden the fact that the company was occupying space in the building.

Handing down the sentences on Saturday, Judge Stanley Chan said the violations, which he called

DYNAMIC ZERO

China to drop some

CHINA planned to stop tracking some travel yesterday, potentially reducing the likelihood people will be forced into quarantine for visiting COVID-19 hot spots, as part of an uncertain exit from the strict pandemic policies that helped fuel widespread protests.

At midnight, the smart phone app that recorded a person's travel between cities and provinces will be disabled. Another app used to restrict the movement of those who test positive or enter an area with a recent outbreak remains in effect. They're part of a package of pandemic apps, some of which have also been used by local governments to suppress protests.

The move follows the government's dramatic announcement last week that it was ending many of the strictest measures, following three years during which it enforced some of the world's tightest virus restrictions. That included near-constant testing, open-ended lockdowns and requirements that a clean bill of health be shown to access public areas.

Last month in Beijing and several other cities, protests over the restrictions grew into calls for leadership to step down — a level of public dissent not seen in decades.

While met with relief, the relaxation has also sparked concerns about a new wave of infections potentially overwhelming health care resources in some areas.

The easing of measures means a sharp drop in testing, but cases still appear to be rising rapidly. China reported 8,500 new infections yesterday, bringing the nation's total to 365,312 — more than double the level on Oct. 1. It has recorded 5,235 deaths — compared to 1.1 million in the United States.

China's government-supplied figures have not been independently verified and questions have been raised about whether the ruling Communist Party has sought to minimize numbers of cases and deaths.

Fever clinics at hospitals in Beijing received 22,000 patients on Sunday — 16 times higher than previous week.

Following a rush last week to buy cold and flu medicine in

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Online travel tracking as it relaxes rules

AP PHOTO



many major Chinese cities, pharmacies in Hong Kong have reported a run on such medications by customers supplying relatives in mainland China, according to Lam Wai-man, chairman of the pharmacy trade association in the semi-autonomous southern Chinese city. Hong Kong has already lifted most of its COVID-19 restrictions.

"Everyone on the mainland wants to buy some pills to have in reserve at home," Lam said.

Alan Cheung, the owner of the Sands Medicine Shop in the Wan Chai district, said he was receiving around 10 inquiries about flu medication from mainland residents every day.

"Normally, no one would ask me about this kind of product," Cheung said.

The uncertainty and apparent growing number of cases have forced the cancellation of events from foreign embassy holiday parties to next spring's Formula One Chinese

Grand Prix car race in Shanghai.

Xi's government is still officially committed to stopping virus transmission, the last major country to try. But the latest moves suggest the party will tolerate more cases without quarantines or shutting down travel or businesses as it winds down its "zero COVID" strategy.

Facing a surge in COVID-19 cases, China is setting up more intensive care facilities and trying to strengthen hospitals' ability to

deal with severe cases. At the same time, part of the relaxation means the government will allow those with mild symptoms to recuperate at home rather than being sent to field hospitals that have become notorious for overcrowding and poor hygiene.

Reports on the Chinese internet, which is tightly controlled by the government, sought to reassure a nervous public, stating that restrictions would continue to be dropped and travel, indoor dining and other economic activity would soon be returning to pre-pandemic conditions.

China's leaders had long praised "zero COVID" for keeping numbers of cases and deaths much lower than in other nations, but officials have recently begun to talk about the virus as far less threatening and now say the most prevalent omicron variety poses much less of a risk.

Amid the unpredictable messaging from Beijing, experts warn there still is a chance the ruling party might reverse course and reimpose restrictions if a large-scale outbreak ensues.

Last week's announcement allowed considerable room for

local governments to assign their own regulations. Most restaurants in Beijing, for example, still require a negative test result obtained over the previous 48 hours and rules are even stricter for government offices.

