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**China** imposed trade and investment sanctions on Lockheed Martin and a unit of Raytheon for supplying weapons to Taiwan, stepping up efforts to isolate the island. Lockheed Martin Corp. and Raytheon Technologies Corp.'s Raytheon Missiles and Defense are barred from importing goods into China or making new investments in the country, the Ministry of Commerce announced. It said they were added to the "unreliable entity" list of companies.



**North Korea** says leader Kim Jong Un attended groundbreaking ceremonies for new housing and farming projects, which are part of his push for domestic achievements as the country's economic isolation deepens amid his defiant pursuit of nuclear arms. Kim broke ground Wednesday for the construction of a huge greenhouse farm in the outskirts of the capital, Pyongyang.



**South Korea** called North Korea "our enemy" in its biennial defense document published yesterday, reviving the label for its rival for the first time in six years, as tensions worsen between the two countries. North Korea conducted an unprecedented number of missile tests in 2022, including simulated nuclear attacks on South Korea. In response, South Korea has been seeking a stronger U.S. security commitment and boosting its own military capabilities.

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**THE LONDONER GARNERS FIVE-STAR AWARDS IN FORBES GUIDE**

The Londoner Macao has been honoured by Forbes Travel Guide's 2023 Star Awards, achieving Five-Star Ratings for both The Londoner Hotel and Londoner Court in their first year of operation. Grant Chum, COO, Sands China Ltd., said: "We are delighted to have received this fantastic recognition for The Londoner Hotel and Londoner Court from Forbes Travel Guide, the gold standard in global luxury hospitality." The Grand Suites and The Spa at Four Seasons Hotel Macao have been awarded Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star designation again this year. Cantonese restaurant Zi Yat Heen was awarded the Five-Star designation for the first time.

**MACAO ONE ACCOUNT UPDATE FROM TOMORROW**

The Macao One Account will be adding new functionalities from tomorrow (February 18), the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFP) reported. The new updated version (5.3.9) will include new features such as the application for "travel documents" and "proof of life," among other electronic services. The SAFP noted that to enjoy the new functionalities, citizens will have to update the application to the new version. Following the release of the update, users will need to log on to the system again by entering their usernames and passwords.

**EDUCATION**

# INT'L SCHOOL IN ZHUHAI ANTICIPATES MORE SAR STUDENTS ALONGSIDE REGIONAL INTEGRATION

**A**N international school in Zhuhai is expecting an increase in its enrolments from Macau and Hong Kong students, contributing to the further integration of neighboring regions.

Relocated to Hengqin in 2021, the Dulwich International High School Zhuhai campus is about a 15-minute drive from the Hengqin Port, 30 minutes from the Qingmao Port and Gongbei Port, and 40 minutes from the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge Zhuhai Port.

Currently, students from Macau and Hong Kong make up around 17% of the current enrolment for the 2022-23 academic year at Dulwich International High School Zhuhai, located in the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone.

In a recent media familiarization trip to the campus, school director Matthew Conn said that in its first year in 2010, the school already had students travelling to Zhuhai from Macau and Hong Kong to study on a daily or weekly basis.

According to Conn, there were "increasing interests for universities



in Macau and Hong Kong among our students during the pandemic."

"We plan to have more collaboration and connection with the universities in Macau to offer more opportunities for our students in both academic projects or experience in wider topics, such as sustainability," Conn told the press.

Data from the school shows that Macau students go to various university destinations, including UK, Australia, Hong Kong and Macau itself.

Currently the school has Macau graduates studying at the University of Manchester, University of Macau, Macau University of Science and Technology and Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Founded in 2010, Dulwich Zhuhai can trace its roots to Dulwich College, the first British independent school to bring its practices and ethos to China in 2003.

The school is the only international program in Zhuhai that has been ranked Top 100 in the "Hurun Edu-

cation Top International Schools in China" for five consecutive years.

The SAR government has been developing the Guangdong-Macau in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin.

The local government has previously pledged that it will continue to promote mutual access of infrastructure in the cooperation zone to gradually link it with Macau's public service and social security systems, covering education, medical care and social services. **LV**

# Over 2,000 volunteers already registered for the National Games

**RENATO MARQUES**

**O**VER 2,000 people have already filled out applications to become volunteers for Macau's hosting of the 15th National Games of China in 2025, the president of the Sports Bureau (ID), Pun Weng Kun, said yesterday on the sidelines of the meeting of the Sports Committee held at the Macao East Asian Games Dome.

Pun said that the preparations ahead of the games, which will be co-hosted by Guangdong province and the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, are going smoothly, noting the enthusiastic res-



ponse from the volunteers, with applications gathered from over 2,000 interested parties in just five days.

According to information published previously, a total of 10,000 volunteers aged 16 and above will be recruited for the National Games in Macau. After verification of

their information, applicants will be able to participate in various training courses and activities conducted by the Organising Committee, which will commence this year. On completion of the training, volunteers will be arranged to fill different positions within the games

and events. The volunteer training program is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2025 and includes a series of theoretical and practical courses. The ID president also added that, to train for the National Games, a delega-

tion of Macau athletes will participate this year in the Asian Games to be held in Hangzhou.

Remarking on the hosting of the 70th Macau Grand Prix in November this year, one of the topics in discussion at the meeting, Pun confirmed that the plan is to follow a similar model to the one used in the 60th edition, with races and other complementary activities taking place over the course of nine days, including two weekends.

The president of ID and Coordinator of the Macau Grand Prix Organizing Committee also said that events such as a "Fun Run" on the Guia Circuit are part of the plans of the organizers, who are now focusing most of their attention on securing the return of the FIA events, namely the FIA Formula 3 World Cup.

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ECONOMY

# Economic prosperity index to rally

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE Prosperity Index for January is expected to rally by over one point, with tourists again flocking to the city after three years, the Macau Economic Association (MEA) announced.

Although China began easing Covid-19 restrictions some time before January, the index in December did not perform well, the MEA noted. The December index scored only 2.2 points.

In contrast, the association estimated that the January index will reach 3.4 points, 1.2 points higher than the December figure. Moreover, the group expects the index to further climb in the coming three months, bringing the score from Unsatisfactory levels to Stability levels.

The MEA pointed out that this optimistic forecast is due to several factors.

On one hand, the revival in tourism began almost immediately after the easing of Covid-19 restrictions. On the other hand, the city's gambling industry has



also been given a degree of certainty with the enactment of the updated Gambling Law at the end of last year.

