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“THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’”

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THE CULTURAL AFFAIRS BUREAU SAID IT MAY MAKE AVENIDA DE ALMEIDA RIBEIRO A PEDESTRIAN-ONLY ZONE MORE OFTEN AFTER ITS POPULARITY

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TOURISM BOON: MACAU READY FOR 40 MILLION TOURISTS A YEAR

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CE: MACAU AND GUANGDONG WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK TO ADVANCE BILATERAL TIES, BOLSTER HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE GBA

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AP PHOTO



South Korea Coast guard vessels and aircraft yesterday were searching for nine fishermen who disappeared after their boat capsized off the country's southwestern coast. The coast guard from the southwestern port city of Mokpo said that three crew members were rescued by a nearby commercial vessel following the accident late Saturday near Daebichi Island in the sea county of Sinan. Survivors said the boat's engine room had quickly filled with water before the 24-ton vessel tipped over, according to the coast guard.

AP PHOTO



Sri Lanka marked its 75th independence anniversary on Saturday as a bankrupt nation, with many citizens angry, anxious and in no mood to celebrate. President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who has started to improve some but not all of the acute shortages, acknowledged the somber state of the nation, saying in a televised speech, "We have reached the point of destruction." "Let's seek to heal this wound though it's difficult and painful. If we endure the suffering and pain for a short period of time, we can get the wound healed completely," Wickremesinghe said, adding that the first six months of the year will be difficult.

AP PHOTO



Ukraine Five people were injured in Russian rocket attacks yesterday in the center of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, officials said. Kharkiv regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said four people were injured when a Russian S-300 missile fell near an apartment block and another was hurt when a missile hit a higher-education building. Local media reports said the building hit was the National Academy for Urban Economy, about 700 meters from the city's central square.

RENATO MARQUES



THE GROUPS ARE BACK

Macau will see its first mainland tour groups today, while Beijing fully resumes travel with SARs

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COVID-19

RAT NO LONGER NEEDED ENTERING HK FROM MACAU

SAME-DAY SARS-CoV-2 rapid antigen tests (RAT) will not be required for travelers from Macau to Hong Kong from today, the Hong Kong government has told a press conference.

Amid the Chinese State Council further lifting pre-travel Covid-19 requirements, the Hong Kong government has also decided to ease more restrictions.

Following this change, the Macau government has also announced people who want to enter mainland China from Macau but who have travelled to Hong Kong in the past seven days before entering mainland China will no longer need a SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test (NAT). This new arrangement also starts today.

Thus, travel between mainland China, Macau and Hong Kong will be test-free from today.

However, "the pre-departure testing requirement for inbound persons from overseas or Taiwan will be maintained at this juncture," the Hong

LYNZY VALLES



Kong government added.

The Hong Kong government will also lift vaccination requirements for all fly-in passengers from today.

Also, travel between Hong Kong and China will no longer be held to a daily limit, authorities announced Friday, as both places seek to drive economic growth.

"From Monday, there will be a full resumption of travel between Hong Kong and the mainland," Hong Kong leader John Lee said Friday at a news briefing.

Lee said quotas for travelers will be scrapped and all boundary checkpoints will reopen next week.

The announcement came a day after Lee unveiled a tourism campaign aimed at attracting travelers to Hong Kong that includes 500,000 free air tickets for tourists to visit the semi-autonomous Chinese city.

China had already eased travel restrictions with Hong Kong on Jan. 8, dropping a mandatory quarantine period required for travelers entering the mainland. However, the

number of travelers entering the mainland from Hong Kong via land checkpoints was limited to 50,000 a day.

Meanwhile, group tours will also resume from today from the mainland to the Special Administrative Regions (SARs). The State Council said border checkpoints between mainland China and the SARs should be open to maximum capacity.

The Macao Government Tourism Office has announced mainland group tours will receive subsidies. **AL**

EVENTS

GOV'T CONSIDERS REGULAR SAN MA LO FOOTPATH

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has said it may make Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro a pedestrian-only zone more often after the popularity of the recent five-day event.

Should residents welcome the event and if it can be run smoothly, the bureau will "actively consider" organizing it more regularly, the president of the IC, Leong Wai Man, told the press on the sidelines of this weekend's event.

The IC president added that evaluations will be held, and emphasized the importance of receiving comments from other bureaus such as the Transport Bureau (DSAT) and the Public Security Police Force (PSP).

Leong said this year's five-day event cost MOP2.6 million, which was primarily spent on installations and staffing costs.

The IC president said she was satisfied with the outcome of the first three days of the Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro event, which "surpassed expectations."

The last two days of the event, which fell on the First Full Moon Festival – also known as Chinese Valentine's Day – saw entities promoting traditional Chinese medicine and showcasing floral heart-shaped backdrops, as well as the IC extending the pawnshop museum's hours to increase the event's attractiveness, the IC president said.

However, unlike the event's first three days that coincided with the Lunar New Year public holidays, this past weekend did not. According to local media Macao Daily News, roads and streets near Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, such as Avenida de Praia Grande, Rua do Visconde Paco de Arcos and Rua das Lorchas, saw significant traffic congestion this weekend as cars tried to enter or leave the area.

One of the reasons for this is that many bus routes passing along Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro were detoured to Sai Van, and resumed their original routes through the Inner Harbour zone. Police have reportedly deployed more officers to maintain traffic order. **AL**



EMPLOYMENT

Gov't is negotiating with businesses possibility of rehiring TNR

RENATO MARQUES

THE government met with representatives from different sectors and associations last week to discuss how to increase workers in various sectors by enabling the hiring of non-resident workers (TNR).

The meeting was revealed by the Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, during the press conference about the resumption of mainland tour groups.



Responding to media, Lei said the government is currently examining the shortage of workers to understand which job vacancies can be easily filled with

the recruitment of TNR.

He said that over the past three years, 40,000 TNR have left Macau either because of the lack of jobs or because of the government's de-

cision not to renew the workers' permits (blue cards) to prioritize local residents' access to jobs during times in which the unemployment rate was high.

"We will be pragmatic; we will analyze and we will certainly support the local SMEs [small and medium enterprises]," Lei remarked.

Concurrently, the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) has announced that, together with the six gaming concessionaires, it will organize

recruitment activities this month with the aim of offering 1,166 jobs in the integrated resorts to Macau residents.

The jobs include receptionist, waiter, chef, public attendant, driver and lifeguard roles as well as several managerial positions.

The six sessions will be conducted individually and candidates can register online to participate in these sessions, which started yesterday and will be held until Feb. 26.

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Gov't: Macau is now better prepared for 40m tourists/year goal

RENATO MARQUES

THE local government believes Macau is now better prepared to receive more tourists and to reach the desired goal of 40 million tourists annually, officials said on Friday during a press conference about the resumption of mainland group travel to Macau.

"I believe that the preparation work over the last three years has improved transportation and also our services in the community. The most essential thing is we also want to improve job opportunities so that all residents of Macau can live and work here in Macau. We also want to improve the quality of life of residents and increase tourist numbers," the Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong said.