The change in policy comes after protests erupted Nov. 25 after 10 people died in a fire in the northwestern city of Urumqi. Many questioned whether COVID-19 restrictions impeded rescue efforts. Authorities denied the claims spread online, but demonstrators gave voice to longstanding frustration in cities such as Shanghai that have endured severe lockdowns.

The party responded with a massive show of force and an unknown number of people were arrested at the protests or in the days following.

The relaxation began shortly after — though the government had already announced its intention to begin opening up slowly, promising to reduce the cost and disruption after the economy shrank by 2.6% from the previous quarter in the three months ending in June.

Forecasters say the economy probably is shrinking in the current quarter. Imports tumbled 10.9% from a year ago in November in a sign of weak demand.

Some forecasters have cut their outlook for annual growth to below 3%, less than half of last year's robust 8.1% expansion. **MDT/AP**

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A NEW WALL?

Tensions run high in north Kosovo as Serbs block roads

SYLEJMAN KLLOKOQI & LLAZAR SEMINI, PRISTINA

TENSIONS were high in northern Kosovo this weekend, with Serbs blocking roads as shots and explosions rang out and the Serbian president warned that Serbian troops are ready to defend their "homeland" if peace doesn't prevail.

The roads in Serbia's former province of Kosovo, which proclaimed independence in 2008, were blocked with heavy vehicles and trucks a day after Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said he would ask the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo to permit the deployment of 1,000 Serb troops in the Serb-populated north of Kosovo, saying they are being harassed there.

The roadblocks, which Serbs say were erected to protest the recent arrest of a former Kosovo Serb police officer, came despite the postponement of the Dec. 18 municipal election opposed by Kosovo Serbs.

"Kosovo reduced tensions by postponing local elections," said German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock yesterday [Macau time].

"Recent rhetoric from Serbia did the opposite. Suggesting sending Serbian forces to Kosovo is completely unacceptable. So are the latest attacks on EULEX," she said.

Vucic said after a meeting of Serbia's top security body that he will do everything to preserve peace, but that the army is ready to protect the minority Serbs in Kosovo.

"We have taken certain measures to protect our homeland," Vucic told Serbia's state RTS television. "I have issued orders and the National Security Council has accepted them. I am very proud of our soldiers and policemen. Before they receive orders ... we will try for a million times to preserve peace," he said.

Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti accused Belgrade of trying to destabilize Kosovo. He said Serbia also is trying to bring an end to the EU-mediated dialogue on normalizing bilateral ties and take it to the United Nations Security Council, where Bel-



The closed border crossing of Jarinje, along the Kosovo-Serbia border, Kosovo

grade hopes to get support from Russia and China.

Kurti called on Kosovo's Serbs "to distance themselves from the criminal groups and Vucic's regime that is funding them and looking for a war."

The European Union rule of law mission, known as EULEX, reported that a stun grenade was thrown at an EULEX reconnaissance patrol overnight. There were no injuries or damage.

EULEX, which has some 134 Polish, Italian and Lithuanian police officers deployed in the north, called on "those responsible to refrain from more provocative actions" and said it urged the Kosovo institutions "to bring the perpetrators to justice."

European Union's high representative, Josep Borrell, said the EU "will not tolerate attacks on EULEX or use of violent, criminal acts in the north."

"Barricades must be removed immediately by groups of Kosovo Serbs," he said on Twitter. "Calm must be restored ... all actors must avoid escalation."

Unidentified masked men were seen on the Serb barricades that blocked main roads leading to the border with Serbia, as Kosovo authorities closed two border crossings to all traffic and pedestrians.

An increased presence of

Kosovar Albanian police in areas with a mixed population, as well as more international police and soldiers, were seen in the north on Sunday.

Serbia and Kosovo have intensified their war of words in recent days.

Vucic said Saturday that he would formally request permission from the NATO-led KFOR mission in Kosovo to deploy Serbian troops in northern Kosovo, while conceding that the request probably wouldn't be granted.

