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THE RETAINING WALL BELOW THE OLD CITY WALL ALONG ESTRADA DE SÃO FRANCISCO CAN BE REBUILT IN A SHORT TIME, DSOP SAYS

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LAWMAKERS ALERTED OF UNBALANCED ‘ECONOMIC RECOVERY’ PENALIZING WORKERS

▲ P3

CHINA RENAISSANCE SAYS MISSING BANKER BAO FAN AIDING PROBE

▲ P6



China At least five workers were killed in a roof collapse at a mine in southwestern China, as hope appeared to be fading for 47 miners trapped under tons of rubble after a mining disaster last week in Inner Mongolia (pictured). In the mine in Sichuan province, 25 miners were underground when part of the roof collapsed Sunday morning. Deadly mine disasters occur regularly in China, although authorities have reduced their toll greatly by emphasizing safety and closing smaller operations.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un opened a major political conference dedicated to agriculture, state media reported yesterday, amid outside assessments that suggest the country is facing a serious shortfall of food. South Korean experts estimate that North Korea is short around 1 million tons of grain, 20 percent of its annual demand, after the pandemic disrupted both farming and imports from China.



Japan Nissan is speeding up its shift toward electric vehicles, especially in Europe where emissions regulations are most stringent, the company said yesterday. Nissan Motor Co. said in a statement that it will make practically all its offerings in Europe electric or series-hybrids by fiscal 2026, at 98%. That's up from the previous target of 75%. In Japan, the company aims to make 58% of its model offerings, up from an earlier target of 55%.

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BIG PHARMA ON TO MACAU, GBA

AP PHOTO

Moderna taps into the GBA market with aims of providing easy access to mRNA science, the Times has learned.

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NATIONAL SECURITY CIVIL REFERENDUM BANNED IN CITY

▲ P3



HONG KONG MURDER SLAIN MODEL'S IN-LAWS, EX-HUSBAND REMAIN IN CUSTODY: COURT

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HOTEL OCCUPANCY RATE AT 71.2% IN JANUARY

The average occupancy rate of guest rooms increased to 71.2% in January from a year earlier by 27.3 percentage points, according to the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). The number of guests of hotel establishments in January went up by 59.6% year-on-year to 819,000; the number of guests from mainland China (646,000) and Hong Kong (105,000) soared by 54.9% and 484.4%, albeit from a low base. Also, 4,800 more tourists made local excursions this January, an increase of 80.4% year-on-year. The overall number of available guest rooms fell by 1.8% year on year to 38,000 due to a decrease in the supply of guest rooms at 5-star hotels.

22.1% DECREASE OF RETAIL SALES VALUE

The value of retail sales for 2022 decreased by 22.1% to MOP57.7 billion, with significant falls of around 30% each in the sales values of Department Stores, Adults' Clothing and Watches, Clocks & Jewelry, according to the data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). Meanwhile, the value of retail sales in the fourth quarter of 2022 decreased by 20.6%, for a total of MOP14.8 billion. After taking price changes into account, the sales volume index decreased by 21.8% year over year. 42.7% of retailers expected the sales volume to be similar to last year in the first quarter, while 70.4% predicted the retail price would maintain the same level year-on-year.

2023 NATIONAL JOINT ADMISSION TO BE HELD IN LATE MAY

The 2023 national joint admission will be held on May 20 and 21. Candidates can register online from March 1 to 15, and proceed with payment and confirmation from March 27 to April 3. Candidates should ensure they meet the qualifications for admission to the examinations. There are over 300 mainland universities involved in the admission program this year, with over 8 of them being national key universities. Candidates should log on to the websites of the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) or joint admission offices of the mainland universities to register, said DSEDJ.

ANNUAL VEHICLE PERIODIC INSPECTION POSTPONED

According to a Transportation Bureau (DSAT) adjustment, all 2023 vehicle annual periodic inspections scheduled for January to March can be delayed to June 30 this year. For the non-commercial vehicles scheduled to complete their 2022 annual periodic inspection, the last day remains March 31; otherwise, they will be considered overdue. According to DSAT, vehicle owners should be aware of the arrangements for the inspection and make an appointment as early as possible. On the DSAT website, citizens can check the date and quota and make an appointment for an inspection.

AL PLENARY

WOMEN'S DAY AS BACKGROUND TO ADDRESS EQUALITY

RENATO MARQUES

THE nearing of International Women's Day on March 8, served as background for several lawmakers of the Legislative Assembly to address the topic of the fairness of treatment to different genders and equality of opportunities for everyone.

The first to address the topic during the period before the agenda was lawmaker Ma Io Fong who said that the "achievement of equal opportunities for both sexes is a core value of social development, and an objective and policy of the government, as well as a fundamental national policy promised by the state."

Adding that the government, with the impulse of society, has been adopting several policies and measures to support the development of women, their role in decision-making "still needs to be elevated."

Lawmaker Ma thinks that the care for women can start in restrooms, calling on the government to better plan public toilets as well as the requirements for such facilities in large-scale commercial establishments, which he thinks are lacking in the number of facilities dedicated to women.



Another of the examples given by Ma is related to the "difficulty for women to rent sports facilities," calling for better planning for facilities "oriented for women and children."

At the decision-making level, the lawmaker noted that in 2021, the number of women in government management and leadership positions, such as members of advisory councils, and judges, among others, have decreased.

Statistics show that some 37.8% of administrative leadership and managerial positions are occupied by women as well as 39.5% of all profes-

sional job posts, figures that do not align to the gender proportion of the employed population.

Ma urges the government to increase the proportion of women in its consultative councils, in management positions in the public administration and justice services, or "to create strict indicators on the proportion of women, to draw the attention of society and companies to the capabilities and advantages of the labor market and women's social participation."

As a representative of the women's federation at the AL, lawmaker Wong Kit Cheng also did not let the date pass

without a note, taking the opportunity to refer to some of the measures taken by the government that, in her opinion, are women-oriented and contribute towards women's wellbeing.

Among these she noted the restructuring of the Women's Affairs Committee that now includes children as well as the new law for the prevention of domestic violence and the establishment of the crime of "sexual harassment."

In relation to parenthood, Wong noted the extension of maternity leave to 70 days and another five days for paternity leave, as well as the improvement of breastfeeding facilities.

Wong also said that "in fact, women have the responsibility of taking care of the family, but this task must be negotiated and shared between the couple, and have the support of the government, society, and companies. This is the only way to continue to create a favorable environment for the development of women."

To fight the declining birthrate, she urged the government to improve labor rules to facilitate the return of women, after birth, to the labor market to "increase women's desire for having children."