Responding to media on the same topic, the director of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, said the figure of 40 million visitors is a pre-pandemic goal that remains unchanged, but it will be achieved gradually.

"The number of visitors is continuously increasing and from the gaming concessions tender between the six concessionaires, we came to know of several projects [that the new concessionaires have designed to attract tourists]. So together, we can come to the conclusion that the capacity to receive more tourists will be increased gradually," Senna Fer-



nandes said, adding, "soon we will develop more projects to attract tourists but of course, we expect quality visitors and tourists."

To attract quality visitors, the new subsidy scheme for travel agencies will exclude agencies that promote so-called "free trips," to avoid problems encountered in the past where visitors who joined these trips without paying any fees upfront were required to compensate the agencies by purchasing products or services later in designated shops.

Often this type of arrangement generated conflict between the tourists and the tour guides over the amount of shopping and expenditure required.

THAILAND: FIRST TARGET OF SOUTHEAST-ASIAN MARKETS

At the same press conference, the MGTO director also revealed that the series of campaign programs from the local

tourism office dedicated to attracting visitors from international markets will start in Thailand.

"In what concerns the international markets, we will start with Southeast-Asian markets.

Thailand was one of the first that we considered, as it has a direct flight to Macau and from mid this month, our [MGTO] delegation in Thailand also resumes operations," Senna Fernandes said, adding, "We are still determining the right locations and the roadshow, but I can say that this will be the one that will happen very soon."

The MGTO is gearing up for physical promotional activities in international markets, including roadshows, presentation seminars, and familiarization trips in preparation for the return of international tourism.

Senna Fernandes also said that, for the time being, the MGTO will follow a strategy based on the Southeast Asian countries that have direct flights to Macau to promote an airfare-based subsidy to attract visitors from those countries.

Currently, Macau has direct international flight routes 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 February 14.

It is expected these countries will be potential targets of a similar promotion campaign soon.

CTRIP: SEARCHES FOR HK, MACAU DESTINATIONS UPBEAT AGAIN

FOLLOWING Beijing's announcement of the full resumption of travel between China and the SARs, Ctrip data has shown an immediate three-fold spike in searches for destinations in Hong Kong and Macau, according to an AASTocks Financial News report. Browsing for package tours in Hong Kong and Macau also shot up 180%. By the end of December, China's tourism portal had

recorded 10 times more searches year-on-year after Covid measures were loosened, with Macau topping the list of intended destinations. The city has been experiencing a tourism boom, particularly during the Lunar New Year holiday, with nearly half a million tourists swarming the city during the week-long holiday, following the loosening of border restrictions in early January.

TOURISM

First tour groups from mainland arrive today

RENATO MARQUES

FOLLOWING the resumption of group tourism visas approved in November last year, the first mainland tour groups will arrive in Macau today.

These will be the first mainland tour groups to enter Macau since the first outbreak of the pandemic.

The resumption of the tour groups comes as central authorities announced the full reinstatement of mutual visits between the mainland, Hong Kong and Macau as well as further easing the need for nucleic acid and rapid antigen tests



for border crossings.

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) said in a press conference last Friday that the resumption of this form of travel tourism

is expected to be a great advantage for the revival of tourism in Macau.

At the same time, the MGTO announced the "My Treat for You, Joyful Macao

Tour" Subsidy Scheme, dedicated to the mainland tourist market.

A total of 88 travel agencies have been selected for participation in the scheme.

Since last Friday, agencies were able to register and input information for their tour groups in the system.

Under the system, each participant from a tour group originating in the Guangdong province will be granted a subsidy of 150 patacas for a one-night stay and 300 patacas for staying two or more nights in Macau.

If the tour group (which needs at least 10 people) originates outside the Guangdong province, the subsidy increases to 250 patacas for one night and 400 patacas for two or more nights.

The subsidy aims to at-

tract visitors, especially those from other regions in China, to visit Macau and stay for a longer period to revive different sectors of the economy. The government is also expecting to give away up to 120,000 free air-tickets later this year.

The industry is expecting mainland tour groups will deliver an additional daily average of around 10,000 visitors, according to a member of the Macau Travel Industry Council, Andy Wu, who was speaking to the Chinese channel of TDM Radio.

Wu also said several Guangdong tour groups have already scheduled trips to Macau as early as this week.

DSAL, FAOM TO JOINTLY HOST TRAINING WORKSHOPS FOR JOB SEEKERS

This month, the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and the Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FOAM) will co-organize 12 workshops to "improve the abilities of local job seekers," the bureau has announced. Representatives from local enterprises will lead the workshops. Meanwhile, as the city sees a tourist influx and will see the introduction of new facilities at hotels and resorts, the bureau will "focus on job-matching in all directions" in February, as well as offering job seekers support. In January, local casino operators offered 500 vacancies in six separate job-matching sessions, but no successful matching data has been released.

DRUG BUREAU RECALLS ANTIDEPRESSANT DUE TO IMPURITIES

The Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau (ISAF) has announced the recall of a Canadian-made antidepressant called Apo-Amitriptyline. The manufacturer, Apotex Inc., requested the recall. The affected medicine comes in bottles with 1000 tablets of 10mg each. The bureau has called for residents with product from batch number PY1904 to return it to the bureau. The recall comes as the manufacturer discovered impurities – N-Nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA) – at higher than expected levels in the medicine. The bureau is in close contact with local hospitals about the recall order.

TOP SECRETARY, EXCO MEMBERS VISIT SAN MA LO, RESORT NON-GAMBLING FACILITIES

The Secretary for Administration and Justice and spokesperson of the Executive Council (ExCo), André Cheong, along with several Exco members, yesterday visited the San Ma Lo pedestrian event and non-gambling facilities at six local resorts. The delegation visited MGM Cotai, Galaxy Macau, The Venetian Macao, City of Dreams, Wynn Palace and the Grand Lisboa Palace. The visit was to inspect the effectiveness of the San Ma Lo event and get in touch with local businesses, as well as familiarize the officials with the non-gambling facilities and their operations.



ART

SECOND SEAT AT AFA STAGES FM-SPONSORED EXHIBITION AT LOCAL UNESCO CENTRE

ANTHONY LAM

LOCAL artist Chiang Wai Lan has opened her fourth solo exhibition at the UNESCO Centre of Macao, exhibiting 45 pieces or sets of her paintings.

The exhibition will run until February 13.

Chiang is the 16th artist to exhibit under the Macao Foundation's (FM) Macao Young Artist Promotion Project.

She hopes to share society's delicate emotional stories with the public through her exhibited works that resemble fairy tales. In her speech, she said "fairy tales", as a tangible image of happiness, imply a variety of intertwined memories, hopes and desires.

In recent years, she has held two different solo exhibitions in Macau and South Korea with the titles "Once Upon A Time" and "Fairy Tale Specimen" respectively. Through the creation of concrete narratives, she conveys memories and happiness via fairy tales, placing them in binary opposition but separated by a line, or displaying them in a showroom set to be admired.

This exhibition, entitled "Fairy Tell", continues this formational direction. It uses artistic creations to depict forgotten moments and the purity and beauty in life. It explores how these stories were conceived at a certain time, conveying them via a visual narrative contrasting illusion and reality,

imagination and memory, as well as sweetness and bitterness.