Serbian officials claim a U.N. resolution that formally ended the country's bloody crackdown against majority Kosovo Albanian separatists in 1999 allows for some 1,000 Serb troops to return to Kosovo. NATO bombed Serbia to end the war and push its troops out of Kosovo, which declared independence in 2008.

The NATO-led peacekeepers who have been deployed in Kosovo since the 1998-99 war would have to give a green light for Serb troops to go there. That's highly unlikely because it would de-facto mean handing over security of Kosovo's Serb-populated northern regions to Serbian forces — a move that could dramatically increase tensions in the Balkans.

"We do not want a conflict. We want peace and pro-

gress but we shall respond to aggression with all our powers," Kosovar Prime Minister Albin Kurti posted on social media.

Kurti told the European Union and the United States that they should "punish" Serbia for orchestrating the violence to "destabilize Kosovo."

Tension in the north has been high this week ahead of the polls initially planned for Dec. 18. They have now been postponed to April 23 in an attempt to defuse the situation.

The election was due after ethnic Serb representatives resigned their posts in November to protest a decision by Kosovo's government to ban Serbia-issued vehicle license plates.

Tensions have simmered in Kosovo ever since it proclaimed independence from Serbia, despite attempts by EU and U.S. officials to defuse them. Serbia, supported by its allies Russia and China, has refused to recognize Kosovo's statehood.

Both Serbia and Kosovo want to join the EU but Brussels has warned they must resolve their dispute and normalize relations to be eligible for membership in the bloc.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said that the NATO-led mission in Kosovo "remains vigilant." MDT/AP

this day in history

1981 MILITARY CRACKDOWN ON POLISH PEOPLE



Poland's military rulers have declared a state of emergency after imposing martial law and placing leaders of the Solidarity trade union under arrest.

The country is effectively sealed off from the outside world with the military insisting the action is necessary to prevent the country from descending into civil war.

Borders with East Germany, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia have been closed and air space over Poland has been shut.

It is aimed at curbing the growing influence of the independent trade union Solidarity who reacted to the measures by calling a national strike.

Prime Minister General Wojciech Jaruzelski announced the crackdown on Solidarity on national television.

He warned Poles the country could no longer function under current tensions but pledged no blood would be spilt.

"We have been patient but now our patience has run out," he said.

The army was immediately dispatched to the streets in a massive show of military strength imposing strict censorship and a curfew.

The newly formed Military Council for National Salvation is instructed to shoot anyone breaking the new laws.

Soldiers are patrolling Warsaw in armed personnel carriers with automatic weapons.

Those on foot are patrolling the streets with riot shields and truncheons.

In the sparse reports leaking out of Poland it is understood some angry crowds have formed in Warsaw jeering and shouting "Gestapo" at soldiers.

Solidarity party offices have been raided and its leaders arrested except for Lech Walesa.

He has avoided detention by agreeing to negotiations with the government.

Demonstrations in Austria, staged mainly by Polish refugees seeking asylum there, have erupted against the action in Poland.

The Pope has called for an end to the strife and said no more blood should be shed in his homeland.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Martial law was not lifted until 1983 and in that year Lech Walesa won the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1989, with the economy close to collapse, General Jaruzelski convened talks and allowed free elections open to Solidarity candidates. Communists were swept from power and Lech Walesa became president of Poland. He turned Poland into a market economy virtually overnight and his reforms, while controversial, were generally successful, sparking rapid growth and major foreign investment. In 1995 Mr Walesa lost his re-election bid. But the legacy of his vision meant by 2000 Poland enjoyed full membership in Nato and joined the European Union in 2004.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