HERITAGE

Timetable not available for the repairs of the old city wall

STAFF REPORTER

THE retaining wall below the old city wall along Estrada de São Francisco can be rebuilt in a short time, after which the old city wall will be passed to the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) for repairs, according to the Public Works Bureau (DSOP).

According to Leong Wai Man, the president of IC, the

wall will be repaired using the original materials after the consolidation. The specific timetable is not available, and further communication is needed between IC and the public works departments.

A section of the collapsed wall, measuring 10 meters, should be rebuilt "layer by layer" instead of just "pouring the cement", said Leong. She stated that the duration of the

construction project will also be confirmed after the project is awarded and the scheme is formulated.

An announcement from DSOP on February 24 said that they employed an independent third party to conduct continual monitoring of the site with 3D lasers. A slope of the old city wall near a hospital is waiting for an optimization project.

The official website of DSOP also announced that the construction of the Black Box theatre will be completed in April, a month later than the provided date on the contract. Leong expects that the theatre will open in the third quarter of this year after two months of facility installation and testing. Appointments for it will be open to citizens and groups. The two theatres in it can each accommodate 100 people.

Nearly a third of the old city wall along Estrada de São Francisco collapsed last June because of a landslide incident. The follow-up consolidation has lasted for eight months.

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AL PLENARY

Lawmakers alerted of unbalanced 'economic recovery' penalizing workers

RENATO MARQUES

THE return to high activity in different economic sectors, revived by the sudden increase in the number of visitors, is creating an unbalanced recovery of the local economy that is penalizing workers while benefiting employers, lawmaker Lei Chan U said yesterday at the Legislative Assembly (AL) in a spoken inquiry delivered in the period before the agenda of the plenary session.

Lei noted that over the last three years "many workers had their salaries frozen or were forced to take long-term unpaid leave, but they insisted on standing by their companies during those difficult times." Lei added that it is now time for companies to repay workers by increasing workers' wages, "so that they may also receive the fruits of the recovery and economic development."

Several lawmakers, namely those representing the workers' sector, have been remarking that while companies have called for extra efforts from their workers during the pandemic with unpaid leave, salary cuts, and other losses of privileges, after the pandemic they were called again to put in extra effort namely to face the



shortage of manpower.

Lawmakers said these workers were requested to work even harder and, in many cases, to work longer hours as companies had dismissed many workers without hiring new ones.

Lei added that the problem is broader and extends beyond the

borders of Macau, being addressed in a recent meeting from the Asia-Pacific International Labour Organization (ILO) that took place in Singapore at the end of 2022.

In this meeting, ILO appealed to all countries to do more to ensure inclusive growth, pointing out that despite the big differen-

ces in socio-economic situations of different countries, they face a common problem, which is, "workers, companies, and families in all countries have been hit hard due to the pandemic," which resulted in financial problems, loss of purchasing power and, in many cases, had a major impact on the economic stability of the household.

A joint declaration was signed at the meeting that highlights "the need to strengthen effective social dialogue and tripartite cooperation to promote social justice and fundamental principles and rights at work, in favor of promoting full, productive and freely chosen employment, and of everyone's right to decent work," the lawmakers said.

They also noted that the current negotiation system that seats at the same table, workers, employers, and government - Standing Committee for the Coordination of Social Affairs (CPCS) - has not been successful in achieving the goal of "decent work conditions," urging the government to also simplify and accelerate the work on the resolution of labor-related disputes.

On the same topic but in a different spoken inquiry, lawmaker Nick Lei said that there are still

many residents who are suffering from unemployment and underemployment, noting recent official statistics from January that show only a slight decrease in the unemployment rate.

"It should be noted that, although the economy is gradually recovering, many workers have not yet managed to return to work. Many residents are waiting in anticipation for the wealth partaking scheme [cash handouts] to relieve the pressure of life," he said, adding that "the government should pay attention to unemployed residents and people with financial difficulties, affected by the epidemic, and introduce measures to stabilize the life of the population, so that everyone, including unskilled workers, can experience post-epidemic recovery."

On the other hand, the representative of the business sector, lawmaker Wang Sai Man expressed resistance to increasing the minimum wage and the number of paid days for maternity leave. According to Wang, if the government opts to increase these benefits small and medium sized companies will need new measures, such as tax cuts, exemptions, and subsidies so the new measures will not be an "extra burden."

NATIONAL SECURITY

Civil referendum banned in city, parliamentary committee reiterates

ANTHONY LAM

REFERENDA not initiated by the government are illegal in Macau, a parliamentary committee noted yesterday.

After studying the National Security Law Amendment Bill, the First Standing Committee of the parliament held a press conference, at which its president, Ella Lei, made the comment.

Government officials attended the main meeting to answer questions from lawmakers.

Lei was asked whether private citizens who attempt to initiate referenda in the future will be subject to prosecutions under the Bill. To this, she cited gover-

ment officials saying that such referenda is banned pursuant to other laws of Macau.

She added that a referendum is a "public law activity with a defined legal meaning" and they are subject to specific legal provisions that regulate them. "[Referenda] are different from surveys," the lawmaker added.

She was then asked to elaborate whether future civil referendum initiators will be prosecuted, to which she refrained from giving a direct answer, saying that it should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Government officials were also cited as saying that civil referenda are unconstitutional. Either

contravening the Constitution or initiating an unconstitutional referendum is targeted at secession. The officials also commented that "relevant activities" are illegal and do not fall within the scope of obstructing public discussions.

The government stated that abetting or supporting rebellion, a new concept in the Bill, refers to instigating or facilitating the planned crime with a clear subject in public or private, directly or indirectly, including providing material, intelligence or financial support to specific targets. The committee recommended the government clearly define the relevant subjects, the means and the purpose of

conducting the proposed crimes.

On the sidelines of the press conference, Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak hinted at the necessity for mutual judicial assistance between Macau and mainland China. With such arrangements, Wong said, both jurisdictions will be able to facilitate transfers of suspects, mutual recognition of evidence and handling of compensation.

His comments were made when he was questioned on concerns over mainland drivers fleeing responsibility after causing traffic accidents in Macau after driving license mutual recognition is enacted on May 16.

Adding to his foremen-



tioned comments, Wong said that current partnerships will be sufficient to deal with such matters.

The official was also asked about the future of the Macau-Zhuhai border-crossing daily cap. He pointed out that one of the two border checkpoints where the measure is imposed - the Border Gate - is under renovation with limited crowd handling capacities, and tried to justify the need for the measure.