There are many artistic platforms for exhibitions in Macau, and there is still room for expansion in the commercial art market in Macau, Chiang said on the sidelines of the exhibition's opening ceremony.

She believes the FM's Young Artist Promotion Project will provide new avenues for discovery and promotion and resources for artists. By collecting the works of young artists, it will further promote the creative power and presence of young artists in Macau to the Greater Bay Area and the world. In this way, she thinks the project will help foster the development of the arts in Macau.

There are five themes in this exhibition, namely "Stories of...", "Seek and Find", "Home: Scenic Ballad", "Seeing Flowers" and "Rhythmic Movements". The first theme is both a recollection of Chiang's previously explored themes and the preamble for new themes she sees as new chapters. The rest, on the other hand, are independent yet interconnected chapters, which exist together as an indivisible whole in this exhibition.

According to the artist, in this fourth solo exhibition, Chiang re-examines and digests past creations, turning them into fodder for the future of her life.

Those emotional stories she considers the most subtle and delicate are presented in this exhibition, perceived as fairy tales.

At the opening of the exhibition, the FM explained the National Arts Fund supports the Macao Young Artist Promotion Project, and projects applying for subsidies will be vetted alongside the national fund. The FM said it would help ensure high standards and quality.

GBA

Macau, Guangdong to bolster bilateral ties

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU and Guangdong will continue to seek to advance bilateral ties, and to bolster high-quality development in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The remarks were made Friday during a meeting in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, between the Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng, the Secretary of the Guangdong Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of Chi-



na (CPC), Huang Kunming, and the Governor of Guangdong Province, Wang Weizhong.

Ho on Friday led an SAR government delegation to Guangzhou.

In the meeting, the

Chief Executive called for a closer partnership between Macau and Guangdong, in a bid to promote the joint development of the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. There should also be close cooperation

between Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau, "in order to push forward the development of the Greater Bay Area as part of the country's overall development," he said.

Speaking during the

meeting, Secretary Huang said that, under the leadership of the Central Government, Guangdong and Macau had, in recent years, achieved closer ties and improved cooperation, particularly in relation to epidemic prevention and control, infrastructure construction, science and technology, economy and trade, social affairs, and issues concerning people's livelihood. Huang noted that the development of the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin had made a "strong start, achieving good momentum."

GEG Supports to Build a Sustainable Future

Understanding environmental protection is of paramount importance for a sustainable future. Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) is committed to supporting the country and Macau in achieving the dual carbon goals. Throughout the years, GEG has incorporated a wide array of energy conservation, emissions reduction and waste management initiatives into its daily operations, and promoted environmental awareness to its team members and the public, with aims of minimizing its carbon footprint and creating a green future for next generations.

GREEN ACHIEVEMENTS

GEG's unwavering efforts to sustainability has received wide recognition from professional authorities. In addition to obtaining the ISO 14001 Environmental Management System and the ISO 50001 Energy Management System certifications, in 2022, GEG became the integrated resort operator to garner the most Earth-Check certifications in Macau, including a Silver Certification for Environmental Design for the Galaxy International Convention Center, Silver Certifications for Galaxy Hotel™ and Hotel Okura Macau, and Gold Certifications for Banyan Tree Macau since 2019.



Additionally, Phase II of Galaxy Macau™ also received a GBA Low Carbon Buildings Top 100 Award from the GBA Carbon Neutrality Association in 2022, making it one of the 100 representative low carbon buildings in the Greater Bay Area, while Broadway Macau™ received an Excellence Award in Hotel Group B and a Continuous Energy Saving Award in Hotel Group in the Macau Energy Saving Activity 2022. Over the years, GEG's properties and hotel brands have also received international



accolades and certifications, including the Gold Certification for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) from the United States Green Building Council, the Green Key Eco-label, and awards such as the Macau Green Hotel Award and Macau Energy Saving Activity organized by the Macau SAR Government and Macau Electricity Company, Ltd. respectively.

ENHANCE ECO-AWARENESS

As an environmentally responsible corporation, GEG strives to raise the environmental awareness of the public and support Macau's development as a livable green city and top tourism destination. Recently, GEG participated in the Macau International Environmental Co-operation Forum & Exhibition (MIECF) and showcased its long-standing contribution to Macau's sustainable development. Made of recycled decorations, plants

and LED lights, GEG's booth received a Green Booth award in recognition of its unique design and energy and waste reduction messaging.



With the objective of encouraging team members to adopt a green lifestyle, GEG held its 7th annual Energy and Environmental Month comprising of a series of engaging team member activities – the "Green Quiz", "Creative Sustainable Lifestyle Idea Competition", "Recycling Facility Tours" and "Winter Clothing Do-



nation", GEG also arranged its Volunteer Team members and their children for visits to various green facilities, such as the Recycle FUN station that is organized by the Macao Environmental Protection Bureau and operated by Green Future Macau in Mong Ha, to help participants better understand the significance of waste reduction and recycling. Moreover, GEG also donated all plastic bag proceeds to Green Future Macau in support of their green services for the third consecutive years.

PIONEERING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

GEG has always been an industry pioneer in promoting environmental sustainability through a multi-pronged approach. Apart from being Macau's first integrated resort operator to partner with Coca-Cola on the circular recycling of all of GEG and its properties' branded water bottles, GEG also protects biodiversity and the habitat by maintaining the largest greenery landscape among all of the integrated resort properties in Macau. Covering a total area of 55,000m², the lush landscape at Galaxy Macau has more than 2,000 trees and over 1.5 million



plants and seasonal flowers helping to remove more than 500 tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere each year. Furthermore, integrating environmental considerations into its investment decisions, GEG is the only integrated resort operator that has subscribed to green bonds. In 2021, GEG invested RMB100 million in Asia's first biodiversity-themed green bond issued by Bank of China Limited, Macau Branch, and USD10 million in a corporate green bond issued by Mingyang Smart Energy Group Limited to fund the construction of green energy projects.



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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

ZEKE MILLER, MICHAEL BALSAMO, COLLEEN LONG, AAMER MADHANI & LOLITA C. BALDOR, WASHINGTON

US DOWNS CHINESE BALLOON, DRAWING A THREAT FROM CHINA

U.S. military yesterday (Macau time) shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon off the Carolina coast after it traversed sensitive military sites across North America.

China insisted the flyover was an accident involving a civilian aircraft and threatened repercussions.

President Joe Biden issued the order but had wanted the balloon downed even earlier, on Wednesday. He was advised that the best time for the operation would be when it was over water, U.S. officials said. Military officials determined that bringing it down over land from an altitude of 60,000 feet would pose an undue risk to people on the ground.

China responded that it reserved the right to "take further actions" and criticized the U.S. for "an obvious overreaction and a serious violation of international practice."

In its statement yesterday, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that "China will resolutely uphold the relevant company's legitimate rights and interests, and at the same time reserving the right to take further actions in response." China's Ministry of Defense echoed the statement later in the day, saying it "reserves the right to take necessary measures to deal with similar situations."

