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A MIDDLE-AGED MAN WAS DETAINED BY THE POLICE ON ALLEGATIONS OF SHAM MARRIAGE WITH HIS GOD-SISTER TO OBTAIN MACAU RESIDENCY P4

AMCM: MACAU SEES 11 NEW FINANCIAL OPERATORS IN FIVE YEARS P3

CHINA ACCUSES WASHINGTON OF ABUSING TECH EXPORT CONTROLS P6



Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan (pictured) has suggested his country might approve Finland's application for NATO membership before taking any action on Sweden's, while the Turkish government issued a travel warning for European countries due to anti-Turkish demonstrations and what it described as Islamophobia.



Ukraine Friends and volunteers gathered at Kyiv's St Sophia's Cathedral to say goodbye to Andrew Bagshaw, a New Zealand scientist who was killed in Ukraine with another volunteer while they were trying to evacuate people from a front-line town. Bagshaw, 48, a New Zealand-British citizen, and British volunteer Christopher Parry, 28, went missing this month while heading to the town of Soledar, in the eastern Donetsk region, where heavy fighting was taking place.



West Bank An alarming spike in Israeli-Palestinian violence and sharp responses by both sides are testing the Biden administration as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken plunges into a cauldron of deepening mistrust and anger on visits to Israel and the West Bank this week. Blinken's high-wire diplomatic act begins today. [More on p8](#)

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GBA GOV'T TO IMPROVE HENGQIN BORDER POST TO BOOST USE P2

RENATO MARQUES



CNY

AIRPORT TRAFFIC EXPECTATIONS FELL SLIGHTLY SHORT

RENATO MARQUES

THE air traffic at the Macau International Airport (MIA) fell slightly short (-5.2%) in comparison with the expectations from the airport company (CAM) for the Lunar New Year holidays (CNY).

Before the CNY, Eric Fong, Director of the Marketing Depart-

ment of CAM, had forecasted a volume of 50,000 passengers during the first five days of the new year, averaging 10,000 per day.

Over the given period, the MIA handled 47,400 passengers at an average of 9,480 per day, 5.2% lower than expected.

The forecast from CAM was not very ambitious as the figure of 10,000/day represented less

than a 20% increase when compared to the regular airport traffic in the period before the holidays, leading to the conclusion that fewer passengers had flown into Macau and, although there was a clear and noticeable increase in the number of the visitors, these are sources mostly in the nearby markets.

Analyzed by day, the day re-

cording the highest influx of passengers was the second day of the CNY (Jan. 23) when 5,892 arrivals to the Macau airport were reported. Also, it is notable that of these only 4,912 (-980) were tourists.

On the other hand, the day that registered the highest number of departures was the fourth day of the CNY (Jan. 25) with 4,966.

This makes the second and

fourth days of the CNY the days with most movement at the MIA and the only two days in which the total movement exceeded 10,000.

If we take into consideration not only the first five days of the CNY but the full nine days of this year's "Golden Week," from CNY Eve (Jan. 21) to Jan. 29 inclusive, the number of passengers handled by the MIA falls slightly further to an average of 9,413 passengers per day.

According to Fong, the MIA has a current capacity for processing around 30,000 in-bound passengers per day, having recorded an average of 5,000/day in the last week, representing a capacity rate of just around 17%.

According to the same official, the airport has been resuming several flight routes from the time the pandemic restrictions were lifted, and recently 10 routes have been reopened, linking Macau to 26 destinations, of which 20 are located on the mainland.

Currently, and according to the Civil Aviation Authority, it is only possible to fly internationally from MIA to Tokyo (Japan), Singapore, Hanoi (Vietnam), Bangkok (Thailand), and Seoul (South Korea) as well as Taipei (Taiwan), with an additional route to Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) scheduled to resume on Feb. 14.

GBA

Gov't to improve Hengqin border post to boost use

RENATO MARQUES & ANTHONY LAM

LOCAL government wants to improve the facilities of the Macau Port Area at the Hengqin Border to facilitate the use of this checkpoint by locals and visitors, the Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, has said during a visit to the facility.

Lei was at Hengqin in his role as a chairman of the Executive Committee of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone, offering assurance that the Macau government would enforce improvements to the border crossing system at the post to make it more efficient and convenient.

Lei said the goal is that

this border post become more convenient so it can be used more frequently and so benefit the businesses located on both sides of the border.

According to the data disclosed by the Public Security Police Force, during the nine days of the Lunar New Year (Jan. 21 to 29), 236,011 people used the Hengqin Port to cross between Macau and the mainland, a figure that represents only 7.7% of the total of 3.07 million border crossings recorded in all posts in the same period.

The larger share of all crossings continues to happen at Border Gate, which recorded 1.51 million crossings (49.2%) over the Golden Week, followed by



the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge Port with 532,337 (17.3%) and Qingmao 443,317 (14.4%).

Also of note is the fact that from the over 236,000 who used the Hengqin port, 43.4%

were local residents.

According to the Executive Committee of the Cooperation Zone, 60% of all vehicles that entered Hengqin over the holidays also had a Macau license plate.

FURTHER INTEGRATION IN THREE WAYS

The Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone will accelerate integration with Macau in three ways, Fu Yongge, deputy director of the Executive Council of the Zone, has said.

The first is to attract global resources to engage in shared research in Hengqin. For example, businesses will receive support to build research platforms with the University of Macau (UM). Efforts will also be put into traditional Chinese medicine, metaverse, commercial pitching and establishing a registrar system.

The second is to establish ferry services between Hengqin Island and Macau's Inner Harbour. Construction of the bridge connecting the

Zone and the UM will be accelerated. Macau residents living in the Macao New Neighbourhood project will be permitted to use Internet and foreign TV channels.

The third is to align services and products available in the Macao New Neighbourhood with those in Macau.

Reviewing the previous year, Fu said the Zone's total tax revenue was 35.389 billion Chinese yuan. The number of Macao-funded enterprises in the Zone reached 5,323 and the number of Macau residents who live and work there, 6,909. The Zone has achieved initial results through extensive consultation and joint construction, diversified industries and the integrated development of Macau and Hengqin.

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MDT ARCHIVE



GAMING

Analysts expect mass GGR to recover to 60-70% of 2019 level

JP Morgan is satisfied with the pace and extent of the recovery of Macau's gaming industry, expecting the Chinese New Year (CNY) mass GGR to recover to 60-70% of 2019's level.