At the same event, the security official was also

asked to comment on the easing of mask-wearing requirements, which he described as "a welcome move." The official did not wear a mask while he was speaking to the press.

"So now I don't have a mask but my smile on," the official said, adding that the easing will be beneficial to both residents and visitors in terms of resuming normal lives. However, he reminded people to remain vigilant, while hoping that no new waves of infections will occur.

Q&A PATRICK BERGSTEDT
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMERCIALS, MODERNA

Moderna taps into the GBA market with aims of providing easy access to mRNA science

LYNZY VALLES

THE Covid-19 pandemic has led to major shifts in society and particularly the global healthcare system as pharma companies have been working at speed to ensure that people around the world are able to move past the pandemic and live freely.

With several experts saying that Covid-19 is here to stay, companies such as Moderna are working on new vaccines that could help target not just Covid, but also the seasonal influenza and make such vaccines easily accessible to the public.

Over the past year, Moderna has received approval for Omicron-targeting bivalent boosters in the United States, Canada, Europe, Switzerland, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, and the UK.

This year, the company has plans to continue expanding across Asia-Pacific, including Macau and Hong Kong as it welcomes the opportunity to be part of any biotech incubator that emerges in this region.

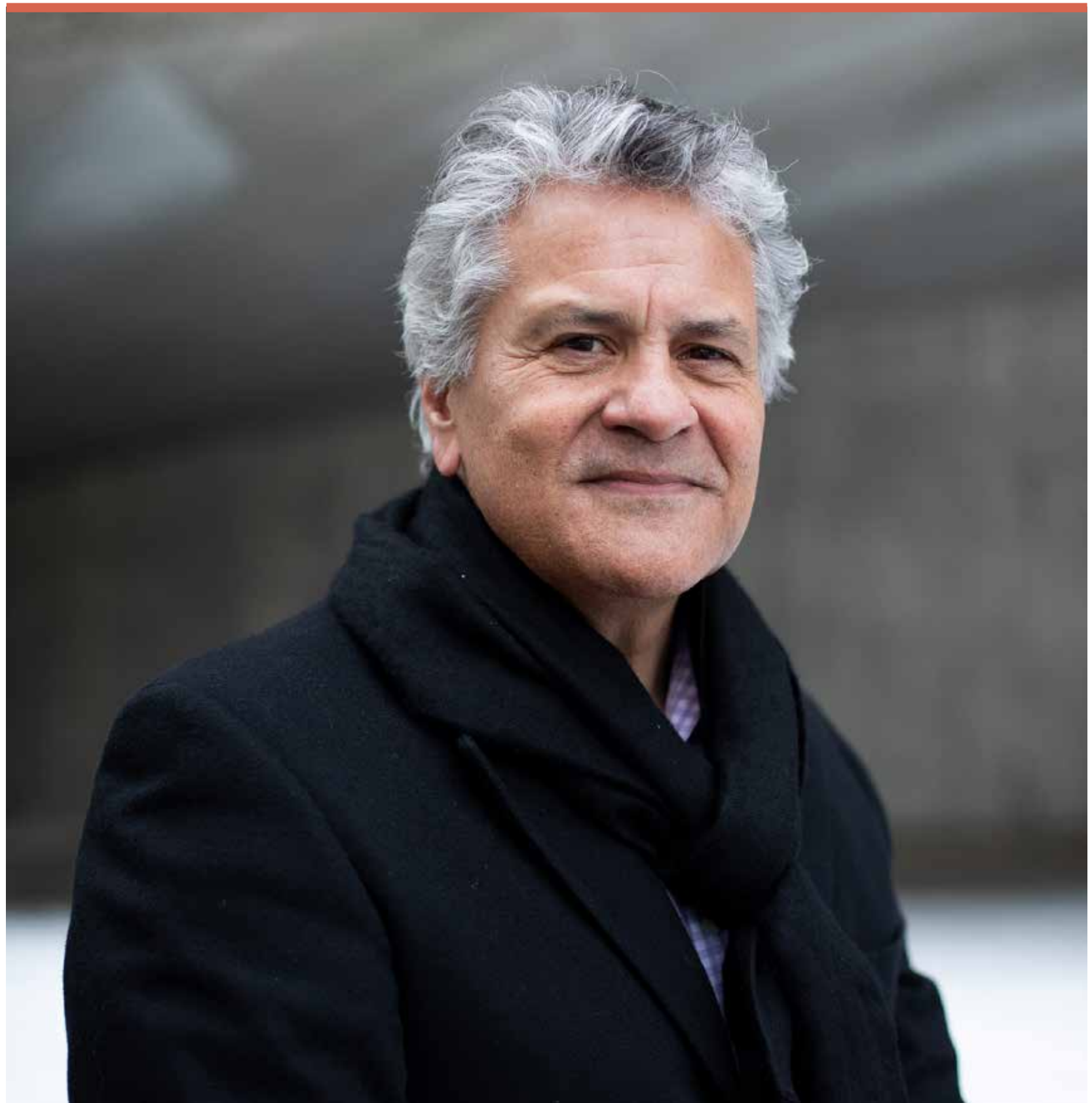
Patrick Bergstedt, senior vice president of Commercials at Moderna spoke with the Times in an exclusive interview to discuss its plans for tapping into the GBA market.

According to him, the group sees Macau as "part of GBA and even though it's a distinctive market we see it a holistic region which is very attractive in what's we're trying to accomplish."

Macau Daily Times (MDT) – With Macau finally transitioned into the endemic period, can you provide some insight on Moderna's data on how [Covid-19] will further evolve into some flu, and hence, vaccines the company is working on to fight this flu?

Patrick Bergstedt (PB) – What's very important to consider as we think about Covid-19 and how it has evolved and how it has continuous to evolve, is that Covid is not over; it continues to evolve. The virus that is circulating today in 2023 is not the same virus that caused the pandemic. it has undergone a number of changes and the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 variant of concern is still the most prevailing variant that is causing infection. Therefore, as the virus has changed, the vaccine also needs to change and be updated.

Most countries around the world have now authorized and approved the Moderna [vaccines]



for BA.4 and BA.5 variant. The bivalent vaccine consists of two variants: the prototype, the so-called Wuhan strain and the BA.5 Omicron containing strain. That is the vaccine that is now being authorized around the world. And that is the vaccine that we have submitted for authorization or approval by the regulator in Macau. [...] Our mission is to really fulfill the promise of mRNA which is going to transform how diseases are treated but also how diseases are prevented. What's unique and revolutionary is that mRNA basically helps the body do what it does best, which is protect each of us.