The presence of the balloon in the skies above the U.S. this week dealt a severe blow to already strained U.S.-Chinese relations that have been in a downward spiral for years. It prompted Secretary of State Antony Blinken to abruptly cancel a high-stakes Beijing trip aimed at easing tensions.

"They successfully took it down and I want to compliment our aviators who did it," Biden said after getting off Air Force One en route to Camp David.

AP PHOTO



The giant white orb was spotted Saturday morning over the Carolinas as it approached the Atlantic coast. About 2:39 p.m. EST, an F-22 fighter jet fired a missile at the balloon, puncturing it while it was about 6 nautical miles off the coast near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, senior defense officials said.

The spectacle had Americans looking to the skies all week, wondering whether the mysterious balloon had floated over them.

On Saturday, Ashlyn Preaux, 33, went out to get her mail in Forestbrook, South Carolina, and noticed her neighbors looking up — and there it was, the balloon in the cloudless blue sky. Then she saw fighter jets circling and the balloon get hit.

"I did not anticipate waking up to be in a 'Top Gun' movie today," she said.

The debris landed in 47 feet of water, shallower than officials had expected, and it spread out over roughly seven miles and the recovery operation included several

ships. The officials estimated the recovery efforts would be completed in a short time, not weeks. A salvage vessel was en route.

U.S. defense and military officials said Saturday that the balloon entered the U.S. air defense zone north of the Aleutian Islands on Jan. 28 and moved largely over land across Alaska and then into Canadian airspace in the Northwest Territories on Monday. It crossed back into U.S. territory over northern Idaho on Tuesday, the day the White House said Biden was first briefed on it.

The balloon was spotted Wednesday over Montana, home to Malmstrom Air Force Base, which has fields of nuclear missile silos.

The Americans were able to collect intelligence on the balloon as it flew over the U.S., giving them a number of days to analyze it and learn how it moved and what it was capable of surveilling, according to two senior defense officials said. The officials briefed reporters on

condition of anonymity.

The officials said the U.S. military was constantly assessing the threat, and concluded that the technology on the balloon didn't give the Chinese significant intelligence beyond what it could already obtain from satellites, though the U.S. took steps to mitigate what information it could gather as it moved along.

Republicans were critical of Biden's response.

"Allowing a spy balloon from the Communist Party of China to travel across the entire continental United States before contesting its presence is a disastrous projection of weakness by the White House," said Mississippi Sen. Roger Wicker, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., tweeted: "Now that this embarrassing episode is over, we need answers from the Biden Administration on the decision-making process. Communist China was allowed to violate American sovereignty uni-

mpeded for days. We must be better prepared for future provocations and incursions by the CCP."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., was more positive: "Thank you to the men and women of the United States military who were responsible for completing the mission to shoot down the Chinese surveillance balloon. The Biden Administration did the right thing in bringing it down."

China has claimed that the balloon was merely a weather research "airship" that had been blown off course. The Pentagon rejected that out of hand — as well as China's contention that it was not being used for surveillance and had only limited navigational ability.

The Chinese government on Saturday sought to play down the cancellation of Blinken's trip. "In actuality, the U.S. and China have never announced any visit, the U.S. making any such announcement is their own business, and we respect that," China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

The Pentagon also acknowledged reports of a second balloon flying over Latin America. "We now assess it is another Chinese surveillance balloon," Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary, said in a statement. Officials said the balloons are part of a fleet that China uses for surveillance, and they can be maneuvered remotely through small motors and propellers. One official said they carry equipment in the pod under the balloon that is not usually associated with standard meteorological activities or civilian research.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not immediately respond to a question about the second balloon. **MDT/AP**

China confirms offer to Sri Lanka of debt moratorium

CHINA'S government on Friday confirmed it is offering Sri Lanka a two-year moratorium on loan repayments as the Indian Ocean island nation struggles to restructure \$51 billion in foreign debt that pushed it into a financial crisis.

China lent to Sri Lanka as part of Beijing's multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative to increase trade by building ports and other infrastructure across Asia and Africa. The International Monetary Fund offered a \$2.9 billion

AP PHOTO



emergency loan but wants other creditors to cut debts, which Beijing had resisted, possibly for fear other

borrowers would want the same relief.

China presented a plan to "provide an extension

on debt service due in 2022 and 2023," said a foreign ministry spokeswoman, Mao Ning. "During that pe-

riod, Sri Lanka would not have to pay the principal and interest due on bank loans."

China is Sri Lanka's third-biggest creditor after Japan and the Asian Development Bank, accounting for about 10% of its debt. But its lack of agreement blocked a final settlement.

Sri Lanka used Chinese loans to build an airport and other projects that failed to pay for themselves.

India, which China sees as a strategic rival, announced last month it gave the IMF assurances to facilita-

te a bailout plan. India has given Sri Lanka \$4.4 billion in emergency credit.

Sri Lanka ran out of foreign currency last April, leading to food shortages, power cuts and protests that forced a prime minister to resign and a president to flee the country. Debt repayment to China, Japan and other foreign lenders was suspended.

The island's government is cutting spending and says it will cut the size of its 200,000-member military by almost half by 2030. **MDT/AP**

ASEAN vows to conclude pact with China on disputed territory

NINIEK KARMINI, JAKARTA

SOUTHEAST Asian foreign ministers vowed to finalize negotiations with China over a proposed pact aimed at preventing conflicts in the disputed South China Sea in their annual retreat on Saturday in Indonesia's capital.

In the final session of their two-day meeting, the ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations also agreed to unite in their approach to implement a five-step agreement made in 2021 between ASEAN leaders and Myanmar's military leader, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, that seeks to end that country's worsening crisis.

China and the ASEAN member states, which include four rival claimants to territories in the South China Sea, have been holding sporadic talks for years on a "code of conduct," a set of regional norms and rules aimed at preventing a clash the disputed waters.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said that Indonesia, this year's ASEAN chair, is ready to host more rounds of negotiations over the proposed pact, the first of which will be held in March. She said ASEAN members are committed to concluding the discussions "as soon as possible."

"Members are also committed to promote implementation of a declaration of conduct," Marsudi added.



Marsudi did not elaborate, but in the past, China has accused Washington of meddling in what it calls an Asian dispute. The U.S. has deployed ships and jets to patrol the waters to promote freedom of navigation and overflight. It has often raised alarm over China's assertive actions, including its construction of islands where it has placed weapons including surface-to-air missiles.

Sidharto Suryodipuro, head of ASEAN Cooperation at Indonesia's Foreign Ministry, told reporters in Jakarta that ASEAN member states will push negotiations this year and explore new approaches.

"All of us agreed that it has to be an effective implementable in accordance with international law, and the code of conduct must fulfill this criteria," Suryodipuro said,

adding that Indonesia is going to involve more countries besides China in the negotiation process.

"It's an exploratory stage. We don't know what shape it will take, but as you know negotiation is a key process that is something we intend to intensify," he said.

China has come under criticism for its militarization of the strategic waterway but says it has the right to build on its territories and defend them at all costs.

Vietnam, one of the four ASEAN claimant states, has been vocal in expressing concerns over China's transformation of seven disputed reefs into man-made islands, including three with runways, which now resemble small cities armed with weapons systems.