Having visited Macau for a day trip with a group of investors last Friday (Jan. 27), JP Morgan said they were "impressed by the traffic level and social activities in the city upon departure."

According to a report yesterday, it felt like they were back to 3-4 years ago, "with long queues for many retail/ F&B outlets and

a lively gaming floor with high minimum bets."

All gaming companies "were pleasantly surprised by the level of segment demand during CNY," the report revealed.

The JP Morgan view sounded similar to if not more upbeat than Sands' management during its earnings call last week.

Credit Suisse also published a research report, predicting the average daily gaming revenue during the non-holiday period in Macau will be between MOP250-300 million, and the peak daily gaming revenue from the 3rd to the 6th day of the Chinese New

Year will reach about MOP500-600 million. Mass performance is expected to be back to around 60% of the 2019 levels.

The broker believes the gaming gross revenue in January should reach between MOP9-11 billion, similar to that in May 2021.

Overall, CNY performance "should surprise the market, and the market may have the opportunity to raise the figures for the first quarter," the broker said.

Meanwhile, Fitch Ratings said that Macau is probably among the most benefited economies in the Asia-Pacific region after Chi-

na dropped travel restrictions and reopened its borders.

In a report this week, the analysts note that Macau, Thailand and Malaysia are likely to most benefit from the trends in outbound Chinese tourism.

The ratings house noted it expects "a revival of Chinese outbound tourism to boost growth prospects in economies with substantial tourism sectors."

The results of pent-up demand were already seen in Macau during the Chinese New Year holiday, with some 451,000 visitors in total, an increase of almost 300% year-on-year. **PC**

Macau sees 11 new financial operators in five years

IN the past five years, the city has seen 11 new financial institutions, operating a relatively wide range of businesses in Macau, the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) stated.

The 11 financial institutions are in businesses such as payment services, financial leasing, investment fund management, financial asset trading and revenue sharing

rights trading.

Referring to them as new types of financial institutions, the AMCM noted their establishments not only added innovative elements to the market, but also realized complementary development with neighboring regions.

Recapping its efforts in the previous years, the AMCM highlighted that it had coordinated the estab-

lishment of the Simple Pay and Easy Transfer functions.

The former allows all local mobile payment platforms to inter-communicate and thus realizes cross-platform payment. The latter relies on Fast Payment System (FPS) technology and facilitates instant to same-day inter-bank money wire transfers.

The AMCM boasts 90%

coverage of Simple Pay and the availability of the next phase of Easy Transfer for the Hong Kong Dollar.

In terms of law, the entity has handled the review or compilation of several

laws related to capitalization, insurance agencies, trusts and currency. It will also propose to the parliament laws concerning insurance agents, funds and securities. **AL**



DAILY BORDER CROSSING CAP EXTENDED AGAIN FOR THREE MONTHS

The daily border crossing cap between Macau and Zhuhai at the Border Gate and Qingmao Border will be extended for three more months from Feb. 1 to April 30. Common travelers will be allowed to make a return crossing per day, regardless of which of the two border checkpoints is used. Border-crossing students and accompanying parents will be allowed to conduct two return crossings per day. Hengqin, Wanzai and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge will not enforce a similar restriction.

MAINLAND CNY DOMESTIC TRAVEL RETURNS TO 87% OF PRE-COVID LEVEL

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has announced that during the past Lunar New Year holiday, there were 308 million domestic tourist trips nationwide, a year-on-year increase of 23.1% and returning to 88.6% of the same period in 2019. Revenue from domestic tourism was 375.843 billion Chinese yuan, a year-on-year increase of 30% and equating to 73.1% of the same holiday period in 2019. The revenue of hotels and inns increased 16.4% and 30.6% year-on-year respectively, recovering to 73.4% and 79.9% of the same holiday period in 2019.

GIRL RESCUED AFTER CARBON MONOXIDE INTOXICATION

A 13-year-old girl has been rescued and sent to the private Kiang Wu Hospital after being reported unwell during her shower, the Fire Services Bureau (CB) has reported. Upon arrival at the girl's residence in Le Cité in Areia Preta, paramedics were told that she was feeling dizzy. Paramedics found a laceration on her nose bridge, which was also bleeding. After inspection, CB officers saw a gas water heater installed in the bathroom and tested 341PPM of carbon dioxide in the room. The culprit is suspected to be a wrongly installed water heater.

CRIME

MAN ARRESTED FOR ALLEGED SHAM MARRIAGE WITH GOD-SISTER FOR MACAU ID

ANTHONY LAM

A now-local middle-aged man has been detained by the Public Security Police Force (PSP) on allegations of a sham marriage with his god-sister to obtain Macau residency.

The case was announced yesterday by the police in a regular press conference.

According to the police, there are four suspects. The first suspect is surnamed Zhong, a 50-year-old male, who was a mainland resident but later obtained Macau residency.

The second suspect is surnamed Tan, a 45-year-old female, who also obtained Macau residency through the progress of this case. She is the first wife of Zhong.

Surnamed Lei, the 40-year-old third suspect is the god-sister of Zhong and also his alleged sham wife. Her mother, surnamed Leong and aged 65 years, is Zhong's godmother and has been identified as the fourth suspect. Both Lei and Leong are Macau residents.

Police disclosed that Zhong and Tan married in 1999. The next year, they bore their first daughter and the second daughter four years later. In January 2008, the couple filed for divorce.

About four months after the divorce, Zhong married Lei in mainland China. In 2012, Zhong and his elder daughter garnered provisional or non-permanent Macau residency.



It was revealed that Zhong and Tan bore a son in 2010. In the same year, Lei bore a son as well, but the biological father was not Zhong.

In 2015, Zhong and Lei filed for a divorce in mainland China.

After the termination of his latest marriage, Zhong remarried Tan in 2017 in mainland China. Five years later, in 2022, Tan and the two remaining children obtained provisional Macau residency.

Seeing this timeline, the police found the occurrences suspicious, mainly because Zhong swiftly married a new woman only four months after his first divorce, in addition to divorcing his second wife in just three years af-

ter obtaining provisional Macau residency. Moreover, the police found the remarriage also a source of suspicion.