We don't differentiate [between] Hong Kong, Macau and China. We are committed to make our information available to the people of China

MDT – Can you give a refresher on how these vaccines will be different?

PB – What we hope to do is to bring the mRNA vaccine to the people from Hong Kong and Macau and the GBA region so that life can get back to normal. People are tired and fed up and peo-

ple just want [to] get back to normal. But what we need to ensure is that people are adequately protected and get health security from vaccination.

These vaccines [provide] more targeted protection against the current circulating virus. It's been updated. It's been impro-

ved. And therefore, it provides a more specific neutralizing antibody response which [is] actually what provides people [with] protection against hospitalization [and] death, [in] particular, vulnerable population[s].

MDT – Macau's healthcare system is not as strong as those in Hong Kong or the neighboring regions, how can Moderna tap into the local market? Or is it reliant on the GBA market?

PB – In early 2022, Moderna took the decision to expand and up until that point, our presence was very much in North America, Western Europe, and

so we have taken the decision to expand in Japan, South Korea. We kind of zoomed in to Southeast Asia. Based upon various specific criteria, we selected Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan and Singapore [because of its] healthcare system, academic university kind of environment. We chose sites where [there is a] good healthcare system, but also where well-respected scientific leaders are; a place where the environment is pro-vaccine and believes in the value of vaccination and protecting the society.

In December of last year, we opened up our regional office in Hong Kong. We don't separate Macau, Hong Kong and GBA. We look at it as one region with great people, great talent and environment that is very pro for scientific research.

We see Macau as part of GBA and even though it's a distinctive market we see it a holistic region which is very attractive [for] what we're trying to accomplish: which is bring mRNA science [to] this part of the world so people can get access to [the] best technology and benefit from what mRNA offers.

MDT – Following Covid, what significant changes have pharmaceutical companies undergone? For sure it had a greater need for data, scientists and related experts. How has the industry evolved.

PB – With Covid, a lot has changed. The world has not seen this kind of pandemic for hundreds of years. [...] Now we are starting to move from pandemic to endemic and therefore the industry now needs to move back to all those normal standards of timelines and review cycles. I think the opportunity now is how do we accelerate access and learn from how quickly we're able to bring these vaccines at the time of crisis and keep that speed so people can get the benefit. How do we take the good things we've learned and apply them in the normal environment so people can get access to innovative care as rapidly as possible.

MDT – Moderna is in active conversations with China but with its strong adherence to its locally-made vaccines, does this serve as a big challenge to tapping into the mainland market?

PB – Moderna's mission to the world is to fulfill the promise of what mRNA does. Our commitment is to make that science and our innovation available to the people of China. We don't differentiate [between] Hong Kong, Macau and China. We are committed to make our information available to the people of China. I think that we welcome the opportunities to

have dialogues with authorities in China to make our medicines and vaccines available.

MDT – Going back to GBA market, can you provide us some color on the timeline of your project?

PB. – I've had discussions with authorities in Hong Kong about the huge opportunities in the GBA region It's 80-90 million people. I know there are lots of things that need to be worked out but we welcome the opportunity with a lot of reasons. There is the innovation through technology parks that have been established in the region.

The Hong Kong government is investing in biotechnology hubs. We welcome the opportunity to be part of any biotech incubator that emerges in this region. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to science and be [a] source of employment for excellent talent that exists in this region.

MDT – There are still people who are not willing to take the jobs. Is there still a need to shift this mindset?

PB – I sort of see three groups of people. One group of people who are always or are very regularly consistent with their vaccine. We need to continue supporting that group of people. Then there's another who are on the extreme opposite [end]: they are the naysayers and probably no matter what we do, it's going to be difficult to convince them. But I believe there are many people in the middle who used to be hesitant. I think the opportunity here is to work with scientific leaders, healthcare professionals, [and the] ministry of health to ensure that people have access to authentic, reliable and trustworthy information.

MDT – The investment in creating these new vaccines is huge but also opportunities are arising amid the endemic. What is the company's outlook for this year?

PB – There are 48 different programs in various stages [of] clinical development. Today, our focus is on respiratory vaccines because respiratory disease has [a] huge impact on mobility mortality. There is a huge opportunity to protect society with more effective vaccines. Traditional flu vaccines are unfortunately not very effective and maybe have 50-60% of efficacy depending on the seasonal strain of the virus that is circulating. If we can now bring mRNA efficacy to 90%, that is going to be transformational. [...] Moderna is developing a combination vaccine so that in the future, we have one vaccine that protects you from covid, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).



CRIME

Police bust another sham marriage

ANTHONY LAM

FOUR people have been arrested on charges of masterminding and conducting a sham marriage in order to obtain Macau residency, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) disclosed yesterday.

Similar to many previous cases, this case was referred for police investigations by the Identification Services Bureau (DSI).

The four suspects are surnamed Ji, 22; Huang, 29; Chan, 41 and Chong, 52. Ji and Chan are mother and daughter, while Huang and Zhong are mother and son.

Ji had applied for residency for her purported husband on the basis of marriage and reunion.

On Feb. 20, the police invited Huang and Chong for an interview, and intercepted Ji and Chan at the Border Gate Checkpoint on the same day.

Preliminary investigations revealed that in 2017, Huang's family gave Ji's family a sum of 40,000 Chinese yuan to resolve economic problems, which later turned out to be a fund to support Ji's application for Macau residency in areas of accommodations and transportation, the police were told by the suspects.

It was also revealed that Ji's father possessed Macau residency before 2017, and Ji only obtained the residency around 2017/2018.

To repay the goodwill, Ji's family agreed to marry the daughter

to Huang so that the latter could apply for Macau residency. The two young people had their marriage registered in August 2019.

Police investigations showed that the two had never lived "as a married couple" in either Macau or mainland China.

After the arrest, only Ji admitted to the offence. The remaining three people have denied the accusations, the police noted.

The police also disclosed that during the period when the couple was legally married, both of them had other partners. Ji had a boyfriend at the time she was arrested, and Huang told the police that he had broken up with his girlfriend.

CURRENCY EXCHANGE SCAM

In another case, a physical confinement reported to the police was later discovered to be a currency exchange scam instead, the Judiciary Police (PJ) said.

The case was first referred to the PJ by the PSP on Feb. 23. The first report, made by a hotel's security guards, led the PSP to identify the case as physical confinement. Further investigations have categorized it as a currency exchange scam.

A mainland man named Pan, 21, was arrested at a hotel in Cotai. Two mainland men were victims in the case.