It pointed out that, according to the updated law, each casino licensee must possess capital

of MOP5 billion. They have also promised to make investments totaling MOP118.8 billion in the coming decade.

Moreover, the M2 currency supply, which the MEA identifies as a leading indicator for the index,

started warming up in Dec. 2022 and achieved a 4.4% rise year-over-year.

What is more auspicious for the city, according to the MEA, is that gross gambling revenue (GGR) has increased following

the tourism industry returning to normal settings. Alongside several projects proposed by the government, the MEA considers further improvement in the economy likely.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also become optimistic in its estimate of the global economic trend.

At the same time, the US has also slowed down the increase in interest rates. This is reflected in the Hong Kong Interbank Offered Rate (HIBOR), which has fallen over 50% since the end of last year, showing that the supply of capital is larger than the demand.

However, the group warned of several risks that may cause fluctuations to the index.

For example, the MEA pointed out that geopolitical concerns, such as the Russian-Ukraine War and the pressure from inflation, may linger for some time and cause instability. Other risks may be entailed in the interest rates of the US Treasury Securities.

Meanwhile, although the increase in US interest rates has slowed down, unless its inflation eases, the inclination to increase will remain, posing risks for both Macau and Hong Kong.

The index for Jan. to Apr. is expected to gradually increase from 2.4 to 3.9 points, the MEA forecast.

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CRIME

# MAN ARRESTED OVER CHANGING-ROOM PHOTOGRAPHY ALLEGATIONS

ANTHONY LAM

A local 45-year-old man has been arrested on allegations of secretly taking pictures of other people in the changing room of a clubhouse, the Judiciary Police (PJ) reported recently.

The suspect, who is named Lei, and is unmarried, is being charged with intrusion into the private lives of others.

At about 4 p.m. on Feb. 8, the police received a report from a male resident at a residential estate in Coloane who said that he had seen a bag containing an operating video camera in the change room. This led the man to suspect that he was being secretly videotaped.

At 8 a.m. the following day, the PJ intercepted the suspect at the residential estate. The suspect admitted to living in the estate and confessed that he started videotaping or photographing other males walking on the street.



The suspect reportedly settled in the estate in Dec. 2021 and later started secretly filming people while they were changing in the changing room.

After searching through his cellphone, the police found over 1,100 photographs and over 500 videos taken on the street as well as over

40 photographs and over 500 videos taken in the changing room.

On the day of the report, six men had been videotaped. They were either in the process of getting changed or wearing only their underwear. Some faces were seen in the videos. Two of the men pictured have decided to press charges.

EMPLOYMENT

# DSAL TO HOLD THREE JOB MATCHING SESSIONS NEXT WEEK, 266 JOBS ON OFFER

RENATO MARQUES

IN cooperation with the Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) will organize three job-matching sessions for specific sectors next week (February 23 and 24), providing a total of 266 job vacancies, the DSAL reported.

Registration for these job-matching sessions opens today and will close at midday on February 22, or when all the time slots are filled.

On the morning of February 23, a job-matching session for supermarkets and the retail trade sector will be held, offering a total of 205 job posts, including trainee manager, store supervisor, cashier, supermarket operator, meat handler, e-commerce agent, and food service agent. In the afternoon of the same day, there will be a

second session for the catering sector with 26 job offers available, including posts as catering services employee, public relations, waiter, cook and cook's assistant.

In the afternoon of February 24, a session for the luxury retail sector will be held, offering a total of 35 jobs such as store employee, salesperson, and concierge.

Those interested may register for the sessions through the specific DSAL webpage ([www.dsal.gov.mo/zh\\_tw/standard/indjobfair.html](http://www.dsal.gov.mo/zh_tw/standard/indjobfair.html)).

The three job-matching sessions will be held at FAOM's headquarters, located at Rua da Ribeira do Patane, 2-6, Edifício das Associações dos Operários.

DSAL and FAOM will notify applicants of the sessions of the time slot for the interview by SMS.

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AL COMMITTEE

# Vets will be allowed to operate in hotel establishments

ANTHONY LAM

**A**FTER the latest parliamentary meeting, the government has agreed to allow veterinary services to operate in hotel establishments, the head of a parliamentary committee has said.

Lawmaker Vong Hin Fai, president of the Third Standing Committee of the parliament, pointed out

that the government had agreed to eliminate the relevant proposal in the bill concerning veterinary services and animal-oriented businesses.

The proposal was set to ban veterinary services in hotel establishments.

The original proposal related to the venues in which animal-oriented businesses was drafted that such businesses must not be established in realty in-

consistent with the use of the businesses, particularly not in residences, industrial buildings, hotels, public facilities or parking lots.

The change was made after some Committee members raised concerns over tourists staying at hotels with their pets. The same concern was also expressed at the first reading of the bill but due to the nature of discussion, the question was deferred.

Meanwhile, changes to the ownership of animal-oriented businesses have also been made. The current version of the bill proposes that such businesses will be allowed to be carried out by individuals or legal persons. In addition, the term legal persons here will not only include commercial companies, but also associations, consortia and foundations.

According to Vong, if the bill enters into force, people with a Bachelor's degree in medicine will be allowed to practice veterinary services, provided that they also have Master's or Doctorate degree in the discipline. The reason behind the change is in consideration of differences in curricula in different places.

The bill also proposes the establishment of a veterinary professional committee that will comprise seven members with established knowledge in the area. Although the government hopes that at least half of the members will be from outside the civil service structure, this "hope" has not been stated as a requirement in the bill. The reason is that the government fears there will not be a sufficient number of veterinarians.

The bill, if passed, will come into force on Apr. 1.

TRAVEL

## FLIGHTS TO AND FROM OSAKA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA TO RESUME

STAFF REPORTER

**F**LIGHTS to and from Da Nang will resume on March 2, while the Singapore route will restart on March 23. A total of nine round-trip flights are scheduled for Southeast Asia, including Hanoi, Da Nang, Bangkok, and Singapore, which is subject to increase according to the reaction and ground support equipment capacity of the destinations, according to Air Macau.

With Taiwan reopening to Macau and Hong Kong residents, Air Macau will increase the frequencies to Taipei to one flight per week, whereas those to Kaohsiung will extend to four flights.

Routes to Osaka will resume with two flights

a week at the beginning of March, when flights to Tokyo will increase to the same frequency, as Air Macau faces the possibility of the cancellation of Japan's entry requirements for Macau and mainland visitors. Further, flights to Seoul will be increased to two per week.