During their investigations, the police were told that Leong, being the godmother of Zhong, arranged the alleged sham marriage. The police have identified her as the intermediary of the alleged sham marriage.

Upon her success in arranging the marriage, Leong was given MOP20,000 as remuneration.

Lei also confessed to the police that she married Zhong following her mother's instructions.

In another case, the Judiciary Police (PJ) was told that a man had lost 50 times the price of an

undelivered cellphone in the attempts of retrieving the cost of the cellphone through underground means.

According to the PJ, the victim, who is a local man, tried to buy a cellphone on an online platform for the price of MOP1,500 in 2020. After settling the bill, the phone was not delivered nor was the money returned. Due to the situation, he went to other online sources for help.

He was then contacted by somebody who claimed to be able to retrieve the paid sum. However, the victim was informed he should pay for the "service." Between August and October in the same year, the victim made six

transfers, totaling nearly 80,000 Chinese yuan, to four mainland bank accounts.

As a result, he lost both the phone price and the "service fee" for the retrieval.

On Jan. 29, 2023, the police intercepted Zhang, the 28-year-old mainland-resident holder of the four accounts, at the Hengqin Border Checkpoint. He confessed that he had allowed the use of his accounts to collect funds of an undisclosed nature and source. He was promised 300 yuan for each receipt, adding up to 1,200 yuan for all four.

Zhang denied that he was aware of the illegality of the nature of the fund.

HK's Prudential Insurance to open Macau branch

RENATO MARQUES

THE Hong Kong arm of the multinational insurance company headquartered in London - Prudential plc (Prudential) - announced last week that following approval by the local authorities, it will establish a branch of its Hong Kong business in Macau, the company stated in a press note sent to the Times.

The new branch, soon to open its doors, is located on the 12th floor A of the FIT Centre of Macau, at the Avenida Doutor Mario Soares, and will provide a wide range of services, including policy inquiries

and payment services.

In the first phase, the company will offer life and health insurance solutions, including multi-currency options to meet different customers' needs in relation to savings packages as well as healthcare and protection.

The company also said that with the opening of the Macau branch, it is extending its presence to 24 markets across Asia and Africa.

The Managing Director, Strategic Business Group, of Prudential, Lilian Ng, said "the new Macau branch also completes the company's footprint in China's Greater Bay Area

(GBA)," noting the existing potential of a population target of 86.7 million people which contributed in 2021 to 11% of China's total gross domestic product.

"While we have seen rapid economic development in Macau, insurance penetration remains low. With the city's fast-aging population, there is strong demand from its residents for solutions that can help them access private healthcare facilities in Macau and elsewhere in the GBA," Ng said, adding, "The Macau branch will play a pivotal role in our strategy to make healthcare and financial security

more accessible to people in the GBA, as we leverage our 50-year experience of providing insurance to customers in Hong Kong."

According to the Swiss Re Institute - Sigma report "World insurance: inflation risks front and centre," Macau had a life insurance penetration rate of 6.4% in 2021, which represents slightly over one-third of Hong Kong's 17.3%.

Figures from the Money Authority of Macau (AMCM) stated that in 2021, the gross written premium of Macau's life insurance industry grew 26% year-on-year to MOP 33 billion, driven by rising demand for protection

and wealth accumulation products in the city.

The local branch will be headed by Chris Ma as general manager and will have management and performance oversight directly from the Hong Kong's Chief Executive Officer of Prudential Hong Kong, Lawrence Lam, who also said the establishment

of the branch will be "a key milestone for the Group's GBA strategy."

Ma, who previously performed the role of chief executive officer of AIA Macau, aims to bring his over 30 years of experience in the local insurance industry to the new company commencing operations soon.





When Fondant Art meets Chinese Culture

Art can be found in abundance in every corner of MGM COTAI. Feast on the taste of sweetness this Chinese New Year at the "Fondant Art Exhibition". In continuation to bring all citizens and tourists the splendor of Chinese culture, MGM collaborated with Zhou Yi, the "Sugar King" of China, and specially curated five beautiful fondant sculptures to showcase contemporary fondant art and the classics of Chinese culture including the folk culture of the Lingnan region "Lion Dance" and "Culture of Yum Cha".

Speaking of Chinese traditional culture, lions have been revered for centuries as auspicious treasures, as well as MGM's corporate image. And whenever we talk about Chinese New Year, there is always a connection between the festival and lion dancing. Every Spring Festival, as well as during many other celebrations, the lion dance performance, with its distinctive drum beat and music, has become synonymous with blessings of good fortune. It is a way to create a festive atmosphere and bring happiness. There is nothing better than kicking off the most significant festivals of the year with lion dancing!



Chinese New Year is a time for family reunions. Billions of people travel back to their homes and families to get together for the reunion dinner and celebrate. It is about family, friends, and food. When it comes to food, Chinese food culture is extensive and profound, and the Cantonese Yum Cha culture is particularly rich in rituals. "The Awakening Lion and Yum Cha Culture" showcases the teahouse culture that originated in Guangzhou. This is where many distinctive rituals originated, such as the tea ceremony, lifting the lid for water refills, and ticking the dim sum list. All of this is evident in this gorgeous piece of art. Today, the teahouse is a place where families gather and friends reminisce about old times, as well as create new happy memories for the new year.



This exquisite art piece adopts the technique of space-staging to seamlessly blend two major cultural elements within the same scene: the Awakening Lion and Yum Cha. The lion drum drives the beat, echoing the craftsmanship of Chinese drum-making, as neighbors enjoy their morning tea at the dining table. Hot steam moves up from the traditional Cantonese-style dim sum steamer, swirling and rising, before transforming into auspicious clouds, and a pair of lion dancers spring out from behind the embroidered ball. On stage, happiness blossoms in pairs. Neighbors revel in the lion dance, as they chat with each other. The lively scene beautifully captures the enjoyable gathering of friends and family.

More scenes await! Savor the art of living at MGM and be in awe of edible art now. Open daily from 12 PM to 8 PM, the exhibition is entirely free of entry!

For more information, please visit mgm.mo



TECH WAR

CHINA ACCUSES WASHINGTON OF ABUSING EXPORT CONTROLS

CHINA'S government yesterday criticized U.S. controls on technology exports as a trade violation, after Japan and the Netherlands agreed to join Washington in limiting Beijing's access to materials to make advanced processor chips they say can be used in weapons.