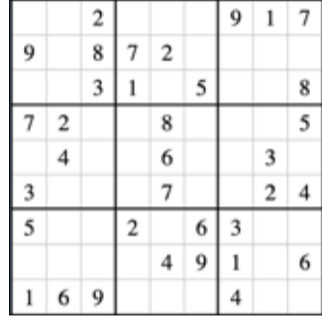
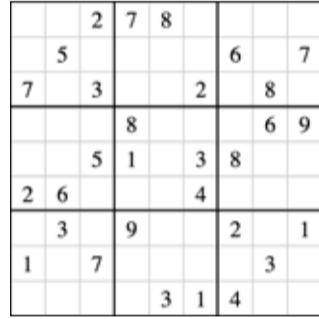


YOUR STARS

 ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Don't be angry, but be on your guard. Arguments could prevail. Control your temper by getting immersed in your work. Money-making opportunities will surface.	 TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Sudden changes in your financial situation are likely. Loss or theft may occur if you are careless with your belongings. Let your lover know what your personal intentions are.
 GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 You may not be that popular at home but you should be able to shine at social gatherings. You need to concentrate on your business ventures more than on your relationship today.	 CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Be cautious handling tools, machinery, or dangerous objects. Turn things around, make sure that they do their share. Take things slowly, especially for the sake of those you love.
 LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Double-check before you go out. Take a second look; difficulties with appliances, water, or electricity in your home may be evident. Throw yourself into your work.	 VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 You can mix business with pleasure to get favorable results. You can make financial deals, but it may be best if you're not using your own cash.
 LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Take the time to do your job correctly or you may find yourself looking for a new one. Rather than making a scene, communicate quietly about the way you feel.	 SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Get busy on projects that improve your own image; you'll have the discipline to succeed. Your lack of responsibility and attention has been a key issue in your relationship.
 SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Hobbies will be good for your emotional well being. Depression may be likely if you're away from home. Keep your feelings to yourself if you want to avoid embarrassment.	 CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Pleasure trips or friendly get-togethers will be satisfying and intellectually stimulating. Don't deny yourself today. Be sure that the person you're drawn to is not already involved.
 AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Friends and relatives can give you good advice. You will be in the mood for entertainment. Family trips or projects should be on your mind.	 PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Use your energy wisely. Tempers could boil if someone you work with has not been pulling their weight. You will get along well with your colleagues today.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY 	EASY+ 
MEDIUM 	HARD 

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-4	5	fine
Changchun	-11	0	cloudy
Chengdu	6	12	overcast
Chongqing	10	13	cloudy
Fuzhou	11	18	overcast
Guangzhou	11	17	cloudy
Guiyang	4	10	overcast
Haikou	14	19	cloudy
Hangzhou	4	11	cloudy
Harbin	-12	-3	snow
Hefei	-1	9	cloudy
Nanjing	0	8	cloudy
Shanghai	6	10	fine
Taipei	17	19	rain
Wuhan	-1	11	fine
Hong Kong	11	14	showers
WORLD			
Moscow	-6	1	snow
Frankfurt	-3	1	fine
Paris	-1	2	overcast
London	-1	2	cloudy
New York	-2	6	fine

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- According to the Bible, he was the first man; 5- Circumference; 10- Neet rival; 14- Israeli round dance; 15- Cover story; 16- Yorkshire river; 17- "The Clan of the Cave Bear" author; 18- Storage center; 19- River to the Caspian; 20- Genius; 22- All together; 24- Monk's hood; 27- Roof overhang; 28- Root of Apium graveolens; 32- Civil rights org.; 35- After; 36- Omega's opposite; 38- Baby bird?; 40- Holds up; 42- Atty.-to-be exams; 44- Earth Day subj.; 45- Sporting blades; 47- Made a mistake; 49- Any person; 50- Prufrock's creator; 52- Wedding; 54- Sheepish look; 56- Coal-rich region; 57- Earthworm; 60- Roofing items; 64- Corner; 65- Sierra ___; 68- Spahn teammate; 69- Light brown; 70- Dazzling display; 71- Sicilian resort; 72- Red-bearded god; 73- Noted Civil War biography; 74- Ooze;