Earlier that day, the two victims were gambling in a casino when they dug up a contact of an illicit currency exchange

operator from their WeChat. They wanted to exchange some Chinese yuan for Hong Kong Dollars.

After negotiations, the two parties agreed to exchange 89,600 yuan for 100,000 dollars.

The operator referred them to another person, Pan, who asked them to meet at the food court at the hotel in Cotai, where Pan asked them to transfer the yuan to a designated account.

After the transfer, Pan started "counting money" in his backpack with extreme caution. The police added that they were told Pan tried to hide the cash from the sight of the two victims. After several attempts at counting, the two men could still not see the cash they were supposed to receive.

One of the two victims then grabbed two cash notes from Pan and discovered that they were film aids.

With their requests to get their money returned unanswered, the two victims started struggling with Pan and eventually alarmed security guards.

PJ investigators found 198 film aid cash notes in Pan's backpack. Pan confessed that he was lured to earn 10,000 yuan in seven days by a criminal syndicate. He was told to exchange the film aid for real money in order to earn the income purportedly promised.

As Pan is under custody for further investigations, the two victims reported a loss of 89,600 yuan.

AP PHOTO



Sen. Lindsey Graham and Sen. Richard Blumenthal speak during a news conference on legislation labeling the Russian Wagner Group as one of the Foreign Terrorist Organization earlier this month

DIPLOMACY

CHINA ACCUSES US OF 'BULLYING' WITH NEW 'ILLEGAL' SANCTIONS

CHINA yesterday accused the U.S. of "outright bullying and double standards" in leveling what it called "illegal" sanctions on Chinese companies as part of U.S. actions against Russia's Wagner Group and related companies and individuals.

The entities were targeted for their role in the war in Ukraine and mercenary activities, including human rights abuses, in Africa.

The sanctions "have no basis in international law or authorization from the Security Council, and are typical illegal unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a daily briefing.

The punitive measures were

"seriously harming China's interests" and China "strongly rejects and deplores that and has lodged solemn complaints with the U.S. side," Mao said.

"While the U.S. has intensified its efforts to send weapons to one of the parties to the conflict, resulting in an endless war, it has frequently spread false information about China's supply of weapons to Russia, taking the opportunity to sanction Chinese companies for no reason," she said. "This is outright bullying and double standards."

The Treasury and State departments announced the moves in coordinated statements that targeted dozens of Wagner Group affiliates, including some

in the Central African Republic and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the president of Russia's Kalashnikov Concern, the original manufacturer of the AK-47 assault rifle.

Wagner, a private Russian military company, has been involved in heavy fighting in the east of Ukraine.

The sanctions also hit the Chinese company Changsha Tianyi Space Science and Technology Research Institute Co. Ltd., also known as Spacety China, which has supplied Wagner Group affiliates with satellite imagery of Ukraine that support Wagner's military operations there. A Luxembourg-based subsidiary of Spacety China was also targeted. MDT/AP

CHINA RENAISSANCE

COMPANY SAYS MISSING BANKER BAO FAN AIDING PROBE

MISSING Chinese investment banker Bao Fan is co-operating with an investigation in China, his company China Renaissance said in a stock market filing over the weekend.

Since Bao went missing, China Renaissance Holdings Ltd.'s Hong Kong-listed shares have slumped as much as 29%. They were up 2.3% yesterday.

"The Board has become aware that Mr. Bao is currently cooperating in an investigation being carried out by certain authorities in the People's Republic of China," the company filing said. "The board would like to reiterate that the business and operations of the group are continuing normally."

Bao's whereabouts are unclear. It is not unusual for Chinese authorities to detain people in the course of inves-

tigations without making any public announcements.

Bao is one of China's top dealmakers in the technology industry, having worked on major deals including e-commerce company JD.com's \$2 billion initial public offering and the public listing of short video platform Kuaishou in Hong Kong.

After working at Credit Suisse and Morgan Stanley, Bao founded China Renaissance in 2005. He took it public in 2018, raising \$346 million.

Bao's disappearance follows a crackdown on big technology companies in the past two years. Anti-graft investigations targeting the financial sector have ensnared dozens of Chinese officials and finance executives at institutions such as Everbright Securities, China Construction Bank and major bank ICBC. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



DIPLOMACY

Beijing protests US surveillance plane's Taiwan Strait flight

CHINA said it closely monitored the flight of a U.S. surveillance plane through the Taiwan Strait yesterday, accusing the U.S. of having "deliberately disrupted and undermined the regional situation."

Chinese forces organized to keep an eye on the passage of the P-8A Poseidon anti-submarine patrol plane and "all matters

were in hand," the People's Liberation Army's Eastern Theater Command said in a social media posting.

China regards self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory to be brought under its control by force if necessary, and views the passage of foreign military ships and aircraft through the 160-kilometer (100-mile)-wide strait as deliberate snubs and provocations.

While U.S. warships regularly transit the strait, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, it is more rare for U.S. military aircraft to do so.

The PLA command accused the U.S. of having "played up" the flight, which it said "endangered peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."

"We firmly oppose this. Theater troops maintain a

high level of alert at all times and will resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity," it said.

In a brief statement, the U.S. 7th Fleet said a Navy P-8A Poseidon transited the Taiwan Strait in international airspace yesterday.

"The United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate anywhere interna-

tional law allows including within the Taiwan Strait," it said. "By operating within the Taiwan Strait in accordance with international law, the United States upholds the navigational rights and freedoms of all nations."

The flight comes as tensions between the sides have spiked over the shooting down of a suspected Chinese spy balloon off

the East Coast and U.S. warnings to Beijing not to provide Russia with military aid to help its war against Ukraine.

China regularly sends warships into waters near Taiwan and fighters and other military aircraft into its air defense buffer zone in an attempt to intimidate the island's pro-independence government and its U.S. supporters. MDT/AP

HONG KONG

Slain model's in-laws, ex-husband appear in court

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

THE ex-husband and former in-laws of a slain Hong Kong model were put in custody without bail yesterday on a joint murder charge, after police found parts of her body in a refrigerator.

Ex-husband Alex Kwong, his father Kwong Kau and his brother Anthony Kwong were charged with murdering model Abby Choi. His mother, Jenny Li, faces one count of perverting the course of justice. The four were placed in custody without bail.

Choi, 28, was a model with more than 100,000 followers on Instagram. Her last post was Feb. 19, featuring a photoshoot she had done with fashion magazine L'Officiel Monaco.

Choi went missing Feb. 21, according to a report filed later with the Hong Kong Police.