ASEAN members Cambodia and Laos, both Chinese allies,

have opposed the use of strong language against Beijing in the disputes.

Indonesia is not among the governments challenging China's claim to virtually the entire South China Sea but expressed opposition after China claimed part of Indonesia's exclusive economic zone in the northern region of the Natuna Islands.

The edge of the exclusive economic zone overlaps with Beijing's unilaterally declared "nine-dash line" demarcating its claims in the South China Sea.

On the Myanmar issue, Marsudi told a news conference Saturday that ASEAN foreign ministers reiterated the urgent need for Myanmar's military junta to implement the five-point consensus, saying it is "very important for ASEAN."

On Friday, the ministers urged Myanmar's military rulers to reduce violence and allow unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to pave the way for a national dialogue aimed at ending the crisis.

Myanmar is also an ASEAN member, but its foreign minister was excluded from Friday's annual ministers' retreat because of his country's failure to implement the five-step consensus.

Marsudi said the ministers agreed that an inclusive national dialogue "is key to finding a peaceful resolution to the situation in Myanmar," and that reducing violence and providing humanitarian assistance are "paramount for building trust and confidence."

She said the lack of progress in Myanmar "tests our credibility" as a group, and that ASEAN's efforts toward peace would be coordinated with those of other countries and the United Nations.

Myanmar's military leader promised in the five-point agreement to allow a special ASEAN envoy to meet with jailed ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi and others to foster a dialogue aimed at easing the crisis, set off by the military's seizure of power two years ago.

But Myanmar refused to let an ASEAN envoy meet with Suu Kyi last year, resulting in Min Aung Hlaing's exclusion from an ASEAN summit last November.

"The public should expect that Indonesia could provide fresh air for finding a political solution to the worsening conflict in Myanmar," said Dinna Prapto Raharja, an international relations analyst from Synergy Policies, an independent think tank.

"The fragmentation of power in Myanmar is worse and so managing the violence has become more complex," she said. **MDT/AP**

CRIME

Indian police nab over 2,000 men for illegal child marriages

WASBIR HUSSAIN,
GUWAHATI

INDIAN police have arrested more than 2,000 men in a crackdown on illegal child marriages involving girls under the age of 18 in a northeastern state, officials said Saturday.

Those arrested this week included more than 50 Hindu priests and Muslim clerics for allegedly performing marriages for underage girls in Assam, state police chief Gyanendra

Pratap Singh said.

"We have so far arrested 2,169 men based on 4,074 registered police cases involving a total of about 8,000 men," said Singh.

Many cases of child marriage in Assam, a state of 35 million people, go unreported.

Only 155 cases of child marriages in the state were registered in 2021, and 138 in 2020, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

In India, the legal marriageable age is 21 for men

and 18 for women. Poverty, lack of education, and social norms and practices, particularly in rural areas, are considered reasons for child marriages across the country.

Television images on Friday showed some young women with infants in their arms, crying and protesting the sudden arrests of their husbands.

"We were struggling and somehow making ends meet. But we were happy together. Who will provide for our livelihood now that my husband has

been arrested?" asked a young woman.

Singh said child marriages were one reason for the state's high infant mortality and maternal mortality rates.

"I have asked the Assam police to act with a spirit of zero tolerance against the unpardonable and heinous crime on women," Himanta Biswa Sarma, the state's top elected official, tweeted.

India's Parliament is considering legislation to raise the age for marriage for women to 21 from



Sonali Begum, 17, displays a photo of her husband Siddique Ali, 23, who was picked up by the police, at her rented house in Guwahati, India, Saturday, Feb. 4

18, to bring it in line with men and promote gender equality.

India's Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani told Parliament on Friday that

the move would enable girls to complete their education and achieve economic independence apart from achieving physical and psychological maturity. **MDT/AP**

OBITUARY

Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan martial ruler in 9/11 wars, dies

JON GAMBRELL & MUNIR AHMED, ISLAMABAD

GEN. Pervez Musharraf, who seized power in a bloodless coup and later led a reluctant Pakistan into aiding the U.S. war in Afghanistan against the Taliban, has died, officials said yesterday. He was 79.

Musharraf, a former special forces commando, became president through the last of a string of military coups that roiled Pakistan since its founding amid the bloody 1947 partition of India. He ruled the nuclear-armed state after his 1999 coup through tensions with India, an atomic proliferation scandal and an Islamic extremist insurgency. He stepped down in 2008 while facing possible impeachment.

Later in life, Musharraf lived in self-imposed exile in Dubai to avoid criminal charges, despite attempting a political comeback in 2012. But it wasn't to be as his poor health plagued his last years. He maintained a soldier's fatalism after avoiding a violent death that always seemed to be stalking him as Islamic militants twice targeted him for assassination.

"I have confronted death and defied it several times in the past because destiny and fate have always smiled on me," Musharraf once wrote. "I only pray that I have more than the proverbial nine lives of a cat."

Musharraf's family announced in June 2022 that he had been hospitalized for weeks in Dubai while suffering from amyloidosis, an incurable condition that sees proteins build up in the body's organs. They later said he also needed access to the drug daratumumab, which is used to treat multiple myeloma. That bone marrow cancer can cause amyloidosis.

Shazia Siraj, a spokeswoman for the Pakistani Consulate in Dubai, confirmed his death and said diplomats were providing support to his family.

The Pakistani military also offered its condolences as did Pakistani Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif,



the younger brother of the prime minister Musharraf overthrew in 1999.

"May God give his family the courage to bear this loss," Sharif said.

Pakistan, a nation nearly twice the size of California along the Arabian Sea, is now home to 220 million people. But it would be its border with Afghanistan that would soon draw the U.S.'s attention and dominate Musharraf's life a little under two years after he seized power.

Al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden launched the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks from Afghanistan, sheltered by the country's Taliban rulers. Musharraf knew what would come next.

"America was sure to react violently, like a wounded bear," he wrote in his autobiography. "If the perpetrator turned out to be al-Qaida, then that wounded bear would come charging straight toward us."

By Sept. 12, then-U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell told Musharraf that Pakistan would either be "with us or against us." Musharraf said another American official threatened to bomb Pakistan "back into the Stone Age" if it chose the latter.

Musharraf chose the former. A month later, he stood by then-President George W. Bush at the Waldorf Astoria in New York to declare Pakistan's unwavering support to fight with the United States against "terrorism in all its forms wherever it exists."

Pakistan became a crucial transit point for NATO supplies headed to landlocked Afghanistan. That was the case even though Pakistan's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence agency had backed the Taliban after it swept into power in Afgha-

nistan in 1994. Prior to that, the CIA and others funneled money and arms through the ISI to Islamic fighters battling the 1980s Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

The U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan saw Taliban fighters flee over the border back into Pakistan, including bin Laden, whom the U.S. would kill in 2011 at a compound in Abbottabad. They regrouped and the offshoot Pakistani Taliban emerged, beginning a yearslong insurgency in the mountainous border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The CIA began flying armed Predator drones from Pakistan with Musharraf's blessing, using an airstrip built by the founding president of the United Arab Emirates for falconing in Pakistan's Balochistan province. The program helped beat back the militants but saw over 400 strikes in Pakistan alone kill at least 2,366 people — including 245 civilians, according to the Washington-based New America Foundation think tank.