The Foreign Ministry didn't mention the latest development but accused Washington of abusing export controls and organizing other governments to "maintain its hegemony" and contain China.

The United States is trying to block China from acquiring the most powerful processor chips and technology that would help its fledgling industry develop the ability to make them.

"This seriously violates market principles and international trade order," said a ministry spokeswoman, Mao Ning. She said it "undermines the stability of global industrial and supply chains."

Japan and the Netherlands have agreed to a deal with the U.S. to restrict China's access to materials

AP PHOTO



Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte (left) and U.S. President Joe Biden during a round table meeting at a NATO summit in Madrid, Spain, last June

used to make advanced computer chips, a person familiar with the agreement told The Associated Press yesterday [Macau time].

The person declined to be identified because the deal hasn't yet been formally announced. It's unclear when all three sides will unveil the agreement. The White House declined to comment.

The Biden administration in October imposed export controls to limit China's ability to access advanced chips, which it says can be used to make weapons, commit human rights abuses and improve the speed and accuracy of its military logistics. It urged allies like Japan and the Netherlands to follow suit.

China has responded angrily, saying trade curbs will disrupt supply chains and the global economic recovery.

"We hope the relevant countries will do the right thing and work together to uphold the multilateral trade regime and safeguard the stability of the global industrial and supply chains," China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said earlier this month. "This will also serve to protect their own long-term interests."

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Friday that Dutch and Japanese officials were in Washington for talks led by President Joe Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, that covered the "safety and security of emerging technologies," efforts to aid Ukraine and other issues.

"We're grateful that they were able to come to D.C. and to have these talks," Kirby said.

Kirby declined to say whether there was a deal on tighter export controls on semiconductor technology. This month, Biden met

separately with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte to push for tighter export controls.

In a press conference last week, Rutte was asked about the talks but said they involve "such sensitive material ... high-quality technology that the Dutch government chooses to communicate about it very carefully and that means in a very limited way."

Veldhoven, Netherlands-based ASML, a leading maker of semiconductor production equipment, said that it didn't know any details about the agreement or how it would affect ASML's business.

ASML is the world's only producer of machines that use extreme ultraviolet lithography to make advanced semiconductor chips. The Dutch government has prohibited ASML from exporting that equipment to China since 2019, but the company had still been shipping lower-quality lithography systems to China.

ASML has research and manufacturing centers in Beijing and Shenzhen, China, as well as a regional headquarters in Hong Kong.

U.S. officials say China is spending heavily to develop its fledgling semiconductor producers but so far cannot make the high-end chips used in the most advanced smartphones and other devices. **MDT/AP**

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XINJIANG

Earthquake rocks Uyghur autonomous region

RESIDENTS and travelers sought shelter after a strong earthquake rocked a remote part of northwestern China yesterday morning.

No injuries or major damage have been reported following the temblor that struck the Xinjiang region at 7:49 a.m., according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

State broadcaster CCTV showed footage of people evacuating an airport departure hall and ceiling fixtures swaying as the ground rocked. Ground crews were seen inspecting the airport's exterior as the sun began to rise over the region's Shahe county.

The China Earthquake Networks Cen-

ter registered the quake at a preliminary magnitude of 6.1, while the U.S. Geological Survey reported it as 5.7.

A vast, resource-rich region of mountains and deserts, Xinjiang is one of China's most seismically volatile regions, though most quakes strike in sparsely inhabited areas outside major cities.

Investigators were checking on the epicenter but no disruptions had been reported to the local power grid, oil and gas production or petrochemical industries, Xinhua said.

China's deadliest recent earthquake was magnitude 7.9 that struck Sichuan province, south of Xinjiang, in 2008, killing nearly 90,000 people. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



新疆阿克苏
新闻直播间

沙雅县发生6.1级地震 多地震感强烈

NORTH KOREA

Russian embassy says lockdown lifted in Pyongyang

KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

RUSSIA'S embassy in North Korea says the country has eased stringent epidemic controls in capital Pyongyang that were placed during the past five days to slow the spread of respiratory illnesses.

North Korea has not officially acknowledged a lockdown in Pyongyang or a re-emergence of COVID-19 after leader Kim Jong Un declared a widely disputed victory over the coronavirus in August, but the Russian embassy's Facebook posts have provided rare glimpses into the secretive country's infectious disease controls.

The embassy posted a notice yesterday issued by North Korea's Foreign Ministry informing foreign diplomats that the "special anti-epidemic period" imposed in Pyongyang since Wednesday was lifted as of yesterday.

Last week, the embassy said that North Korean health authorities required diplomatic missions to keep their employees indoors and also measure their temperatures four times a day and report the results to a hospital in Pyongyang. It said the North Korean measures were in response to an increase in "flu and other respiratory diseases," but it didn't mention the spread of COVID-19 or restrictions imposed on regular citizens.

Shortly before that post, NK News, a North Korea-focused

AP PHOTO



North Koreans visit and pay respect to the statues of late leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il on Mansu Hill in Pyongyang, last week

news website, cited a North Korean government notice to report that health officials had imposed a five-day lockdown in Pyongyang in an effort to stem the spread of respiratory illnesses.

Getting a read of North Korea's virus situation is difficult as the country has been tightly shut since early 2020, with officials imposing strict border controls, banning tourists and aid workers and jetting out diplomats while scrambling to shield their poor health care system.

North Korea's admission of a COVID-19 outbreak in May last year came after it spent 2 ½ years rejecting outside offers of vaccines and other help while steadfastly claiming that its superior socialist system was protecting

its population from an "evil" virus that had killed millions elsewhere.

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, said the number of foreign missions that are currently active in North Korea would be 10 or less, a list that includes the missions of China, Vietnam and Cuba along with the Russian embassy.

North Korean state media in recent weeks have stressed vigilance against a possible re-emergence of COVID-19. The official Rodong Sinmun newspaper, which previously described the anti-virus campaign as the "No. 1 priority" in national affairs, called for North Koreans to maintain a "sense of high crisis" yesterday as COVID-19 continues to spread in

neighboring countries.

Some analysts say North Korea could be taking preventive measures as it prepares to stage huge public events in Pyongyang — possibly as early as next week — to glorify Kim's authoritarian leadership and the expansion of his nuclear weapons and missiles program.