On Friday, police found her dismembered body in a refrigerator in a house rented by Kwong Kau in Lung Mei Tsuen, a subur-



In this image taken from video footage run by TVB Hong Kong, journalists try to film a police van believed to be carrying relatives of murdered model Abby Choi [right] on its arrival at the Kowloon City Law Courts Building in Hong Kong, yesterday

ban part of Hong Kong about a 30-minute drive from the border with mainland China.

On Sunday, authorities discovered a young woman's skull believed to be Choi's in a cooking pot that was seized from the house. Officials believe that a hole on the right rear of the skull is where the fatal attack struck her.

Choi had financial disputes in-

volving tens of millions of Hong Kong dollars with her ex-husband and his family, police said earlier, adding that "some people" were unhappy with how Choi handled her financial assets.

Choi's friend Bernard Cheng said she had four children: two sons ages 10 and 3, and two daughters ages 8 and 6. Kwong, 28, fathered the elder two, and her

current husband, Chris Tam, was the father of the younger children.

Tam said he was very thankful to have had Choi in his life and praised her for being supportive, friend Pao Jo-yea relayed in a Facebook post.

"When Abby was alive, she was a very kind person and always wanted to help people," he was

quoted as saying in the post. "I feel anyone who had a chance to be her family or her friend are blessed."

Pao, who is married to Cheng, told The Associated Press that she has known Choi for over seven years.

"She was the type of person that wouldn't have enemies," she said.

Cheng said Choi had very good relationships with her family, and would travel with the families of her current and former husbands together. Choi's current father-in-law is one of the founders of a famous Hong Kong chain of Yunnan rice noodle shops, local newspaper The Standard reported.

The gruesome killing of Choi has gripped many in Hong Kong and across the border in mainland China, as the self-governed southern Chinese city is widely considered safe with a very low level of violent crime.

Her case is one of the most shocking killings Hong Kong has seen since 2013, when a man killed his parents and their heads were later found in refrigerators. In another famous 1999 case, a woman was kidnapped and tortured by three members from an organized crime group before her death. Her skull was later found stuffed in a Hello Kitty doll.

The hearing of the murder case was adjourned to May. MDT/AP

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IRAQ

President Rashid says country now peaceful, life is returning

JOHN DANISZEWSKI,
BAGHDAD

NEARLY 20 years after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein by U.S.-led forces, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid wants the world to know his country now is at peace, democratic and intent on rebuilding economic life while maintaining a government that serves the whole country and the region.

Rashid told The Associated Press yesterday [Macau time] that after overcoming the hardships of the past two decades, Iraq is ready to focus on improving everyday life for its people. Those hardships included years of resistance to foreign troops, violence between Sunnis and Shiites, and attacks by Islamic State group extremists who once controlled large areas, including Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul.

"Peace and security is all over the country, and I would be very glad if you will report that and emphasize on that, instead of giving a picture of Iraq ... still (as) a war zone, which a lot of media still do," Rashid said.

While Iraq's major fighting has ended, there have been some recent outbreaks of violence — including on the day of Rashid's election, which came after a yearlong stalemate following the October 2021 election. Ahead of the vote, at least nine rockets targeted Iraq's Parliament inside Baghdad's fortified Green Zone.

After Rashid's election, he nominated Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, who formed a government with the backing of a coalition of Iran-backed parties and with promises of improving security and public services.

Despite its oil wealth, Iraq's infrastructure remains weak. Private generators fill in for the hours of daily state electricity cuts. Long-promised public transportation projects, including a Baghdad metro, have not come to fruition.

Rashid said this is due to damage as "a result of conflicts and as a result of terror, as a result of a number of years living at war."

Government critics say the sputtering electricity supply is also a result of endemic corruption, rooted in the coun-



Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid is interviewed in Saddam Hussein's former palace in the old Green Zone in Baghdad

try's sectarian power-sharing system that allows political elites to use patronage networks to consolidate power.

Rashid, who spoke at his presidential quarters in Saddam's former palace, also asserted that most Iraqis believe the 2003 invasion of Saddam-ruled Iraq by the United States and its allies was necessary because of the former dictator's brutality.

He said he believes most Iraqis, "including all sections of the society, the Kurds, the Sunni, the Christian, the Shiites, they were all against" Saddam and appreciate that the U.S. and its allies came to "save" Iraq.

"Obviously certain things did not work out as we hoped. Nobody expected Daesh (the Islamic State group) and nobody expected car bombs," he said. "It should have been controlled right from the beginning. It should have been studied and planned out right from the beginning. I think the myth was that once Saddam is removed, Iraq becomes heaven."

The reality proved more difficult, he said, but it hasn't weakened Iraq's commitment to democracy.

"Even if you have conflicts and if we have arguments, it's much better to have a freedom and democracy rather than a dictatorship," he said.

However, mass anti-government demonstrations that kicked off in late 2019 were often put down by force. Hundreds of protesters were killed by security forces and state-backed armed groups.

Rashid acknowledged there are still conflicts, but urged Iraqis, particularly the younger generation, to be patient and have faith in the future. "We don't have much choice but to live together ... and let our democratic election take place to represent our values," said Rashid, a veteran Kurdish politician and former water minister after Saddam's ouster.

Rashid assumed the presidency in October. Under Iraq's unofficial power-sharing arrangement, the country's president is always a Kurd, the prime minister a Shiite and the parliament speaker a Sunni.

Rashid's job entails helping to maintain a delicate balance among Iraq's various centers of political power and even-keel relations with both the U.S. and Iran, the government's two key — and often opposing — international backers.

The balancing act is reflected in a monument near Baghdad airport. It extolls Iran's Revolutionary Guard commander Qassem Soleimani, who was targeted and

killed in a 2020 U.S. airstrike.

Improving relations with neighbors including Iran, Syria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Jordan is a source of strength for Iraq, Rashid said. Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia had for years kept a distance from Iraq, partly because of its ties to Iran.

He noted with pride that Iraq hosted a Mideast meeting of senior Arab lawmakers on Saturday and expressed the country's willingness to continue serving as a mediator in now-stalled talks between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Rashid also promised to take a hard line on corruption.

Economically, he said, Iraq is focusing on rebuilding industry and agriculture damaged by years of conflict, and developing its natural gas reserves so as not to be dependent on buying gas from neighboring countries — notably Iran.

Despite the currency's devaluation and inflation in recent months, Iraq's prospects are good, he said, buoyed by strong oil production and high global oil prices.

"Iraq economically is in a sound position and probably is one of the countries in the world which (does not have) a deficit in our budget," he said. MDT/AP

this day in history

1986 SWEDISH PRIME MINISTER ASSASSINATED



The Swedish prime minister has died after being shot in a street ambush in central Stockholm. His wife was wounded.