DOWN 1- Gregory Peck role of 1956; 2- Glum; 3- Carpeting calculation; 4- Harmful intent; 5- Move about recklessly; 6- ___ de France; 7- Ready for plucking; 8- Steak order; 9- Hired killer; 10- Sicken; 11- Melodies; 12- Dies ___; 13- Fam. reunion attendee; 21- "A Doll's House" heroine; 23- Gardner and others; 25- Volition; 26- Pass into disuse; 28- Attention; 29- Run away with a lover; 30- Trademark; 31- Amulet; 33- Winter drink; 34- Fork; 37- Gillette razors; 39- "Twittering Machine" artist; 41- Feudal lord; 43- Lab fluids; 46- Ticked; 48- Fiddlesticks!; 51- Cultivator; 53- Van Gogh masterpiece; 55- Family tree member; 57- Foot part; 58- Emperor of Rome 54-68; 59- Barbie, e.g.; 61- Alley; 62- Mozart's "___ kleine Nachtmusik"; 63- Break, card game; 64- Asian holiday; 66- Dundee denial; 67- Hot time in Paris;

Friday's solution




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- 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
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MATCH OF THE DAY

Messi, Modric clash in first semifinal

STEVE DOUGLAS, DOHA

Wednesday, 03:00
Argentina v Croatia
H 1.84, D 3.45, A 5.6

ODDSCHECKER.COM

TEARS are flowing from soccer's biggest superstars as they make emotional exits from what might be their last World Cup.

First it was Neymar. Then it was Cristiano Ronaldo. Could Lionel Messi be next?

Momentum is building behind Messi's push to cap his career with the biggest prize in the game. The 35-year-old Argentina playmaker has carried his team to the semifinals, almost in the same way Diego Maradona — the man with whom Messi is so often compared — led the South American nation to its second and most recent World Cup title in 1986.

Now in Argentina's way is Croatia, a country with a population of 4 million which is establishing a reputation as the most stubborn and durable of opponents while also boasting one of soccer's most graceful players in Luka Modric.

The teams go head to head at Lusail Stadium — also the venue for Sunday's final — in a meeting between the last two runners-up



Messi, Modric: faceoff

at the tournament: Argentina in 2014 and Croatia in 2018.

Argentina might have been expected to be in this position. The team arrived at the World Cup as the Copa America champion, on a 36-match unbeaten run and with Messi back in sublime form for Paris Saint-Germain.

There was much less noise around the Croatians, yet they keep on surprising just like four years ago when their run to the final included a 3-0 victory over

Argentina in the group stage. They also reached the World Cup semifinals in 1998.

Both teams have come through uncomfortable moments. Argentina's darkest time was right at the start of the tournament, after a 2-1 loss to Saudi Arabia in what will go down as one of the World Cup's biggest upsets.

Inspired by Messi and one of the most fervent fan followings in Qatar, Argentina won its final two group games, ended up squeez-

ing past Australia 2-1 in the round of 16 and then required penalties to get past the Netherlands in a wild quarterfinal match.

Messi now has four goals in the tournament in Qatar, leaving him one behind top scorer Kylian Mbappé. They are probably the two standout players at a World Cup that has seen many other top players live up to their lofty reputations.

Modric is a case in point.

He might not have scored a

goal. He hasn't even had an assist. But don't underestimate the importance to Croatia of the little magician who keeps things ticking in midfield and manages to assert some control for a team which fights until the last minute.

In 2018, each of Croatia's knockout games went into extra time before the team lost to France in the final, and the same thing is happening in Qatar, with victories in penalty shootouts over Japan in the last 16 and Brazil in the quarterfinals.

Croatia looked more comfortable against Brazil than against Japan, which shows the team might be happier to invite pressure and choose its moments to break forward rather than control games and be more susceptible to the counterattack.

Containing Messi will be key and much of the responsibility there lies with holding midfielder Marcelo Brozovic, who protected Croatia's defense so well against Brazil.