Though Pakistan under Musharraf launched these operations, the militants still thrived as billions of American dollars flowed into the nation. That led to suspicion that still plagues the U.S. relationship with Pakistan.

"After 9/11, then President Musharraf made a strategic shift to abandon the Taliban and support the U.S. in the war on terror, but neither side believes the other has lived up to expectations flowing from that decision," a 2009 U.S. cable from then-Ambassador Anne Patterson published by WikiLeaks said, describing what had become the

diplomatic equivalent of a loveless marriage.

"The relationship we grudgingly admit — Pakistan knows the U.S. cannot afford to walk away; the U.S. knows Pakistan cannot survive without our support."

But it would be Musharraf's life on the line. Militants tried to assassinate him twice in 2003 by targeting his convoy, first with a bomb planted on a bridge and then with car bombs. That second attack saw Musharraf's vehicle lifted into the air by the blast before touching the ground again. It raced to safety on just its rims, Musharraf pulling a Glock pistol in case he needed to fight his way out.

It wasn't until his wife, Sehba, saw the car covered in gore that the scale of the attack dawned on him.

"She is always calm in the face of danger," he recounted. But then, "she was screaming uncontrollably, hysterically."

Born Aug. 11, 1943, in New Delhi, India, Musharraf was the middle son of a diplomat. His family joined millions of other Muslims in fleeing westward when predominantly Hindu India and Islamic Pakistan split during independence from Britain in 1947. The partition saw hundreds of thousands of people killed in riots and fighting.

Musharraf entered the Pakistani army at age 18 and made his career there as Islamabad fought three wars against India. He'd launch his own attempt at capturing territory in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir in 1999 just before seizing power from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. **MDT/AP**

this day in history**1952 KING GEORGE VI DIES IN HIS SLEEP**

His Majesty, King George VI, has died peacefully in his sleep at Sandringham House.

The official announcement from Sandringham, given at 1045 GMT, said the King retired in his usual health, but passed away in his sleep and was found dead in bed at 0730 GMT by a servant.

He was 56, and was known to have been suffering from a worsening lung condition.

Princess Elizabeth, who is at the Royal hunting lodge in Kenya, immediately becomes Queen at the age of 25.

She has been informed of her father's death, and is preparing to return to London, but a thunderstorm has delayed the departure of her plane.

She is expected back tomorrow afternoon, when she will take the Royal Oath which will seal her accession to the throne.

The cabinet met this morning as soon as the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was informed of the news, to discuss the constitutional implications.

The House of Commons has also been suspended as a mark of respect.

Before MPs adjourned, Prime Minister Winston Churchill offered their condolences, saying, "We cannot at this moment do more than record the spontaneous expression of grief."

He is due to make a broadcast to the nation at 2100 GMT tomorrow.

As the news of the King's death spread, all cinemas and theatres closed, and BBC programmes were cancelled except for news bulletins. Flags in every town were at half-mast, and sports fixtures were cancelled.

A crowd began to gather outside Buckingham Palace during the afternoon, as diplomats from around the world arrived in official cars to write their condolences in the visitors' book.

By 2100 GMT the police had to press the growing number of mourners back from the gates and on to the pavement. Despite the bitter cold and rain, the silent, weeping crowd stayed until long after it grew dark.

The news was greeted with shock and grief throughout the world. In the United States, President Truman, in a formal statement from the White House, paid tribute to the King.

He said, "He shared to the end of his reign all the hardships and austerities which evil days imposed on the brave British people."

"In return, he received from the people of the whole Commonwealth a love and devotion which went beyond the usual relationship of a King and his subjects."

Both the US Senate and the House of Representatives voted to adjourn out of regard for the dead King.

The body of King George is to lie in state in Westminster Hall from next Monday, 11 February, until the funeral.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The King had suffered a coronary thrombosis - a fatal blood clot to the heart - soon after falling asleep. He was also revealed to have been suffering from lung cancer. He had always been a frail, nervous man, and had not expected to become King; but he was catapulted onto the throne by the abdication of his brother, Edward VIII. Three years later, he was leading the country through the Second World War. His steadfastness won him the hearts of the people, most notably when he and his wife and Queen, Elizabeth (who became the Queen Mother on his death), insisted on sharing the dangers of the Battle of Britain with the people of London. However, the stressful nature of his accession to the throne, and the particularly traumatic times through which he led the country left him physically exhausted, and are thought to have contributed to his failing health and his early death.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 You could expand your circle of friends if you get involved in unusual activities. Make your intentions perfectly clear and find out exactly what is expected of you.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Try spending the day catching up on any responsibilities that need to be taken care of. Disappointments are likely if your mate embarrasses you in front of friends.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Nagging has never been something that you could tolerate, and it's once again driving you into a lonely state of affairs. You'll have great insight.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Problems with large corporations or institutions are apparent. Those you care about may oppose your ideas. New relationships will surface through work related events.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Hassles with your boss are sure to erupt if you speak your mind. Visit friends or relatives you don't get to see very often. Moneymaking ventures may just turn your life around.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Look into the cost factor, but don't try to get backing yet. Your partner may be reluctant to tell you how they feel. Romantic opportunities are evident if you get involved in large groups or organizations.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Opportunities for travel and socializing are evident. Don't make mountains out of molehills if you want to avoid conflict. Art investment will pay big dividends in the long term.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 You will gain valuable insight and knowledge through the experiences you have along the way. You may have been too agreeable to someone who just wanted to use you.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Be sure to use your charm and diplomacy when dealing with potential new clients. You are best not to retaliate if members of your household are trying to pick a fight.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Concentrate on work or make changes to yourself. Use your genuine warmth and compassion to win hearts. Residential moves will also be advantageous for all concerned.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Financial limitations may add to your depression. Confronting a situation will only result in indignation and misunderstandings. Your own small business on the side could ease your financial stress.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Do not reveal personal information to those you feel may be untrustworthy. Don't count on correspondence to clear up major problems. Rather than making a scene, communicate quietly about the way you feel.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-4	7	fine
Changchun	-16	-4	fine
Chengdu	10	12	overcast
Chongqing	8	15	cloudy
Fuzhou	12	20	cloudy
Guangzhou	16	22	rain
Guiyang	5	9	overcast
Haikou	22	26	cloudy
Hangzhou	8	12	overcast
Harbin	-21	-6	fine
Hefei	4	13	overcast
Nanjing	6	9	rain
Shanghai	8	11	rain
Taipei	16	19	rain
Wuhan	6	13	rain
Hong Kong	18	21	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-9	-5	cloudy
Frankfurt	-3	5	overcast
Paris	0	8	fine
London	-1	8	cloudy
New York	-1	11	overcast