Olof and Lisbeth Palme were attacked as they were leaving a cinema at about 2330 local time. Mr Palme was shot twice in the stomach, his wife was shot in the back.

Police say a taxi-driver used his mobile radio to raise the alarm. Two young girls sitting in a car close to the scene of the shooting tried to help the Prime Minister.

He was rushed to hospital but was dead on arrival. Mrs Palme is being treated for her injury, but it is not thought to be life threatening.

Mr Palme, 59, and a social democrat, was serving his second term as leader. He believed in open government and shunned tight security.

He had two bodyguards to protect him on official functions but frequently walked unattended through the Swedish capital and went on holidays unescorted to his summer cottage on the island of Gotland.

His assassination will come as a shock to the Swedes. They have always taken great pride in the fact their prime minister could walk openly in the streets without the security which accompanies other heads of state.

Mr Palme will be remembered as a campaigner for the working classes and Third World causes. He was first elected as prime minister in 1969.

He became a leading advocate of peace and non violence and campaigned for an end to the war in Vietnam.

He saw himself carrying the banner of Social Democracy through Europe at a time when the Right was only temporarily in triumph.

He once said: "I know that the Thatchers and the Reagans will be out in a few years. We have to survive till then."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Olof Palme's deputy Ingvar Carlsson was chosen to succeed him as Social Democratic party leader.

At the time of his death, Mr Palme had been accused of being pro-Soviet and not safeguarding Sweden's interests. Arrangements had been made for a trip to Moscow to discuss Soviet submarine incursions into Swedish waters.

A drug addict and social outcast, Christer Pettersson, 42, was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder in July 1989.

The verdict immediately became controversial as the court's two judges voted for acquittal but six lay assessors disagreed.

In October 1989, Pettersson was cleared. Although several witnesses thought they could place him at the scene of the crime, no motive was ever found for the killing.

Pettersson died in September 2004. He was reported to have confessed to the killing before his death.

The investigation into Olof Palme's death remains open.

In November 2006 police recovered a Smith and Wesson revolver believed to have been used in the murder. It was found in a lake in central Sweden.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

 ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Don't let friends or relatives rule your life. Don't hesitate to come right out and ask for the pertinent information. Unexpected visitors are likely. Be prepared to do your chores early.	 TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Keep your ears open, especially to those who care about you. Stabilize your own position by locking up your savings. You may be up for some changes in your home.
 GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Express your interest if you want the relationship to progress. Be discreet about any information you uncover. Don't make unreasonable promises.	 CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Deception is probable if you don't use discrimination. Be sure to question any detail that you feel could leave you in a precarious position at a later date.
 LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Don't be too shy to promote your own interests. You should follow through on educational endeavors you have wanted to pursue for some time.	 VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Take time to deal with legal documents and the affairs of people who you may be indebted to. You will be prone to carelessness that could result in accidents.
 LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Try not to be so demonstrative. There'll be difficulties if you spend too much. Expect to have more people on your domestic scene. You will be emotional about family matters.	 SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Try to accommodate them without infringing on your own responsibilities. Avoid being overly opinionated or you will alienate friends. You can make career moves that will be prosperous.
 SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 It's time to reevaluate your motives. You should want to feel good about yourself and your goals. Don't let your partner start any arguments.	 CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 You can avoid hassles by sticking to your work and refusing to get involved in gossip or idle chatter. You can come up with future trends in creative fields.
 AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Abrupt changes concerning your professional position are evident. Your creative ideas must be put to good use. Verbal abuse could lead to carelessness.	 PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 You may have a problem with coworkers if you try to tell them what to do. Pursue outdoor activities or any physical exertion.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY					EASY+				
4	7	3	6					3	4
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			2	1	7	2	3		5
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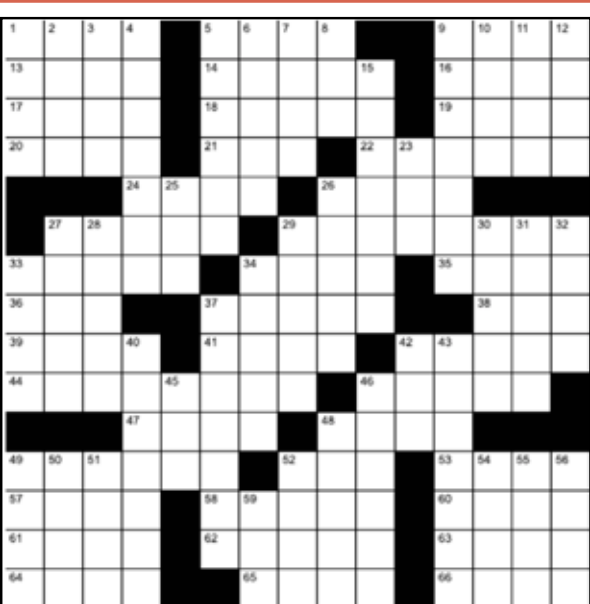
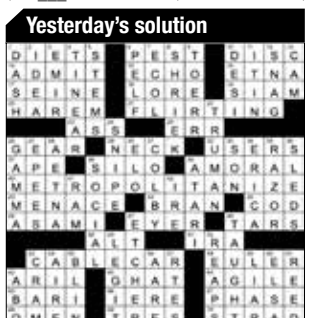
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	1	15	fine
Changchun	-1	5	cloudy
Chengdu	11	17	overcast
Chongqing	12	15	rain
Fuzhou	7	21	overcast
Guangzhou	10	24	fine
Guiyang	4	13	cloudy
Haikou	16	23	cloudy
Hangzhou	4	19	cloudy
Harbin	-1	3	cloudy
Hefei	0	16	rain
Nanjing	3	16	rain
Shanghai	4	17	fine
Taipei	12	20	fine
Wuhan	1	15	rain
Hong Kong	17	21	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-8	1	snow
Frankfurt	-3	6	overcast
Paris	-1	7	overcast
London	4	9	cloudy
New York	0	4	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Panama and bowler; 5- American space agency; 9- Type of school or cook; 13- Monetary unit of Greece; 14- Malfunction; 16- Architect Saarinen; 17- Whence; 18- Transfer; 19- Mont. neighbor; 20- Ciao!; 21- Sun. talk; 22- Like bread dough; 24- Mutual fund fee; 26- Equal a bet; 27- Old French expression meaning "goodbye"; 29- What senators play?; 33- Lend ___; 34- Big rig; 35- Long ago; 36- Nabokov novel; 37- Memento; 38- Process leather; 39- Depend; 41- Cheer; 42- Gnu cousin; 44- Guess; 46- ___ and desist; 47- Jittery; 48- Torah holders; 49- Threat finale; 52- Indignation; 53- Intentions; 57- Emptiness; 58- Italian lady; 60- Broad smile; 61- French 101 verb; 62- Some locks; 63- Defense grp. since 1949; 64- Requirement; 65- Cabbagelike plant; 66- All over again;