Argentina will be without two players because of suspension: left back Marcos Acuña and right back Gonzalo Montiel. Acuña is the bigger miss, having impressed since coming into the team after the loss to Saudi Arabia, and he is likely to be replaced by Nicolás Tagliafico. **MDT/AP**

END OF AN ERA

Portugal prepares for post-Ronaldo era after exit

STEVE DOUGLAS, DOHA

THE fortunes of Portugal's national team have been inextricably linked with Cristiano Ronaldo for nearly two decades.

Is a new era upon us?

Ronaldo was in tears as he made his way to the locker room following Portugal's 1-0 loss to Morocco in the World Cup quarterfinals on Saturday.

It remains to be seen if that was the last time the world saw Ronaldo on soccer's international stage. In a post on Instagram on Sunday, he stopped short of announcing his retirement from international duty, but said his dream of winning the World Cup had "ended."

If he does stop playing for Portugal, it marks a huge moment for the national team, given Ronaldo is its captain, record scorer and greatest ever player.



There's a chance the team might also have a different coach for the first time since 2014 when qualification for the 2024 European Championship begins in March.

Reaching the quarterfinals was the minimum expected of Portugal considering the depth of talent in its squad. The team sailed through the group phase by winning its opening two ga-

mes before coach Fernando Santos rotated most of his starting lineup for the final group-stage match against South Korea, which won 2-1 on a late goal. Portugal then thrashed Switzerland 6-1 in the round of 16. Despite Morocco's strong defense and status as the surprise of the tournament, Portugal was still expected to beat the North African nation in the quarterfinals so, in that

sense, it is another missed opportunity and probably an overall underperformance by Ronaldo and his team.

WHO'S OUT

The world is waiting to see if the 37-year-old Ronaldo retires from international duty after scoring 118 goals — a record in men's soccer — and making 196 appearances in his 19 years with the national team. If Ronaldo does continue, it seems it will only be for Euro 2024. When the 2026 World Cup comes around, he will be 41 years old. At 39, center back Pepe is likely to have played his final major tournament. What's more in doubt is the future of Santos, who took charge of Portugal in 2014 after four years at the helm of Greece's national team. He has a contract through 2024 and repeatedly deflec-

ted any talk about leaving his post earlier after the loss to Morocco. "I will have a discussion with the (Portuguese soccer federation) president and when we go back to Portugal, we will deal with the issue of the contract," Santos said.

A future without Ronaldo might be an alarming proposition but there's talent coming through. Up front, there's the 21-year-old Gonçalo Ramos, who scored a hat trick against Switzerland when standing in for Ronaldo in his first start for the national team. There's much excitement about the development of

António Silva, a 19-year-old center back at Benfica who seems the natural replacement for Pepe — a player more than twice Silva's age. João Félix is only 23 so has time on his side, while full backs Diogo Dalot and Nuno Mendes are only 23 and 20, respectively.

With or without Ronaldo, Portugal is the favorite in a kind-looking qualifying group for Euro 2024. Portugal opens group play in March with a home match against Liechtenstein. The other teams in Group J are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Slovakia and Luxembourg. If Portugal reaches the tournament in Germany, expect the team to be among the favorites — even without its most famous player. **MDT/AP**

QUARTERFINALS SCOREBOARD

Netherlands	2	(3-4)	2	Argentina
Croatia	1	(4-2)	1	Brazil
England	1		2	France
Morocco	1		0	Portugal

OPINION

Sports Views

James Robson, MDT/AP



ENGLAND LOOKS TO
FUTURE AFTER LATEST
WORLD CUP HEARTBREAK

It was a new twist on an old story for England. Harry Kane's late penalty flew high over the bar at Al Bayt Stadium Saturday, effectively sealing the national team's World Cup fate.

France held out for a 2-1 win that sent the defending champions back to the semifinals and England home.