Recent commercial satellite images have indicated preparations for a massive military parade in Pyongyang, likely for the 75th founding anniversary of the Korean People's Army that falls on Feb. 8, an occasion Kim could potentially use to showcase his growing collection of nuclear-capable missiles.

Satellite images from Friday indicated continuing parade practi-

ces at a training site in southeast Pyongyang despite the reported lockdown, according to 38 North, a website specializing in North Korea studies. But no activities were seen at Kim Il Sung Square in the central part of the city where the country usually hosts military parades, the report said.

Some outside experts had linked North Korea's 2022 COVID-19 outbreak to a massive military parade in April, where Kim vowed to accelerate the development of nuclear weapons and threatened to use them if provoked.

North Korea maintains it has had no confirmed COVID-19 cases since Aug. 10, when Kim used a major political conference to declare the country has eradicated the coronavirus, just three months after the country acknowledged an omicron outbreak.

While Kim claimed that the country's purported success against the virus would be recognized as a global health miracle, experts believe North Korea has manipulated disclosures on its outbreak to help him maintain absolute control.

From May to August, North Korea reported about 4.8 million "fever cases" across its population of 26 million but only identified a fraction of them as COVID-19. Experts say the country's official death toll of 74 is abnormally small, considering the country's lack of public health tools.

North Korea has dubiously insisted that rival South Korea was responsible for its COVID-19 outbreak, saying that the virus was transported by anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets and other materials flown across the border by balloons launched by South Korean civilian activists. South Korea has dismissed such claims as unscientific and "ridiculous."

MDT/AP

NEW ZEALAND

Auckland to get more dangerous rainfall after flood

A dangerous amount of rain is forecast today for New Zealand's most populous city four days after Auckland had its wettest day on record in a storm that claimed four lives.

A state of emergency was declared on Friday when a volume of rain that would typically fall over an entire Southern Hemisphere summer hit in a single day. At least 5,000 homes and businesses were being assessed for flood and landslide damage and several roads remained closed after more than 15 centimeters of rain fell in three hours.

The state of emergency for Auckland and surrou-

AP PHOTO



Vehicles are stranded by flood water in Auckland, Saturday

nding districts was lifted yesterday morning. But Auckland Mayor Wayne Brown warned that dangerous conditions were forecast to return today.

"My team's current focus

and our big worry is that some Aucklanders might think the worse is behind us, but it isn't," Brown told reporters.

Brown said up to 12 centimeters of rain was fore-

cast in some areas that were already waterlogged.

"That's nothing like Friday night, but the ground is so saturated and the drains are so full that if anything, it could be more dangerous

than even Friday," Brown said.

Brown said the number of residents of Auckland and surrounding areas asking for help due to storm damage would continue to rise.

"It has taken some time for everyone to appreciate just how big and widespread an event this has been and it hasn't finished yet," Brown said.

"The downfall was by far the biggest in our history. It was well beyond even what our emergency people either imagined or planned for," Brown added.

The heavy rain warning for Tuesday covered Au-

ckland and further north on the North Island.

"This rain is expected to cause dangerous river conditions and significant flooding. Slips and floodwaters are likely to disrupt travel, making some roads impassable and possibly isolating communities," a MetService statement said.

Auckland schools will remain closed until next week.

Auckland Airport has resumed operations that were shut down by the storm Friday, but the airport warned in a statement that flight schedules may be disrupted for several days.

MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



An Israeli policeman secures a shooting attack site in east Jerusalem

WEST BANK

Palestinians say Israeli troops kill man as conflict escalates

TIA GOLDENBERG, TEL AVIV

ISRAELI forces killed a Palestinian man in a flashpoint city in the occupied West Bank yesterday, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. The killing marks the latest bloodshed in spiraling violence that comes as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visits the region.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment. The Palestinian Health Ministry said the man, Nassim Abu Fouda, 26, was shot in Hebron, often a center of clashes between the Israeli military and Palestinians.

Israeli-Palestinian violence has spiked in recent days, with an Israeli military raid on a militant stronghold in the West Bank city of Jenin last week killing 10, most of them militants, and a Palestinian shooting attack in an east Jerusalem Jewish settlement that killed seven Israelis.

Unrest has continued in the ensuing days, prompting Israel to approve a series of punitive steps against the Palestinians and ratcheting up tensions just as Blinken begins meetings with lea-

ders later in the day.

The violence comes after months of Israeli arrest raids in the West Bank, which were launched after a wave of Palestinians attacks against Israelis in the spring of 2022 that killed 19 people. Nearly 150 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank and east Jerusalem last year, making it the deadliest year in those territories since 2004, according to figures from the Israeli rights group B'Tselem. Another 10 Israelis were killed later last year, raising the 2022 Israeli death toll to 29.

Israel says that most of those killed have been militants but others — including youths protesting the incursions and other people not involved in confrontations — have also been killed. Israel says the military raids are meant to dismantle militant networks and thwart future attacks while the Palestinians view them as further entrenchment of Israel's open-ended, 55-year occupation.

The bloodshed has spiked this month, during the first weeks of Israel's new far-right government, which has promised to take a tough stance against the Palesti-

nians and ramp up settlement construction. Yesterday's death brings the toll of Palestinians killed this month to 35.

Blinken's visit, which was planned before the flare-up, was expected to be fraught with tension over differences between the Biden administration and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new government, which is made up of settlement supporters. He will now need to contend with an additional challenge during his trip, trying to restore calm even as violence persists.

After the Jenin raid, the Palestinians said they would cancel security coordination with Israel and after attacks against Israelis intensified, Israel said it would beef up Jewish settlements in the West Bank, among other steps.

Israeli Army Radio reported late Sunday that the government was also set to approve a rogue outpost deep inside the West Bank, and speed up approval for other such small settlements.

Israel also arrested 42 Palestinians, some relatives of the Jerusalem attacker, in its

investigation into the attack. And the firebrand National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said he has ordered authorities to demolish illegally built Palestinian homes in east Jerusalem in response to the attack.

Ben-Gvir called it "one step among a series of important steps for governance and for the war on terror and we need more steps in this war."