It is expected that Air Macau will resume flights to almost all of its outgoing destinations after the adjustments next month.

Also, routes to and from Southeast Asia operated by various airlines are resuming. Flights between Macau and Malaysia have resumed, and direct flights to Thailand and the Philippines are expected to resume within the next two months.

# Macau's international banking industry grows in 2022

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE proportion of international business in the local banking sector rebounded in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2022, as revealed by Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) statistics. At end of December 2022, the share of international assets in total banking assets increased by 0.6% to 85.3% compared to the end of September 2022, while the share of international liabilities in total banking liabilities fell by 0.5% to 81.9% in the same period, the AMCM stated in a statistical report.

According to the same report, the International Banking Assets at the end of December 2022 increased by 6.3% from the previous quarter (Q3) to MOP2,209.1 billion (USD275.1 billion).



Within this total, external assets rose by 2.5% from Q3 to MOP1,598.9 billion, while local assets in foreign currencies expanded by 17.9% to MOP610.2 billion.

As a major component of international assets, external non-bank loans decreased by 5.4% to MOP701.7 billion.

At the same time, the total international banking

liabilities also increased by 4.9% from September to MOP2,120.9 billion (USD264.1 billion). Of this total, external liabilities and local liabilities in foreign currencies grew by 0.9% quarter-to-quarter to MOP1,201.6 billion and 10.8% to MOP919.3 billion respectively.

Foreign currency deposits held by residents and the Macau government in

local banks constituted a major component of international liabilities. This type of deposit dropped by 0.3% to MOP667.2 billion at the end of 2022.

The majority of external assets and liabilities in the local banking sector were related to Asia with claims on the mainland and Hong Kong occupying, respectively, 40.4% and 24.9% of total external assets.

Claims on Portuguese-speaking countries and countries along the "Belt and Road" had shares of 0.8% and 12.4%, respectively.

As for external liabilities, Hong Kong and the mainland accounted for 41.0% and 38.2% of the total, respectively, while the Portuguese-speaking countries and countries along the "Belt and Road" represented 0.6% and 6.4%, respectively.

## VISITOR SPENDING IN 2022 PLUNGES 25% TO MOP18 BILLION

**T**OTAL spending from visitors to Macau amounted to MOP18.17 billion in 2022, down 25.7% year-on-year, as the city battled with unstable border restrictions due to a series of Covid outbreaks, as recorded by the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

Total spending from overnight visitors (MOP14.91 billion) declined by 30.0% year-on-year, whereas that of same-day visitors (MOP3.25 billion) rose 3.7%.

Last year, the SAR saw a total of 5,700,339 visitor arrivals, down 26.0% year-on-year.

Data shows that the number of overnight visitors last year fell 32.8% to 2,484,028, while same-day visitors fell 19.8% to 3,216,311.

Per-capita spending of visitors edged up by 0.4% year-on-year to MOP3,187 in 2022, with that of overnight visitors (MOP6,004) and same-

-day visitors (MOP1,011) rising 4.1% and 29.3%, respectively.

Concerning the type of spending, per-capita spending from visitors on the category of shopping (MOP2,110) rose 2.6% year-on-year, while spending on food & beverages (MOP488) and accommodation (MOP428) decreased by 4.3% and 9.4%, respectively.

A survey conducted by Visa shows that the pandemic has changed both means of travel as well as the aims and expectations of travelers in visiting their chosen destinations.

Throughout mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, 44% of consumers placed more emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene during travel, while 39% were interested in "wellness experiences". 32% of respondents named shopping locally as a goal, while a considerable 30% sought "once-in-a-lifetime experiences."



AP PHOTO



COVID

# CHINA SAYS 200 MILLION TREATED, PANDEMIC 'DECISIVELY' BEATEN

CHINA says more than 200 million of its citizens have been diagnosed and treated for COVID-19 since it lifted strict containment measures beginning in November.

With 800,000 of the most critically ill patients having recovered, China has "decisively beaten" the pandemic, according to notes from a meeting of the ruling Communist Party's all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee presided

over by President and party leader Xi Jinping.

China enforced some of the world's most draconian lockdowns, quarantines and travel restrictions and still faces questions about the origins of the virus that was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019. Heavy-handed enforcement prompted rare anti-government protests and took a heavy toll on the world's second-largest economy.

The official Xinhua News

Agency quoted Xi as saying that policies to control the outbreak had been "entirely correct." The abrupt lifting in November and December of the "zero COVID" policy that had sought to eliminate all cases of the virus led to a surge in infections that temporarily overwhelmed hospitals.

Case numbers have since peaked and life has largely returned to normal, although international travel in and out of China has yet to return

to pre-pandemic levels.

China is now transitioning to a post-pandemic stage after a fight against the outbreak that was "extraordinary in the extreme," Xinhua said.

The government will continue to "optimize and adjust prevention and control policies and measures according to the times and situations with a strong historical responsibility and strong strategic determination," Xinhua said. **MDT**

HONG KONG

# Population drops for third year under Covid shadow

HONG Kong's government announced yesterday that the territory's population dropped for a third straight year as deaths rose during the pandemic and anti-virus measures reduced the number of arriving workers, but did not mention an exodus of residents sparked by a crackdown on the pro-democracy movement.

The city's population declined 0.9% to 7.3 million at the end of 2022 from a year earlier, according to provisional data released by the Census and Statistics Department. It said there was a net



outflow of 60,000 residents, with 21,200 new residents arriving.

For much of the pandemic, Hong Kong followed mainland China's stringent "zero COVID" strategy, deterring professionals from moving into the

international financial hub. Its population decline has been exacerbated by a growing number of young professionals leaving for Britain, the United States and other countries in response to the erosion of Hong Kong's

Western-style civil liberties after a harsh new National Security Law silenced or jailed dissidents.

The announcement gave no clue regarding how many people had left for political reasons but said there

was a slight rebound in inflows near the end of last year after officials gradually relaxed anti-virus controls.

"We noticed that the population decrease in the second half of 2022 has narrowed when compared to that in the first half, reflecting that movement of the Hong Kong population has begun to resume normal gradually," the statement said.

The government predicted that factors hindering workers from moving to Hong Kong will dissipate after the resumption of restriction-free travel with mainland China and elsewhere.

Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee has rolled out various measures aimed at attracting at least 35,000 professionals each year between 2023 and 2025. **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN

# PARAGUAY LEADER PRAISES ISLAND AS 'LIGHTHOUSE OF DEMOCRACY'

THE outgoing president of Paraguay, whose country is one of Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic allies, spoke of his admiration for the island democracy while on a state visit to Taipei yesterday.