Penalties have cost the Three Lions time and again at major tournaments — they have lost shootouts on seven occasions at World Cups and European Championships since 1990.

It didn't come down to that against France, but Kane still faced a test of nerve from the spot when standing over the ball in the 84th minute.

The England captain had already scored one penalty to tie Aurelien Tchouameni's opening goal, but couldn't repeat that act after Olivier Giroud put France back in front with what turned out to be the winner.

England's wait for a first trophy since its one and only World Cup win in 1966 goes on.

A potential quarterfinal match with France always stood out as the moment England's World Cup hopes could end. And that's how it turned out. But that doesn't tell the whole story of a game in which England dominated possession and chances against one of the tournament favorites. If Kane had converted his second penalty, it could have been a different story. It was a performance that exceeded expectations, even if it ended in defeat, and provides encouragement for English fans. England was also the leading scorer in the tournament with 13 goals, which points to a more attacking style than in past years. But after reaching the semifinals in 2018 and the Euro 2020 final, which England lost on penalties to Italy, a quarterfinal exit feels premature.

Coach Gareth Southgate is considering his future after three major tournaments without a trophy and will be the biggest departure if he decides to walk away from a contract that still has two years to run. He has transformed England's fortunes since taking charge in 2016 and would leave big shoes to fill in terms of the connection he has built between the team and the nation. On the field, time is still on England's side. Kane, at 29, should have another World Cup in him, while players such as Jude Bellingham, Bukayo Saka, Phil Foden and Declan Rice are still to reach their peak. Kyle Walker, Jordan Henderson, Kieran Trippier, all 32, could be among the ones who start to make way for a new generation.

Bellingham looks like the future after his dominant performances in central midfield. At just 19, he has already emerged as a leader, while Saka, Foden and Rice will also be key to England's future. Chelsea right back Reece James is one of the country's most exciting young talents and only missed out on Qatar because of injury. Winger Jadon Sancho will also hope to work his way back into the picture by rediscovering his form with Manchester United. The big challenge for Southgate — or whoever is in charge — is to find a natural successor to Kane, even if England's co-leading scorer isn't ready to step aside just yet.

Euro 2024 is the next target and the majority of this squad could be back again for that tournament.

Qualifying starts in March, with England taking on Italy in a repeat of last year's final. Ukraine, North Macedonia and Malta are the other teams drawn in Group C. Eyes will be firmly fixed on the tournament in Germany, when England will once again be among the favorites to finally end its wait for a major trophy.

A joint venture between General Motors and South Korean battery company LG Energy Solution has closed on a \$2.5 billion federal loan to help finance three lithium-ion battery cell plants in Ohio, Tennessee, and Michigan.

The Department of Energy awarded the loan to the venture, called Ultium Cells, for the plants, which are expected to create about 11,000 jobs. The loan is part of a government program designed to address the growing need for batteries for electric vehicles.

The loan was first announced in July.

The Biden administration has been working to strengthen U.S. energy independence and reduce dependence on China for critical components. Ultium Cells will supply GM as it works to convert its light-duty fleet to all-electric by 2035.

The plants are planned for Lansing, Michigan and Spring Hill, Tennessee. A plant near Warren, Ohio, began battery cell production in August.

AP PHOTO



Tom Cruise as Capt. Pete "Maverick" Mitchell in "Top Gun: Maverick"

GOLDEN GLOBES,
HOBBLED BY SCANDAL,
SET TO ANNOUNCE NOMS

JAKE COYLE, NEW YORK

AFTER scandal and boycott plunged the Hollywood Foreign Press Association into disarray and knocked the Golden Globes broadcast off television for a year, the annual film and television awards are set to announce nominations today [Macau time].

Nominations to the 80th Golden Globe Awards will be announced by George and Mayan Lopez, who will read the nominees on NBC's "Today" show. The Globes will be telecast Jan. 10, with stand-up comedian Jerrod Carmichael hosting.