Palestinian residents of the city's eastern sector say systemic housing discrimination means they are rarely granted building permits, prompting them to build illegally.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war, territories the Palestinians claim for their hoped-for independent state. Some 500,000 Israelis now live in the West Bank in dozens of settlements and outposts, some made up of just a few mobile homes and others sprawling cities with malls and public transit. The Palestinians and much of the international community view settlements as illegal and an obstacle to peace.

MDT/AP

this day in history

1983 BRITISH DRIVERS ORDERED TO BELT UP



Drivers and front seat passengers must wear seatbelts under a new law which came into force at midnight.

The Department of Transport says 30,000 people a year are killed or seriously injured in road accidents. It hopes the compulsory wearing of front seatbelts will save 1,000 lives a year.

Evidence suggests six out of 10 drivers currently ignore advice to belt up in the front.

Police are being urged to take a softly softly approach to start with - but drivers could eventually be fined £50 for not wearing their seatbelts.

The row over making front seatbelts compulsory has been going on for 15 years and there have been 11 previous attempts to make it law.

Critics have accused the government of operating a nanny state and some drivers have complained their personal freedom is being infringed and they find seatbelts uncomfortable.

The government has been urging drivers to check the position of their seatbelts and make the necessary adjustments before today's law came into effect.

Junior Transport Minister Linda Chalker said: "Nobody likes being told to do something when they haven't seen for themselves the sense of it."

"You can remain in control of a vehicle when you don't get knocked out. If you are held in your seat by a belt you have more chance of stopping your vehicle careering into another vehicle containing other people."

She dismissed claims some people would suffer worse injuries through belting up, saying the evidence suggested only a tiny proportion of front seat passengers would suffer worse injuries if they were restrained by seat belts.

There will be some exceptions to the new law. Taxi drivers will be exempt because of the possible threat to their safety from dangerous passengers. Drivers of electric delivery vehicles such as milk floats will also be exempt.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Figures showed 90% of front-seat passengers began routinely wearing seat belts after it became compulsory.

In 1991 it became compulsory for adults to belt up in the back seat. Figures showed an increase from 10% to 40% of backseat passengers wearing seatbelts

Research in 1998 showed 160 lives could be saved a year through belting up in the back - this included 40 drivers or front-seat passengers killed by an unbelted passenger in the back.

A high-profile advertising campaign, launched in July 1998, showed a mother being killed in a car when she was hit from behind by her unbelted child.

Figures for October 2000 showed the wearing of rear seatbelts had increased to 59% of adults and 91% of children.

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You should regain some of your self esteem if you get involved in organizational functions. Don't involve yourself in the emotional problems of those you work with.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Don't prejudge. You may get drawn into a personal situation that will not be to your liking. Get ready to discover love, passion, and the desire to enjoy all that life has to offer.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

It's time to reevaluate your own motives and make changes to yourself first. A passionate encounter with your mate should help alleviate that pent-up energy.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Residential moves look hectic and sudden changes in your life are likely. Your tendency to vacillate will drive everyone crazy. Learn some new skills that will increase your income.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You may find your nights sleepless due to bad dreams. Group endeavors will provide you with entertainment. Travel for business will be advantageous.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

You may find yourself in an uncomfortable situation if you have overloaded your plate unintentionally. Travel and communication will be lucrative for you.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You could have trouble persuading others to accept your ideas and opinions. Use discretion in your dealings and refrain from making verbal promises of any kind.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Travel should be on your agenda. You should take good care of your health; get lots of rest. Hobbies will be good for your emotional well being.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Don't let your mate force you into making a decision that you aren't ready to make. Your concern with older family members and those less fortunate than yourself will only add to your attractiveness.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You will be able to make changes regarding your living arrangements. It might be best to work on your own; if possible, do your job out of your home today.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Don't be taken advantage of by any fast talking salesperson trying to part you from your cash. Those who have been too demanding should be put in their place or out to pasture.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Travel will be fun and entertaining. You can accomplish the most if you travel for business purposes. Don't delay; go to your physician or dentist and get to the bottom of the discomfort.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	11	fine
Changchun	-12	-3	cloudy
Chengdu	3	17	fine
Chongqing	5	17	fine
Fuzhou	4	20	fine
Guangzhou	7	21	cloudy
Guiyang	1	17	fine
Haikou	12	20	cloudy
Hangzhou	0	18	cloudy
Harbin	-21	-7	cloudy
Hefei	-1	18	cloudy
Nanjing	0	17	cloudy
Shanghai	3	15	fine
Taipei	10	19	fine
Wuhan	-2	20	fine
Hong Kong	15	17	cloudy

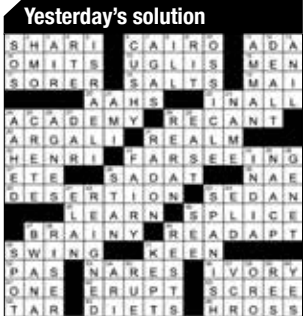
WORLD

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
Moscow	-2	1	snow
Frankfurt	3	4	showers
Paris	6	9	cloudy
London	5	12	cloudy
New York	-2	4	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Condition; 6- Bodybuilder's pride; 9- What you don't know; 14- Supple; 15- Spanish aunt; 16- Specialized language; 17- Ordinance; 19- Salt water; 20- X; 21- Scottish boys; 22- Beneath; 23- Skin marking, often due to injury; 25- Waits; 26- Lactern; 29- Squabbling; 31- Eye membrane; 32- Method of raising money; 36- Blueprint detail, for short; 37- Inclined; 38- Crux; 40- Start for fish, meatballs, or massage; 43- Talks; 45- Bear in the sky; 46- Stiff; 47- Poker Flat chronicler; 50- Breezy; 51- Recipient; 52- Structure for storing grain; 54- Possess, to Burns; 57- Pipe cleaner; 58- Carry; 61- Old French expression meaning "goodbye"; 62- Actor Herbert; 63- Sao ____; 64- Approvals; 65- Lennon's lady; 66- Cookwear;