Mario Abdo Benitez was welcomed with an honor guard as he walked alongside Taiwan's leader Tsai Ing-wen on a red carpet in front of the Presidential House. Abdo arrived in Taiwan on Tuesday on a five-day visit.

Taiwan is closely watching as Paraguay is set to hold presidential elections in which the opposition party candidate has said he would break diplomatic ties with Taiwan if elected, according to local media reports.

Since Tsai was elected in 2016, China has been on a pressure campaign to poach the island's remaining diplomatic allies. China claims self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory and opposes any form of exchange between Taiwan and the governments of other countries. Taiwan currently has 14 diplomatic allies.

"I want to express my deepest and most sincere respect to the Taiwanese people for not giving up their brave struggle for freedom and the safeguarding of their sovereignty," Abdo said. "In the face of continued threats and the tense situation, Taiwan's people have not given up their resolution for peace, continuing to play the role of a lighthouse of democracy in the region."

Abdo also thanked Taiwan for its help during the COVID-19 pandemic and said his country's economy suffered the least of Latin American countries during the pandemic as a result of that assistance.

Tsai did not speak about the possible loss of Paraguay as a diplomatic ally, instead thanking Abdo for his visit and speaking of deepening economic cooperation between the two sides.

"I want to thank President Abdo for speaking in support of Taiwan's participation in international forums many times," said Tsai in a speech ahead of a private meeting with the Paraguayan president.

In December 2021, Taiwan lost Nicaragua as a diplomatic ally after the Central American country's president won re-election in a vote the White House said was rigged. Nicaragua then said it would officially recognize only China.

In 2022, Honduras, another Taiwan ally, also made Taiwan and China part of its presidential campaign. As a candidate, Xiomara Castro said she would switch diplomatic recognition to China if elected. But after Castro assumed power, her administration said the government would continue to maintain ties with Taiwan for now.

Though Taiwan has lost allies, it has also stepped up official exchanges with countries such as Lithuania and Slovakia, which do not formally recognize Taiwan as a country.

As part of his visit, Abdo met with Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu and attended a conference on women's empowerment with Tsai. **MDT/AP**



DIPLOMACY

# China, Iran call on Afghanistan to end restrictions on women

**C**HINA and Iran have urged mutual neighbor Afghanistan to end restrictions on women's work and education.

The call came in a joint statement yesterday issued at the close of a visit to Beijing by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi during which the two sides affirmed close economic and political ties and their rejection of Western standards of human rights and democracy.

Since taking over Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban has banned women and girls from universities and schools after the sixth grade and forced out those in elected offices and other prominent positions.

"The two sides ... called on the Afghan rulers to form an inclusive government in which all ethnic groups and political groups actually participate, and cancel all discriminatory measures against women, ethnic minorities and other religions," the statement



President Xi Jinping and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, after reviewing an honor guard during a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Tuesday

said, adding that the U.S. and its NATO allies "should be responsible for the current situation in Afghanistan."

The U.S. had backed Afghanistan's elected government against the Taliban, but withdrew amid the rising costs and dwindling domestic support for a government that was unable to counter a Tali-

ban revival.

The call for women's rights is notable coming from Iran's hardline Shiite Muslim regime, which has been challenged by months of protests sparked by the death of a young woman in police custody for allegedly violating clothing requirements.

The country's theocracy has

executed at least four men since the demonstrations began in September over the death of Mahsa Amini. All have faced internationally criticized, rapid, closed-door trials.

The bulk of the China-Iran joint statement emphasized strong political and economic ties, the quest for peace and jus-

stice in the Middle East and denuclearization in spite of Tehran's alleged drive to produce atomic weapons.

In a meeting earlier with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, Raisi expressed support for China's crackdown on democracy in Hong Kong and claim to self-ruling democratic Taiwan.

China and Iran portray themselves, alongside Moscow, as counterweights to American power, and have given tacit, and in Iran's case, material support to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"China supports Iran in safeguarding national sovereignty" and "resisting unilateralism and bullying," Xi said in a statement carried by Chinese state TV on its website.

Xi and Raisi attended the signing of 20 cooperation agreements including on trade and tourism, the Chinese government announced. Those add to a 25-year strategy agreement signed in 2021 to cooperate in developing oil, industry and other fields.

China is one of the biggest buyers of Iranian oil and a major source of investment.

Iran has struggled for years under trade and financial sanctions imposed by Washington and other Western governments. The U.S. government cut off Iran's access to the network that connects global banks in 2018. **MDT/AP**

BALLOONED

## BEIJING BLASTS US OVER RESPONSE TO CHINESE BALLOON INCURSION

**C**HINA'S ceremonial parliament has accused American lawmakers of trampling on the sovereignty of other nations after the U.S. passed a measure condemning a suspected Chinese spy balloon's intrusion into U.S. airspace.

The statement issued yesterday by the National People's Congress's Foreign Affairs Committee repeated Beijing's insistence that the balloon was an unmanned civilian weather research airship, a claim the U.S. has dismissed citing its flight route and payload of surveillance equipment.

While China at first expressed regret over the Feb. 4 incident, it has toughened its rhetoric in a further sign of how badly relations between the sides have deteriorated in recent years.

On Wednesday, the Foreign Ministry said it will take measures against U.S. entities somehow related to the downing of the balloon, without giving details.

The resolution earlier passed unanimously by the U.S. House of Representatives "deliberately exaggerated the 'China threat,'" the Foreign Relations Committee statement said.

That was "purely malicious hype and political manipulation," it said. "Some U.S. Congress politicians fanned the flames, fully exposing their sinister designs to oppose China and contain China."

"In fact, it is the United States that wantonly interferes in other countries' internal affairs, violates their sovereignty, and conducts surveillance on other countries," it said.

A range of Chinese government departments have issued daily protests over how the U.S. handled the issue, accusing Washington of overreacting and violating "the spirit of international law." Beijing has offered no details on what company or government department was responsible for the

giant balloon, the remnants of which are being sent to an FBI lab for analysis.

Along with Congress's passing of the resolution, the U.S. has sanctioned six Chinese entities it said are linked to Beijing's aerospace programs. Secretary of State Antony Blinken also canceled a visit to Beijing, putting an abrupt freeze on what some had seen as momentum for a stabilization in relations that have plunged to their lowest in decades amid disputes over trade, human rights, Taiwan and China's claim to the South China Sea.