This year's show could be make-or-break for the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, the organization that puts on the Globes. A Los Angeles Times investigation in early 2021 found that the group then had no Black members, a revelation compounded by other allegations of ethical improprieties. Many stars and studios said they would boycott the show. Tom Cruise returned his three Globes.

With Hollywood spurning the Globes, NBC last year canceled the telecast that would have taken place in January. Instead, the Golden Globes were quietly held in a Beverly Hilton ballroom without any stars in attendance.

Winners were announced on Twitter.

Now, the Globes are trying to mount a comeback. The biggest question surrounding the nominations today isn't who will be nominated but how will Hollywood respond. Will the usual press statements and social-media celebrations follow? Or will many take the lead of Brendan Fraser — a likely nominee this year for his performance in "The Whale" — who said he won't attend the Globes.

In 2018, Fraser said he was groped by Philip Berk, a longtime HFPA member and former president of the organization, at an event in 2003. The HFPA found that Berk "inappropriately touched" Fraser, but that it "was intended to be taken as a joke and not as a sexual advance."

"It's because of the history that I have with them," Fraser told GQ last month, explaining why he wouldn't attend. "And my mother didn't raise a hypocrite. You can call me a lot of things, but not that."

Over the last year and a half, the HFPA has revamped its membership and enacted reforms designed to curtail unethical behavior. The group added new members, including six Black voting members.

In bringing the Globes back on the air, NBC praised the HFPA for its

ongoing reforms but also reworked its contract. The network will broadcast the 2023 show in a one-year deal. It also shifted the telecast to a Tuesday, instead of the Globes' previous Sunday night perch.

Known for its boozy, celebrity-stuffed broadcast, the Globes have long ranked as one of the most-watched non-sporting live programs of the year. But ratings, as they have for most award shows, have slid for the Globes in recent years. The 2021 show, held amid the pandemic, was watched by 6.9 million, down from 18 million the year prior.

The HFPA also sold the Globes earlier this year to Todd Boehly's Eldridge Industries, which has turned it from a nonprofit to a for-profit venture. The firm also owns Dick Clark Productions, which produces the Globes, and the award show's longtime home, the Beverly Hilton in Los Angeles.

This year, some of the favorites include the metaverse adventure "Everything Everywhere all at Once," Steven Spielberg's autobiographical "The Fabelmans" and Martin McDonagh's feuding friends drama "The Banshees of Inisherin." The year's biggest box-office hit, "Top Gun: Maverick," too, could be in the mix. Could Cruise be a nominee again? MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Ukraine Bice is an American pit bull terrier with an important and sensitive job in Ukraine — comforting children traumatized by Russia's war. The playful 8-year-old gray dog arrived on time this week to a rehabilitation center on the outskirts of the Ukrainian capital, ready to start his duties. As Bice waited in a hallway, inside of what looked like a school classroom with paintings and some books, a dozen children were seated around a table listening to Oksana Sliepora, a psychologist.

AP PHOTO



UK Heavy snow, ice and fog triggered travel disruptions across the U.K. yesterday, as airports canceled flights, train operators issued do-not-travel alerts and police warned of treacherous roads. The Met Office issued severe weather alerts for large parts of the country. Roads in eastern and southeast England were among the most affected. The country recorded its coldest night of the year so far in northern Scotland at minus 15.7 degrees Celsius.

AP PHOTO



Space NASA's Orion capsule made a blisteringly fast return from the moon Sunday, parachuting into the Pacific off Mexico to conclude a test flight that should clear the way for astronauts on the next lunar flyby. The incoming capsule hit the atmosphere at Mach 32, or 32 times the speed of sound, and endured reentry temperatures of 2,760 degrees Celsius before splashing down west of Baja California near Guadalupe Island. A Navy ship quickly moved in to recover the spacecraft and its silent occupants — three test dummies rigged with vibration sensors and radiation monitors.