DOWN 1- Blind part; 2- Bring on board; 3- Env. notation; 4- 21st letter of the Greek alphabet; 5- Snakelike fish; 6- Shed ____; 7- Feathered creature; 8- Puts into words; 9- Self-satisfied person; 10- Made a mistake; 11- Nimble; 12- Taboos; 13- Bouillabaisse, e.g.; 18- South American ruminant; 23- From that time; 24- Stimulus; 25- Mouthpiece of a bridle; 26- IBM products; 27- "My fault!"; 28- Took a blood sample; 29- Omega's opposite; 30- Small drink, young child; 33- Abrasive mineral; 34- Get as a result; 35- Tibetan beasts; 37- Donkey's uncle; 39- Half a fly; 41- Obedient; 42- Ill temper; 43- Descendant; 44- ____ favor; 47- Swarm; 48- "Delta of Venus" author Nin; 49- Actress Taylor; 50- Budget alternative; 51- WWII event; 52- WWII battle site; 53- Tiger's choice; 54- It may be happy; 55- He sang about Alice; 56- School founded by Henry VI; 59- Health haven; 60- Infant fare;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
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WORLD BANK REPORT

MYANMAR ECONOMY TO GROW 3%, DRAGGED BY CONFLICT

ELAINE KURTENBACH,
BANGKOK

MYANMAR'S economy grew 3% last year and will likely achieve the same pace in 2023, but still lags far behind where it stood before the army seized power in early 2021, the World Bank said in a report released yesterday.

The global development agency estimates Myanmar's level of economic activity is still more than 10% below where it stood before the pandemic and the military takeover. On a per capita basis it is even further behind, it says.

If the global economy slows further as expected, exports and investment may weaken after recovering somewhat from the pandemic and the disruptions caused by civil conflict and foreign sanctions after the army ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government.

The reversion to military control after nearly a decade of quasi-civilian rule provoked mass protests that spun into armed revolt,

AP PHOTO



on top of decades-long conflict between the government and armed ethnic groups.

"Economic activity has continued to be disrupted by persistent conflict, which has had devastating impacts on lives and livelihoods, and by electricity shortages," the report said.

Myanmar's economy contracted by about 18% in 2021, after growing at a pace of 6% or more

in the years before. The slow pace of expansion last year, from a very low base, suggests conditions remain weak.

"What's surprising is that the growth hasn't been higher," Kim Alan Edwards, a World Bank senior economist, said in an online briefing. "Growth is nowhere near levels we saw in 2019."

Like other emerging economies, Myanmar has had to con-

tend with a weakening of its currency against the dollar. The kyat's value dropped by about a quarter in June-December last year and has less than half the value it had two years earlier. That makes imports of vital commodities like oil much more expensive in local terms.

Combined with higher prices for many commodities including oil and gas, Myanmar has seen

inflation hit nearly 20% as of July, the report said.

"While the kyat has stabilized in recent months, foreign currency shortages persist, which together with onerous trade restrictions have affected businesses' ability to supply a range of imported products," it said.

The World Bank economists said controls imposed by the central bank to support the kyat and protect foreign exchange reserves have been relaxed, making it easier for exporters to obtain credit or retain their earnings. But many businesses and people are forced to comply with orders to convert foreign currency into kyat at the official rate of 2,100 kyats per dollar, when the market value is about 2,800 kyats.

The report says agriculture and garment manufacturing have recovered and some businesses are finding ways to operate by using informal payments and trade channels. The reopening of Myanmar's trade routes with China also has helped.

But risks have been heightened by security issues, due to the civil conflict, that add to costs and delays for transporting goods.

"There are no easy fixes to Myanmar's situation," Edwards said, noting a lack of transparency that obscures what is going on. "Rules and regulations can change anytime and can favor some and not others." **MDT/AP**

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FOOTBALL

Ryan Reynolds goes through range of emotions in FA Cup match

STEVE DOUGLAS

RYAN Reynolds went from joy to despair, and punch-the-air ecstasy to desolation.

The unlikely new love of his life — Welsh soccer club Wrexham — put the movie star on an emotional roller coaster yesterday [Macau time] in a thrill-a-minute FA Cup match that had an ending not quite in the script.

Wrexham, the fifth-tier team bought by Reynolds and fellow Hollywood actor Rob McElhenney for \$2.5 million in November 2020 on the recommendation of one of their writers, conceded in the fifth minute of stoppage time to draw 3-3 with Sheffield United.

Reynolds and one of his daughters flew in for the fourth-round match at the atmospheric Racecourse Ground in north Wales, about 28 miles south of Liver-



Wrexham co-owner, actor Ryan Reynolds arrives prior to the English FA Cup 4th round Soccer match between Wrexham and Sheffield United

pool, and went through a whole range of emotions as the goals poured in at either end.

He's getting used to it by now. "I'm now so much in love with this sport that I actually hate it," Reynolds, a Canadian-born actor best known for starring in the

"Deadpool" movies, told the BBC before the match.

"Each match I'm pacing around like a caged lion."

With 71 places between the teams in English soccer's pyramid, Wrexham came close to a big upset to add to a long line in

its history. The team beat then-English champion Arsenal in the third round in 1992 and also reached the quarterfinals in the 1996-97 season, when it was in the third tier.

This was the biggest occasion since Reynolds and McElhenney,

an American actor and director who was the creator of TV show "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," took over.

Fans serenaded Reynolds, who was in one of the directors' boxes and was standing for most of the game, with a chant of "There's only one Ryan Reynolds" near the end of the match — when Wrexham was 3-2 ahead and looked like completing a win against an opponent that was down to 10 men at that point.

Reynolds was seen walking across the field and to the locker room after the final whistle to speak to the players.

And he has a sequel to look forward to: Wrexham and Sheffield United will meet in a replay next month. Wrexham beat another second-tier team, Coventry, in the previous round.

The new Hollywood owners are using Wrexham for a behind-the-scenes TV series called "Welcome To Wrexham," which is on Disney+.

Reynolds said he hopes to lead Wrexham into the Premier League.

"The plan is now, and has always been, the Premier League," Reynolds said. "I can't really put a date on that. But if it's theoretically possible to go from fifth division to Premier League, why wouldn't we do it?" **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

**EPIDEMIC DATA DEFY
ALARMIST CLAIMS**

That there has been no surge in novel coronavirus infections and no new variant of the virus has appeared on the mainland before and during the Chinese New Year holiday as of Jan 23, according to the latest China CDC Weekly report, is welcome news.

Published by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention on Wednesday and based on data provided by all provincial-level regions on the Chinese mainland from Dec 9 to Jan 23, the report says that the epidemic peaked in late December, and then continued to decline, with similar trends in all provincial-level regions and in both urban and rural areas.