The House resolution condemned China for a "brazen violation" of U.S. sovereignty and efforts to "deceive the international community through false claims about its intelligence collection campaigns."

U.S. officials have said China operates a fleet of such balloons, which are a relatively inexpensive and difficult-to-detect method of gathering intelligence. The U.S. government determined the balloon posed little risk to national security and allowed it to fly across the continent before bringing it down with a missile off the coast of South Carolina. **MDT/AP**

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AFGHANISTAN

# Ruling Taliban display rare division in public over bans

RAHIM FAIEZ, ISLAMABAD

**A**RARE public show of division within the ranks of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban emerged in recent days when Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, a powerful government figure, gave a speech seen as implicit criticism of the movement's reclusive supreme leader.

The Taliban leadership has been opaque since the former insurgents' takeover of the country in August 2021, with almost no indication of how decisions are made.

In recent months, the group's supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, has appeared to take a stronger hand in directing policy. In particular, it was on his orders that the Taliban government banned women and girls from universities and schools after the sixth grade.

The bans raised a fierce international uproar, increasing Afghanistan's isolation at a time when its economy has collapsed — and worsening a humanitarian crisis. The bans also appeared to contradict previous policies by the Taliban government.

Between the Taliban takeover until the December ban on attending universities, women had been allowed to continue their studies. Taliban officials repeatedly promised that girls would be allowed to attend secondary school, but a decision to allow them back last year was suddenly reversed.

Haqqani made his comments in a speech over the weekend to a graduation ceremony at an Islamic religious school in the eastern province of Khost.

"Monopolizing power and hurting the reputation of the entire system are not to our benefit," Haqqani said, according to video clips of the speech released on social media by his supporters. "The situation cannot be tolerated," he added.

Haqqani said now that the Taliban have taken power, "more responsibility has been placed on our shoulders and it requires patience and good behavior and engagement with the people." He said the Taliban must "soothe the wounds of the people" and act in a way that the people do not come to hate them



Taliban acting Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani speaks during a graduation ceremony at the police academy in Kabul, last March

and religion.

Haqqani did not refer to Akhundzada, but the remarks were seen by many commenting on social media as directed at him. Haqqani also did not mention the issue of women's education, but he has said publicly in the past that women and girls should be allowed to go to school and universities.

Zabihullah Mujahed, the top spokesman for the Kabul government, said in an apparent reaction to Haqqani's comments — without naming him — that criticism is best voiced privately.

"If someone criticizes the emir, minister, or any other official, it is better — and Islamic ethics also say — that he should express his criticism directly and secretly to him," not in public, he said.

Akhundzada, an Islamic scholar, almost never appears in public and hardly ever leaves the Taliban heartland in southern Kandahar province.

He surrounds himself with other religious scholars and tribal leaders who oppose education and work for women. Only one known photo of him, years old, exists. Akhundzada came to Kabul only once since the Taliban takeover to give a speech to an assembly of pro-

-Taliban clerics, though he was not shown in media coverage at the closed event.

The Taliban have typically dealt with internal differences behind the scenes, and Haqqani's comments "are a major escalation," said Michael Kugelman, the deputy director of the Asia program and senior associate for South Asia at the Wilson Center. The Taliban leaders have the same broad vision, but "in Kandahar, they're hermits, they're not involved in the day-to-day," said Kugelman. In Kabul, they have to govern and provide services, he added.

Haqqani leads a faction of the Taliban known as the Haqqani network, built around the family of the same name centered in Khost. The network battled U.S.-led NATO troops and former Afghan government forces for years and was notorious for attacks on civilians and suicide bombings in Kabul. The U.S. government maintains a \$10 million bounty on Sirajuddin Haqqani for attacks on American troops and Afghan civilians.

His comments pointed to an apparent difference between some senior Taliban, who have had to rapidly adjust to the demands of government after two decades of fighting as

insurgents.

When they took power in 2021, Taliban officials said they wanted better ties to the world. They said they would not return to the social restrictions on women or punishments, such as public lashings, that they imposed during their first time in power in the 1990s.

But over the nearly 20 months since, the Taliban have barred women from most jobs, middle school and high school as well as from parks. They've also ordered women to wear head-to-toe clothing in public.

The deputy prime minister in the Taliban government, Abdul Salam Hanafi, indirectly criticized the ban on education for women and girls in a speech in Kabul this week.

"If we don't improve the quality and quantity of the education system and do not update it, we will never succeed," he said. He added that the duty of Islamic scholars requires more than prohibiting a behavior or practice — they must also offer a solution and a path forward.

Ahmed Rashid, a veteran Lahore-based journalist who wrote several books about the Taliban, said he didn't expect change from Akhundzada and his Kandahar-based supporters. MDT/AP

## this day in history

### 1992 CANNIBAL KILLER JAILED FOR LIFE



Serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer has been sentenced to life in prison by a court in Wisconsin for murdering and dismembering 15 young men and boys.

Dahmer, 31, was unable to convince the jury that his cannibalism and necrophilia were the result of madness.

He was given 15 consecutive life sentences and will never be eligible for parole.

Dahmer's trial, which ended in Milwaukee on Saturday night, included some of the most gruesome evidence ever heard in a US courtroom.

It also became a test case of the insanity defense seldom used in America.

He has escaped the death sentence because Wisconsin is one of the few states which does not have capital punishment.

After sentence was passed, Dahmer read a statement to the court. In a calm voice he said: "I never wanted freedom. Frankly, I wanted death for myself. I knew I was sick or evil or both."

"Doctors have told me about my sickness and now I have some peace. I know how much harm I have caused. I feel so bad for what I did to those poor families."

Victims' families were in court and some lashed out at the bullet-proof screen, which was all that separated them from the man described by his own lawyer as "a steamrolling, killing machine".

Rita Isbell, sister of victim Errol Lindsey, lunged at Dahmer screaming: "You are Satan. I want to kill you."

Tears rolled down the face of Donald Bradehof, brother of another victim, as he said: "We lost the baby of our family - I hope you go to hell."

Dahmer tended to prey on young gay black men. The court was told how he drugged them with sleeping pills and practised crude lobotomies on the brains of three of them. Various body parts were found in his flat.

His lawyers argued he suffered from necrophilia, a compulsive desire to have sex with corpses. But the prosecution claimed Dahmer had chosen his victims carefully and had not intended to kill them all.