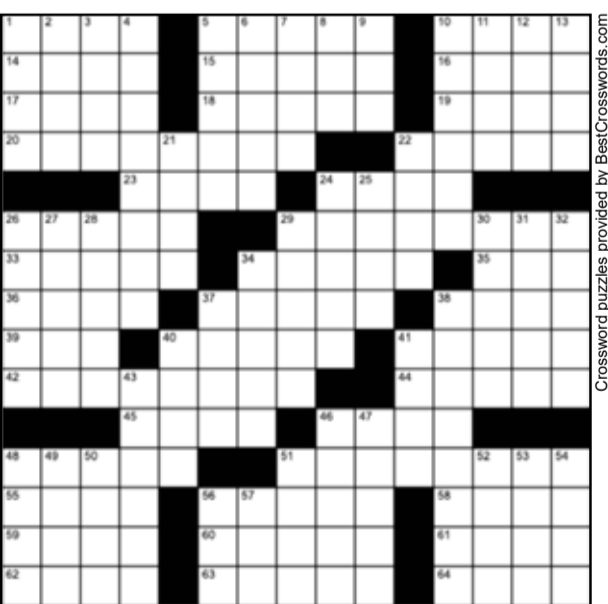
CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Impediment; 5- Parlor game; 10- Tax experts; Abbr.; 14- Actress Olin; 15- Acid type; 16- Control; 17- Golf club which can be numbered 1 to 9; 18- Try to bite; 19- Take apart; 20- Ferretlike carnivore; 22- Nonsense!; 23- Takes to court; 24- Coup d'...; 26- Uses a sieve; 29- Goalpost part; 33- Everglades bird; 34- Falls; 35- Falsehood; 36- Chemical used on trees; 37- Orchestra section; 38- "Star Trek" speed; 39- Cargo measure; 40- Flip out; 41- Chick of jazz; 42- Companionable; 44- Abrasive mineral; 45- Treehouse used by birds; 46- Leaf with Sanscrit writing?; 48- Scarpia's killer; 51- Lack of intelligence; 55- Dress often worn by Hindu women; 56- Mazda model; 58- Inwardly; 59- Cries of discovery; 60- Emblem; 61- Scrutinize; 62- Subterfuge; 63- The end of ___; 64- Greek goddess of youth;

DOWN 1- Meager; 2- Emperor of Rome 54-68; 3- Bartlett's abbr.; 4- Mobster; 5- Slender boat; 6- Off-track; 7- Ready for plucking; 8- Kind of fingerprint; 9- Drunkard; 10- Pie coverings; 11- Phnom ___; 12- Verdi heroine; 13- Chilly powder?; 21- Unseat; 22- Bridge option; 24- Eat away at; 25- Outstanding; 26- Chairs; 27- Dome home; 28- Piece of French bread?; 29- Fancy pancake; 30- Raucous sound; 31- Broadcaster; 32- Settle a loan; 34- Distributed cards; 37- Holds up; 38- Feminine; 40- Mother of the Titans; 41- Unit of an insurgency; 43- Cut into; 46- External; 47- Wool source; 48- Boris Godunov, for one; 49- Honolulu's island; 50- Ladies of Spain; Abbr.; 51- Go out with; 52- Suffix with exist; 53- Hunk; 54- New Year's word; 56- 1959 Kingston Trio hit; 57- Electrically charged particle;

Friday's solution

SEAM	IRREG	SIDE			
ATRA	MIAMI	EREI			
ATIP	ROSUN	COEN			
BADMOUTH	LUCRE				
	APES	GLEN			
KHAKI	BOUNDARY				
RELEE	ULTRA	COO			
GNOR	SPOOK	TLOU			
NE	IMEAN	GORGE			
EASEMENT	PANEL				
HELPS	WORSHIPS				
INOR	ITALO	ICAN			
DESI	THROB	NERO			
ERST	DENSE	GRAB			



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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BASKETBALL

Nuggets beat Hawks 128-108, tie Boston for NBA's best record

DENNIS GEORGATOS, DENVER

JAMAL Murray scored a season-high 41 points, Nikola Jokic had his 18th triple-double of the season and the Denver Nuggets won their third straight game, beating the Atlanta Hawks 128-108 on Saturday night.

Jokic finished with 14 points, 18 rebounds and 10 assists and recorded the 94th regular-season triple-double of his career. Michael Porter Jr. added 23 points for the Nuggets, who are 19-1 in their last 20 home games and moved into a tie with the Boston Celtics for the best record in the NBA at 37-16.

With the Nuggets' success, Murray said Denver has to be ready to deal with the best effort from opposing teams on a nightly basis.

"We can't underestimate any team. We've got to come prepared. We've got a target on our backs," Murray said. "We've seen that,



Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic, right, drives to the rim as Atlanta Hawks forward Onyeka Okongwu defends in the second half of an NBA basketball game Saturday, Feb. 4, 2023, in Denver

even today. They stuck in it for a while. We just had to lock in and we did that."

Dejounte Murray scored 28 points to lead the Hawks. De'Andre Hunter added 20 points.

"This is a tough place to come

back when you dig such a deep hole like as did in the first half," Hawks coach Nate McMillan told the Atlanta Journal Constitution.

"I thought they did a good job of making us earn everything that we got," McMillan said. "We were

making tough shots and I didn't think we had the ball movement, but I thought it was due to their defense. They just made us work for everything on the offensive end the floor."

Trailing by 18 points at the break, the Hawks narrowed the deficit to 97-86 by the start of the fourth quarter on a tip-in by Onyeka Okongwu in the final minute of the third. Atlanta defenders had blocked the Nuggets' last three field goal attempts in the third period.

Hunter's jumper with 5:49 remaining got the Hawks within 109-101. But the Nuggets, with Murray leading the way, responded with a 15-2 run that pushed their lead to 124-103 with 2:23 remaining. The Hawks never threatened again. Murray had 11 of his points in the late flurry, which Jokic helped get started with an alley-oop pass to Aaron Gordon for a layup for his 10th assist of the

game. "It was such a weird game," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "If you look at quarters one and three, we played no defense. Quarters two and four, I thought our defense was really good. Most importantly, the fourth quarter, 22 points allowed, a lot of good things for us and that allowed us to pull away."

Murray had 22 of his points in the first half, including a 3-pointer off a feed from Jokic following an Atlanta turnover in the waning seconds of the second quarter. That helped the Nuggets take a 70-52 halftime lead.

TIP-INS

Hawks: G Trae Young was held out of the game because of a non-COVID-19 illness.

Nuggets: Murray's career-high is 50 points, at Cleveland ON Feb. 19, 2021. F Aaron Gordon was back in the starting lineup after missing the previous game with a left ankle sprain. ... G Kentavious Caldwell-Pope left the game in the second quarter with a right ankle sprain. He did not return.

UP NEXT

Hawks: Visit New Orleans on Tuesday to cap a five-game trip.

Nuggets: Head to Minnesota on Sunday night for the second in a back-to-back set. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

PARANOIA SPURS CHINA-BASHERS TO DRAMATIZE BALLOON INCIDENT INTO A HOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTER

China has strongly protested at the shooting down of its meteorological balloon that had strayed into US airspace “completely accidentally”.

A US military fighter jet shot down the balloon off the coast of South Carolina on Saturday, a week after it first entered US airspace.