That's a positive development given the warnings of some that there would be a likely burst of infections in the rural areas as migrant workers returned to their hometowns to celebrate the festival. That prompted action plans to be drawn up to cope with the expected uptick in infections in villages.

Few of these plans, which essentially tilted more medical care resources to villages, have had to be implemented. But it is always better to err on the side of caution, and the process acts as a rehearsal for addressing any public health crisis that might emerge in the countryside in the future.

And although it can perhaps be attributed to probability, it is certainly good to see that no new variant of the virus has appeared, defying the predictions of some who claimed that the largest scale and most intensive population mobility in such a short period over the past three years would be a happy hunting ground for the virus, enabling it to mutate.

After a quick adaptation of the nation to the rise of infections after the latest adjustment to the prevention and control measures, the country is swiftly regaining its equilibrium by putting its socioeconomic activities back on track as evidenced by the robust growth in consumption and traveling over the holiday season.

Those China-bashing politicians in the United States who were prominent in making alarmist claims that China's lifting of its strict virus control measures represented an immediate threat to global public health have been left to swallow their words.

The Spring Festival holiday has demonstrated the effectiveness of the country's virus control policies, which have been repeatedly adjusted over the past three years in light of the actual epidemic situation in the country.

The latest CDC report is of great significance to the world, as it provides meaningful information for the World Health Organization as it continues to assess the pandemic situation. The world health body decided to maintain the global health emergency over the virus on Monday, and the country must still maintain a watchful eye on the epidemic situation to see how it develops.

**DUTCH ELECTRONICS GIANT PHILIPS
TO CUT 6,000 JOBS WORLDWIDE**

THE
BUZZ

Dutch consumer electronics and medical equipment maker Philips said yesterday it is cutting 6,000 jobs worldwide over the next two years as it revealed a net loss of 1.6 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) in 2022, down from a net profit of 3.3 billion euros last year.

The job losses come on top of a reduction of 4,000 staff the company announced in October.

The company, which has its headquarters in Amsterdam, is

reeling from a worldwide recall of sleep apnea machines and economic headwinds including COVID-related issues in China and the war in Ukraine.

CEO Roy Jakobs said 2022 was "a very difficult year for Philips and our stakeholders, and we are taking firm actions to improve our execution and step up performance with urgency."

He said the job cuts will significantly reduce costs and make Philips a "leaner and more focused organization."

AP PHOTO



Army soldiers and police officers clear the way for ambulances rushing toward a bomb explosion site, at the main entry gate of police offices, in Peshawar, yesterday

**SUICIDE BOMBER KILLS 20,
WOUNDS 96 AT MOSQUE
IN NW PAKISTAN**

RIAZ KHAN, PESHAWAR

A suicide bomber struck yesterday inside a mosque in the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar, killing at least 20 people and wounding as many as 96 worshippers, officials said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing, said Saddique Khan, a senior police official in Peshawar who gave the latest casualty tolls, but the Pakistani Taliban have been blamed in similar suicide attacks in the past.

The bomber detonated his suicide vest as some 150 worshippers — including many policemen from nearby police offices — were praying inside. The impact of the explosion collapsed the roof of the mosque, which caved in and injured many, according to Zafar Khan, a local police officer.

A survivor, 38-year-old police officer Meena Gul, said he was inside the mosque when the bomb went off. He said he doesn't know how he survived unhurt. He could hear cries and screams after the bomb exploded, Gul said.

Rescuers scrambled trying to remove mounds of debris from the mosque

grounds and get to worshippers still trapped under the rubble, police said. Khan said several of the wounded were listed in critical condition at a hospital and there were fears the death toll would rise.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif in a statement condemned the bombing, and ordered authorities to ensure the best possible medical treatment to the victims. He also vowed "stern action" against those who were behind the attack.

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan also condemned the bombing, calling it a "terrorist suicide attack" in a Twitter posting. "My prayers & condolences go to victims families," said the ex-premier. "It is imperative we improve our intelligence gathering & properly equip our police forces to combat the growing threat of terrorism."

Peshawar is the capital of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan and has been the scene of frequent militant attacks.

The Pakistani Taliban, are known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP, and are separate group but also a close ally of the Afghan Taliban, who seized power in neighboring Afghanistan in August 2021 as U.S. and NATO troops were in the final stages of their pullout from the country after 20 years of war.

The TTP has waged an insurgency in Pakistan over the past 15 years, fighting for stricter enforcement of Islamic laws in the country, the release of their members who are in government custody and a reduction of the Pakistani military presence in the country's former tribal regions. **MDT/AP**

Syria Drones attacked a convoy of trucks in eastern Syria yesterday [Macau time] shortly after it crossed into the country from Iraq, Syrian opposition activists and a pro-government radio station said. There was no immediate word on casualties. The strike comes amid heightening tension between Iran and its rivals in the region. It was not immediately clear who was behind the attack.

AP PHOTO



Tunisia Voters massively shunned parliamentary elections seen as an important test for their president and their country's troubled democracy, according to preliminary turnout figures Sunday. Independent observers reported scattered violations. Turnout was just 11.3% of Tunisia's 8 million voters, according to preliminary estimates from the national electoral commission.

AP PHOTO



Congo Most Catholics in eastern Congo hope that Pope Francis could bring a message of hope at a time when the M23 rebels are posing their greatest threat here since 2012. Francis long-awaited visit to Congo and South Sudan next week comes after he postponed an earlier trip late last year that originally had included a stop in the volatile east. Insecurity, though, has soared in the months since so the pope is limiting his visit to Congo's capital, Kinshasa.

AP PHOTO



India's Adani Group, run by Asia's richest man, has hit back at a report from U.S.-based short-seller Hindenburg Research, calling it "malicious", "baseless" and full of "selective misinformation." Shares in the conglomerate have suffered massive losses since Hindenburg issued its report alleging fraud and other malfeasance yesterday, shares in some Adani companies recovered some lost ground.

BUS FALLS OFF BRIDGE KILLING 40

A passenger bus crashed into a pillar and fell off a bridge, catching fire and killing 40 people in southern Pakistan yesterday [Macau time], a government official said.

The bus was carrying 44 passengers from Quetta in Balochistan province to Karachi in neighboring Sindh province. The accident was near the town of Bela, in Lasbela district.