There has been criticism of the Milwaukee police for failing to realise there was a serial killer operating in the city.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Dahmer was convicted of 15 murders but confessed to 17 killings.

He became increasingly religious in prison and was baptised.

On 28 November 1994 he was murdered by a fellow inmate, who bludgeoned him to death with a metal bar.

His killer Christopher Scarver was a black man with a diagnosed mental illness, who was later convicted of the murder.

Before his death Dahmer talked to NBC about religion.

The interview - broadcast the day after his murder - revealed how he had previously believed he was accountable to no-one for his behaviour but since finding Christianity that had changed.

In his will, Dahmer requested no funeral or service of any kind.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
You may need to make a few alterations to your living arrangements. Keep calm. Someone around you is bouncing off the walls.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
Don't let them blame you. You might find that the extra cash will come in handy when an opportunity to invest comes along.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
Pleasure trips will be most enjoyable and should lead to new and lasting friendships. You have the stamina and determination to succeed.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
Art investment will pay big dividends in the long term. Do not get involved in joint financial ventures. Pamper yourself; you deserve it.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
You should be trying to clear up legal contracts that have been pending. Be cautious while traveling to foreign countries. Do things you enjoy instead of being a chameleon.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Spend some time with the one you love. Pleasure trips will be satisfying. Time to deal with institutional environments, government agencies, and matters of a private nature today.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
You will meet new romantic partners through the company you keep. You may find out that someone is trying to undermine you. You can make progress professionally.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
Helping children may be rewarding and challenging. You can pick up information that will give you an edge. You can learn from those who have had similar experiences.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
Try not to get upset or angry without having all the facts. You need to keep everyone on your domestic scene too busy to complain. Be sure to organize events that will keep the children busy.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
Your emotional reaction will be dependent upon your partner's responsiveness. You will have some problems with children, but if you are patient you will win their favor.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
Don't put limitations on yourself. Recognition will be yours if you meet your deadline. Don't delay; go to your physician or dentist and get to the bottom of the discomfort.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
You will be able to work in fine detail and present the best possible proposal. Keep a lookout for any individuals eager to confront you with unsavory situations.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

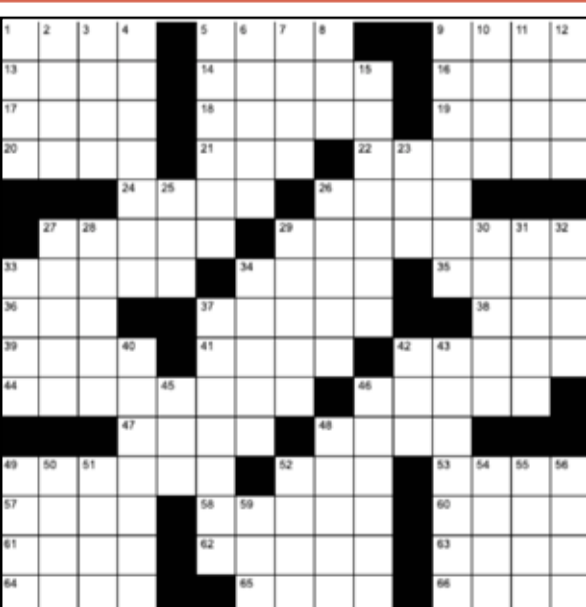
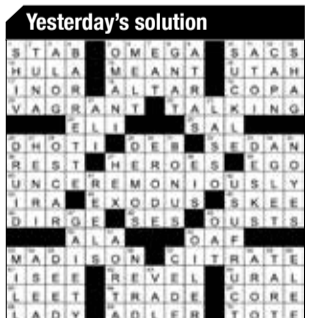
**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-4	6	cloudy
Changchun	-8	2	cloudy
Chengdu	7	12	overcast
Chongqing	9	16	cloudy
Fuzhou	8	18	overcast
Guangzhou	9	21	fine
Guiyang	2	16	cloudy
Haikou	16	21	cloudy
Hangzhou	1	19	fine
Harbin	-14	-3	fine
Hefei	1	14	cloudy
Nanjing	1	14	cloudy
Shanghai	3	15	cloudy
Taipei	11	21	cloudy
Wuhan	3	14	cloudy
Hong Kong	15	18	fine
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-11	-6	cloudy
Frankfurt	10	13	cloudy
Paris	11	16	cloudy
London	11	14	cloudy
New York	-2	17	rain

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Saltimbocca seasoning; 5- Calf-length skirt; 9- Held on to; 13- Mosque leader; 14- Dry as \_\_\_; 16- Golfer Aoki; 17- Splendor; 18- Confronts; 19- Depilatory brand; 20- Terrier type; 21- More, in Mexico; 22- Flat roofing tile; 24- Travel far and wide; 26- Big swallow; 27- In conflict with, with "of"; 29- Wading bird; 33- Inactive; 34- Wanting; 35- Square; 36- Narrow inlet; 37- Pert; 38- Turf; 39- Canadian gas brand; 41- Mug; 42- Take the role of; 44- Free; 46- As \_\_\_ resort; 47- Hamlet, for one; 48- Dues; 49- Explosions; 52- Pig; 53- Roman censor; 57- Having wealth; 58- Midway alternative; 60- Wide-eyed; 61- About; 62- Oscar de la \_\_\_; 63- Antlered animal; 64- Portfolio; 65- Paradise; 66- Gaelic language of Ireland or Scotland;

**DOWN** 1- Drinks slowly; 2- Hog-wild; 3- Malodorous; 4- High ruler; 5- Warm-blooded vertebrate; 6- Girder; 7- Female rabbits; 8- CD earnings; 9- Boss; 10- Biblical birthright seller; 11- Bucket; 12- When said three times, a 1970 war movie; 15- Tidal river; 23- "Slippery" tree; 25- Not at home; 26- Glaze; 27- Biscotto flavoring; 28- Sumptuous meal; 29- "Damn Yankees" choreographer; 30- Bird homes; 31- Old English coin; 32- Track numbers; 33- Angers; 34- VCR button; 37- Underwriter; 40- Comfortably familiar; 42- Schooner fill; 43- Waterfall; 45- Bran source; 46- Mediterranean arm; 48- Specialty; 49- Bric-a-\_\_\_; 50- One of the Simpsons; 51- Makes a move; 52- Clock pointer; 54- Antiquing agent; 55- Some digits; 56- Shrek, e.g.; 59- Tee follower;



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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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

MARK KENNEDY, NEW YORK

OBITUARY

# HOLLYWOOD SEX SYMBOL RAQUEL WELCH DIES AT 82

**RAQUEL** Welch, whose emergence from the sea in a skimpy, furry bikini in the film "One Million Years B.C." would propel her to international sex symbol status throughout the 1960s and '70s, has died. She was 82.