“China clearly asked the US to handle this properly in a calm, professional and restrained manner,” China’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement. “The US has insisted on using force, obviously overreacting.”

Although China explained, clearly and unambiguously, that the high-altitude balloon spotted flying over the continental United States was a civilian balloon used for meteorological purposes and that its entry into US airspace was unintended, the US is still using the incident to justify the postponement of the planned visit to China of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

But the balloon is an excuse, not the cause of the postponement. The true cause lies in US domestic politics. US President Joe Biden said he had issued an order on Wednesday to take down the balloon, but the Pentagon had recommended waiting until it could be done over the sea. Republican opponents in Congress still argue he failed to act quickly enough.

That reflects the struggle between the two parties and how public demonstrations of which party is tougher on China has become part of their feuding, hindering the world’s largest developed country from bettering relations with the world’s largest developing country. By hyping up the balloon as being “a massive surveillance balloon”, US media outlets have provided the excuse for that political animosity toward China to be intensified as the two parties are already jockeying for position with their eyes on the presidential election in 2024.

As the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in an earlier statement, China respects the decision of the US side to postpone Blinken’s visit, but the fact that the latter’s decision is based on some US media outlets’ hyping-up of the issue plus the fierce quarreling between the two US parties raises doubts about whether the US is sincere in claiming it wants to put bilateral relations back on a healthy track.

Since Biden agreed that it was important to maintain contact and communication at all levels in his face-to-face meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Bali ahead of the G20 Summit in November, either the US government lacks sincerity, or it lacks the capability to do so given the anti-China sentiment that prevails in Washington, which makes the Sino-US relationship extremely fragile, as the loudest voices are always the most unfriendly ones.

China cherishes its relationship with the US, and its goodwill should be echoed with goodwill instead of such dirty tricks that seek to make the country a political football in the rancorous power struggle between the two US parties.

Astronomers have discovered 12 new moons around Jupiter, putting the total count at a record-breaking 92.

That’s more than any other planet in our solar system. Saturn, the one-time leader, comes in a close second with 83 confirmed moons.

The Jupiter moons were added recently to a list kept by the International Astronomical Union’s Minor Planet Center, said Scott Sheppard of the Carnegie Institution, who was part of the team.

They were discovered using telescopes in Hawaii and Chile in

2021 and 2022, and their orbits were confirmed with follow-up observations.

These newest moons range in size from 0.6 miles to 2 miles, according to Sheppard.

In April, the European Space Agency is sending a spacecraft to Jupiter to study the planet and some of its biggest, icy moons. And next year, NASA will launch the Europa Clipper to explore Jupiter’s moon of the same name, which could harbor an ocean beneath its frozen crust.



FILE - Olena Kostevych and Bogdan Nikishin, of Ukraine, carry their country's flag during the opening ceremony in the Olympic Stadium at the 2020 Summer Olympics, on July 23, 2021, in Tokyo, Japan

OLYMPIC BOYCOTT

UKRAINE PUSHES TO EXCLUDE RUSSIA FROM 2024 PARIS OLYMPICS

HANNA ARHIROVA, KYIV

WITH next year’s Paris Olympics on the horizon and Russia’s invasion looking more like a prolonged conflict, Ukraine’s sports minister on Friday renewed a threat to boycott the games if Russia and Belarus are allowed to compete and said Kyiv would lobby other nations to join.

Such a move could lead to the biggest rift in the Olympic movement since the Cold War era.

No nation has declared it will boycott the 2024 Summer Games. But Ukraine won support from Poland, the Baltic nations and Denmark, who pushed back against an International Olympic Committee plan to allow delegations from Russia and ally Belarus to compete in Paris as “neutral athletes,” without flags or anthems.

“We cannot compromise on the admission of Russian and Belarusian athletes,” said Ukrainian Sports Minister Vadym Huttsait, who also heads its national Olympic committee, citing attacks on his country, the deaths of its athletes and the destruction of its sports facilities.

A meeting of his committee did not commit to a boycott but approved plans to try to persuade global sports officials in the next two months —

including discussion of a possible boycott.

Huttsait added: “As a last option, but I note that this is my personal opinion, if we do not succeed, then we will have to boycott the Olympic Games.”

Paris will be the final Olympics under outgoing IOC head Thomas Bach, who is looking to his legacy after a tenure marked by disputes over Russia’s status — first over widespread doping scandals and now over the war in Ukraine.

Bach’s views were shaped when he was an Olympic gold medalist in fencing and his country, West Germany, took part in the U.S.-led boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He has condemned that decision ever since.

Russia has cautiously welcomed the IOC’s decision to give it a path to the Olympics but demands it drop a condition that would leave out those athletes deemed to be “actively supporting the war in Ukraine.”

Russian Olympic Committee head Stanislav Pozdnyakov, who was a teammate of Ukraine’s Huttsait at the 1992 Olympics, called that aspect discriminatory. The IOC, which previously recommended excluding Russia and Belarus from world sports

on safety grounds, now argues it cannot discriminate against them purely based on citizenship.

The leaders of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania urged the IOC to ban Russia and said a boycott was a possibility.

“I think that our efforts should be on convincing our other friends and allies that the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes is just wrong,” Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said. “So boycotting is the next step. I think people will understand why this is necessary.”

The IOC said in a statement that “this threat of a boycott only leads to further escalation of the situation, not only in sport, but also in the wider context. It is regretful that politicians are misusing athletes and sport as tools to achieve their political objectives.”

It added bluntly: “Why punish athletes from your country for the Russian government starting the war?”

Poland’s sports minister Kamil Bortniczuk said as many as 40 countries could jointly condemn Russian and Belarusian participation at Paris in a statement next week but that it could stop short of a boycott threat. He told state news agency PAP that the IOC was being “naive” and should reflect on its position. MDT/AP



Russia Europe imposed a ban yesterday on Russian diesel fuel and other refined oil products, slashing energy dependency on Moscow and seeking to further crimp the Kremlin’s fossil fuel earnings as punishment for invading Ukraine. The ban comes along with a price cap agreed by the Group of Seven allied democracies. The goal is allowing Russian diesel to keep flowing to countries like China and India and avoiding a sudden price rise that would hurt consumers worldwide, while reducing the profits funding Moscow’s budget and war.



Israel A former Israeli prime minister who served briefly as a mediator at the start of Russia’s war with Ukraine says he drew a promise from the Russian president not to kill his Ukrainian counterpart. Former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (pictured) emerged as an unlikely intermediary in the war’s first weeks, becoming one of the few Western leaders to meet President Vladimir Putin during the war in a snap trip to Moscow last March.



Chile extended an emergency declaration to yet another region on Saturday as firefighters struggled to control dozens of raging wildfires that have claimed at least 22 lives amid a scorching heat wave that has broken records. The government declared a state of catastrophe in the La Araucanía region, which is south of Ñuble and Biobío, two central-southern regions where the emergency declaration had already been issued. The measure allows for greater cooperation with the military. At least 22 people have died in connection to the fires and 554 have been injured, including 16 in serious condition, according to Interior Minister Carolina Tohá.