Welch died yesterday [Macau time] after a brief illness, according to her agent, Stephen LaManna of the talent agency Innovative Artists.

Welch's breakthrough came in 1966's campy prehistoric flick "One Million Years B.C.," despite having a grand total of three lines. Clad in a brown doeskin bikini, she successfully evaded pterodactyls but not the notice of the public.

"I just thought it was a goofy dinosaur epic we'd be able to sweep under the carpet one day," she told The Associated Press in 1981. "Wrong. It turned out that I was the Bo Derek of the season, the lady in the loin cloth about whom everyone said, 'My God, what a bod' and they expected to disappear overnight."

She did not, playing Lust for the comedy team of Peter Cook and Dudley Moore in their film "Bedazzled" in 1967 and playing a secret agent in the sexy spy

AP PHOTO



Raquel Welch appears at the Los Angeles premiere of "How to Be a Latin Lover" on April 26, 2017

spoof "Fathom" that same year.

Her curves and beauty captured pop culture attention, with Playboy crowning her the "most desired woman" of the '70s, despite never being completely naked in the magazine. In 2013, she graced the No. 2 spot on Men's Health's "Hottest Women of All Time" list. In the

film "The Shawshank Redemption," a poster of Welch covers an escape tunnel — the last of three that character Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) used after Rita Hayworth and Marilyn Monroe.

Admirers took to Twitter to mourn the star, including TV host Rosie O'Donnell, actor

Chris Meloni and writer-director Paul Feig, who worked with Welch on "Sabrina the Teenage Witch" and called her "Kind, funny and a true superstar whom I was pretty much in love with for most of my childhood. We've lost a true icon."

In addition to acting, Welch was a singer and dancer. She

surprised many critics — and won positive reviews — when she starred in the 1981 musical "Woman of the Year" on Broadway, replacing a vacationing Lauren Bacall. She returned to the Great White Way in 1997 in "Victor/Victoria."

She knew that some people didn't take her seriously because of her glamorous image. "I'm not Penny Marshall or Barbra Streisand," she told the AP in 1993. "They'll say, 'Raquel Welch wants to direct? Give me a break.'"

Welch was born Jo-Raquel Tejada in Chicago and raised in La Jolla, California. (The Jo in her name was from her mother, Josephine). Welch was a divorced mother when she met ex-actor turned press agent, Patrick Curtis.

"The irony of it all is that even though people thought of me as a sex symbol, in reality I was a single mother of two small children!" she wrote in her autobiography, "Raquel: Beyond the Cleavage."

Curtis became her manager and second husband and helped shape her into a glamor-girl with hundreds of magazine covers and a string of movies, plus exercise videos and books like "The Raquel Welch Total Beauty and Fitness Program." **MDT/AP**

AD

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MACAUCLOSER



TASTE OF EDESIA

# Evolution of good taste

IRENE SAM, MDT

**H**ENNESSY V.S.O.P — “Very Superior Old Pale” — a Hennessy original, perfectly balanced, universal blend that impresses as much now as the day it was created is proud to unveil a new sleek, more versatile and eco-friendly design that has been carefully conceived to reduce carbon footprint while still upholding Hennessy’s uncompromising standards and cons-

tant strive for reinvention.

The newly launched Hennessy V.S.O.P decanter is made of glass sourced in Cognac and northern France, it also features a contemporary reinterpretation of Maison Hennessy’s emblematic bras armé signature, while the packaging improvements include adopting a wood bottle stopper, using coating-free labels made of recycled paper, and producing gift boxes made of coating-free paper sourced from FSC-certified forests.

These measures have yielded concrete results, eliminating 51 tons of plastic from production, and reducing Hennessy V.S.O.P cognac’s carbon footprint by approximately 4%. Each of these steps is in keeping with the LVMH Life 360 initiative for social and environmental responsibility, an environmental performance roadmap that stipulates removing all virgin fossil-fuel-based plastics from the packaging by 2026. By 2030, all of Hennessy’s new products will be eco-designed.



LIFESTYLE

## SHINE LIKE RIHANNA

**F**OR the Super Bowl LVII Half-time Show, Rihanna hit the biggest stage in the world in a classic Rihanna beauty look – flawless, soft matte skin and her iconic red lips, featuring the Fenty Icon Velvet Liquid Lipstick in The MVP, a luxe and long-lasting liquid lipstick in a universally-flattering red shade, and her go-to complexion products, Fenty Beauty Pro Filt’r Soft Matte Longwear Foundation and Fenty Beauty Invisimatte Instant Setting and Blotting Powder.

Rihanna created Fenty Icon Lipsticks to be seen, and the newest addition to the Fenty Icon family, Velvet Liquid Lipstick, is no exception. When it comes to matte liquid lipsticks, we all know the deal: if you want the intense pigment, put

up with the downside – inevitable dryness and cracking on the lips. Fenty Beauty is adding the Fenty touch to the liquid lipstick category with this game-changing formula. Fenty Icon Velvet Liquid Lipstick offers a luxuriously creamy, whipped formula and rich velvet matte color that lasts. The plush, comfy, and lightweight formula delivers an intensely smooth texture that keeps the fine lines and dry lips at bay. Best of all, it’s available in 5 universal shades and features sleek, iconic packaging with a holographic logo on the cap and a translucent logo on the tube so that you can see the true color of the shade from the start. With just one swipe of its precise doe-foot applicator, lips will enjoy rich full coverage that’s lightweight and lasts. IS



## Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



### THE PHOENIX 1050M SAND

2023-02-18|Sat|14:35

**H**appy Cat is my pick for this Saturday’s sand meeting. He did well in all his sand outings, although this time he draw barrier eight which is not ideal, but I am willing to pick him as my best bet of the day. There is no reason why that he should not do well again, **Happy Cat** is the best horse to get his C&D chance here under no weight. He should prove hard to catch. Expect he can return to his best sand consistent form for he is capable of collecting another win over this sort of racing condition.

Race 2 Horse no. 9 Happy Cat Win & Place bets





**OPINION**

**Multipolar World**

Jorge Costa Oliveira



**CHINA'S ECONOMY AND FOREIGN TRADE IN 2023**

China's relevance in international trade has been steadily increasing. In addition to its major import position in commodities, the increase in disposable income, especially of the urban middle class, has positioned China as an important market for exporters of consumer and industrial goods. On the other hand, China's export sector has also grown significantly, employing circa 180 million people – one quarter of the labor force of urban China.

In 2022, China's exports rose by 7% to a new high of \$3.59 trillion, beating the 2021 record of \$3.36 trillion, according to data released recently by China's General Administration of Customs. Imports increased by 1.1% in 2022. That translated into an annual trade surplus of \$877.6 billion, surpassing the previous high of \$676.43 billion in 2021. With China benefiting from a record trade balance surplus, net exports are expected to have contributed one third (+1%) to China's GDP growth in 2022.

This record surplus in China's trade balance is due to strong exports that have propelled the country's economy for most of the year. But last quarter, the situation was inverted; exports shrank by 9.9% in December, following an 8.7% drop in November, according to recent customs data. This drop (accompanied by a similar decline in imports) was the worst since February 2020. This trend is expected to continue into 2023. Not only is external demand likely to remain weak, but problems in exporting sectors arising from successive waves of covid infections are also likely to have a major impact on the output of many exporting companies. The perceived risks of a recession or a major global slowdown, especially in the EU and the US, exacerbate the trend. Therefore, it is unlikely that China will be able to maintain a trade balance surplus as high as 2022. Admittedly, there are very uncertain exogenous variables (e.g. the price of oil). But most likely, China's export growth will continue to slow and net exports will contribute to Chinese GDP growth by a mere +0.5-1%.

In short, the export sector cannot be expected to be the main growth factor for the Chinese economy this year. Maintaining the existing penetration or having a small reduction in the main destination markets of Chinese products would still be a good result. And a reduced demand for Chinese products in the main destination markets may also have repercussions on (un)employment in the companies in this sector.

Nevertheless, both the central and provincial governments in China seem committed to prioritizing GDP growth above 5% in 2023. For this to happen, the Chinese government is likely to adopt measures to increase domestic demand – including more public spending – and suspend restrictive policies on real estate, technology, and income redistribution. Given the international relevance of the Chinese economy, such policies are especially important for other economic blocs, such as the EU, to also achieve higher growth.

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**JUDGE SLAPS \$335K PENALTY ON RONALDO ACCUSER'S VEGAS LAWYER**

A Las Vegas lawyer has been hit with a \$335,000 penalty for pressing a bid in U.S. courts to force Cristiano Ronaldo to pay millions of dollars more than the \$375,000 in hush money he paid to a Nevada woman who claimed the international soccer star raped her in Las Vegas in 2009.

"I find that Ronaldo would not have incurred a majority of the fees and costs that he spent on this litigation absent plaintiff's counsel's bad faith," U.S. District Judge Jennifer Dorsey said in a scathing, 18-page ruling.

The judge in Las Vegas held plaintiff Kathryn Mayorga's attorney, Les-

lie Mark Stovall, personally responsible for paying Ronaldo's attorneys, led by Peter Christiansen and Kendelea Works.

Stovall and associates in the case, Ross Moynihan and Larissa Drohobyczer, did not immediately respond yesterday [Macau time] to email and telephone messages about the ruling issued earlier this week.

In a related case, a Nevada state court judge who nearly made long-sealed and long-fought documents public by mistake in August rejected Stovall's bid for a court order to unseal crucial documents.

Full story on [macaudailytimes.com](https://www.macaudailytimes.com)

AP PHOTO



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**Philippines**

A strong earthquake rocked a central Philippine province yesterday, sending people out of their homes at night, prompting dozens of patients to be evacuated from a hospital and causing minor damage to a government coliseum and business establishments, officials said. There were no immediate reports of injuries or major damage from the magnitude 6 quake.



AP PHOTO



Kosovo is celebrating 15 years of independence with a month of celebrations starting today while still facing serious challenges with Serbia, which refuses to recognize the autonomy of its former province. A military parade, ceremonies at monuments to national heroes and a special session of parliament are some of the anniversary events planned in the capital, Pristina.

AP PHOTO



Mexican soldiers seized more than a half million fentanyl pills in a raid on what the army's announcement yesterday [Macau time] called the largest synthetic drug lab found to date. The army said the outdoor lab was discovered in Culiacan, the capital of the northern state of Sinaloa. Sinaloa is home to the drug cartel of the same name.

AP PHOTO



Climate change isn't causing the multi-year drought that is devastating parts of Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Bolivia, but warming is worsening some of the dry spell's impacts, a new study says. The natural three-year climate condition La Nina is the chief culprit in a drought that has devastated central South America and is still going on, according to a flash study released yesterday by international scientists at World Weather Attribution.

**REVELERS CELEBRATE STREET CARNIVAL ACROSS GERMAN RHINELAND**

KIRSTEN GRIESHABER, BERLIN

TENS of thousands of revelers danced in the streets of Cologne, Duesseldorf, Bonn and other cities and towns across the Rhineland yesterday as they celebrated the traditional start of Carnival in Germany.

Dressed up in bright colors and creative costumes, they sang loudly and swayed to familiar tunes of brass bands and folklore music, and drank lots of beer.

It is the first time since the start of the pandemic that Carnival is being celebrated in Germany without any coronavirus restrictions.

The first day of Carnival in Germany is also traditionally dedicated to women taking over the power in city halls across the

Rhineland for a day. They symbolically take away the keys from the — mostly male — mayors, and cut off men's ties and shoelaces in return for kisses.

In Duesseldorf, costumed elderly women known as Moehnen stormed city hall at 11:11 a.m, German news agency dpa reported.

"For two years you had your peace, but today it's all about women power. We want the power," shouted Carnival princess Uasa Maisch. "We'll cut off your ties. You're in for it. We want in."

In Cologne alone, tens of thousands of people were expected for the festivities. Police deployed more than 2,000 officers, and the interior minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, where Cologne is located, warned revelers not to drink too much

"Koelsch" — the typical, honey-colored beer of Cologne.

"Everyone should know when there's been enough Koelsch," Herbert Reul told Cologne daily paper Koelner Stadt-Anzeiger.

At the same time, the minister acknowledged that "it's all the more important that there are these days when you can switch off for a few hours and put your worries aside" when concern about war and inflation are on many people's minds most of the time.

Around noontime, Cologne police blocked off the Zuelpicher Viertel neighborhood because it was overflowing with people, dpa reported. No more revelers were allowed to enter the district close to the city's main university that's dotted with many popular bars and pubs.