DOWN 1- Weight; 2- Mystique; 3- Horse's gait; 4- East African nation; 5- Capital of the Bahamas; 6- Needed liniment; 7- Arouse; 8- ___ Wiedersehen; 9- Punishment; 10- Cincinnati club; 11- Quod ___ demonstrandum; 12- Slow; 15- Saliva enzyme; 23- Clockmaker Terry; 25- ___ the land of the free...; 26- Celestial body; 27- Aconcagua's range; 28- Passed out; 29- Black tea; 30- Little bits; 31- Large wading bird; 32- Dispatch; 33- Bern's river; 34- Like a smokestack; 37- Calamity; 40- Ceded; 42- A mouse; 43- Garfield's snack; 45- Rx writers; 46- Wrinkle; 48- Synthetic fiber; 49- Baking chamber; 50- Routine; 51- Land of shamrocks; 52- To Live and Die ___; 54- Teheran's country; 55- Microscopic arachnid; 56- Chilly powder?; 59- Cask wood;




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
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TRADE

HUAWEI DOMINATES MWC MOBILE TECH FAIR DESPITE US SANCTIONS

KELVIN CHAN, BARCELONA

A contingent of Chinese companies led by technology giant Huawei is turning the world's biggest wireless trade fair into an opportunity to show their muscle in the face of Huawei's blacklisting by Western nations concerned about cybersecurity and escalating tensions with the U.S. over TikTok, spy balloons and computer chips.

After three years of pandemic disruption, they are among tens of thousands in Barcelona for MWC, also known as Mobile World Congress, an annual tech industry expo starting today [macau time] where mobile phone makers show off new devices and telecom industry executives peruse the latest networking gear and software.

Out of 2,000 exhibitors and sponsors, 150 are Chinese companies and Huawei Technologies Ltd. has the biggest presence. The smartphone and network equipment maker expanded its footprint by 50% from last year



and is taking up almost an entire vast exhibition hall at Barcelona's Fira convention center, organizers said.

That is striking considering that Huawei has been at the center of a geopolitical battle over global technology supremacy that's left parts of its business crippled by Western sanctions.

The U.S. three years ago successfully pushed European allies like Britain and Sweden to ban

or restrict Huawei equipment in their phone networks over fears Beijing could use it for cyber-snooping or sabotaging critical communications infrastructure — allegations Huawei has denied repeatedly. Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Canada have taken similar action.

Brian Chamberlin, executive adviser at Huawei's wireless carrier group, said "the sanctions have had a big impact" but the

company is "not going to try to break any of those rules."

"But at the same time, that's not going to slow us down from delivering innovation, innovative solutions," he said at the expo. "We will continue to do business with companies and countries that want our support."

Huawei's supersized presence at the show is a sign of defiance, said John Strand, a Danish telecom industry consultant.

Huawei wants to "give Biden the finger," Strand said of the U.S. president. The company's message, he said, is: "Despite the American sanctions, we are alive and kicking and doing so well."

U.S.-China tech tensions have only grown.

A suspected Chinese spy balloon downed by a U.S. fighter jet sparked acrimony between Beijing and Washington in recent weeks.

U.S. authorities have banned TikTok from devices issued to government employees over fears the popular Chinese-owned video sharing app is a data priva-

cy risk or could be used to push pro-China narratives.

The U.S. also is seeking to restrict China's access to equipment to make advanced semiconductors, signing up key allies Japan and the Netherlands.

That followed the MWC expo four years ago becoming a battleground between the U.S. and China over Huawei and the security of next generation wireless networks. In a keynote speech, a top Huawei executive trolled the U.S. over its push to get allies to shun the company's gear.

Huawei hasn't gone away, and the dispute continues to simmer. Washington widened sanctions last month with new curbs on exports to Huawei of less advanced tech components.

Still, the company has maintained its status as the world's No. 1 maker of network gear thanks to sales in China and other markets where Washington hasn't been so successful at persuading governments to boycott the company.

Strand, who has been attending MWC for 26 years, said Huawei wants to show the world it's pivoting away from mainly making networking gear — the hidden plumbing such as base stations and antennas connecting the world's mobile devices — and becoming an all-round tech supplier. **MDT/AP**

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FOOTBALL

Mbappé and Messi combine as leader PSG wins at Marseille

JEROME PUGMIRE, PARIS

MARSEILLE 0, PSG 3

KYLIAN Mbappé scored twice and Lionel Messi got the other goal as the World Cup final stars combined to give French league leader Paris Saint-Germain a 3-0 win at title challenger Marseille.

Mbappé tops the league's scoring charts outright with 17 goals, and he matched Edinson Cavani's PSG club-record tally of 200 in the process yesterday [Macau time].

What better place to do it than at bitter rival Marseille, where PSG lost in the French Cup earlier this month without the injured Mbappé in the team? This time, PSG was without the injured Neymar but didn't miss the Brazil star.

A win would have moved second-place Marseille within two points of defending cham-



pion PSG. Instead, Marseille trails by eight points with only 13 rounds remaining.

"Everyone put in the right effort," PSG coach Christophe Galtier said.

Galtier is from Marseille and played for the club as a gritty defender, which means some Marseille fans are simply unable to understand why he is coaching PSG.

Galtier had to be restrained

after the final whistle as he went over to confront an irate Marseille fan leaning over and heckling him near the dugout.

Mbappé became only the second player to score a hat trick in a World Cup final when France lost on penalty kicks to Argentina last December, with an inspirational Messi netting twice in a thrilling final.

This time they combined on each other's goals to quieten a

Stade Velodrome crowd full of belief after the recent cup win against a PSG side reeling from five defeats in its 12 previous games.

But after Nuno Tavares missed a great chance for Marseille, an exquisite pass from Messi near the halfway line sent Mbappé sprinting through for a typically clinical finish in the 25th minute.

"He's a player from another planet," Marseille coach Igor Tudor said about Mbappé.

Four minutes later Mbappé found space down the left and picked out Messi — who saved PSG with an injury-time free kick in a 4-3 win against Lille last weekend — for a close-range finish.

Having scored his 12th league goal, Messi set up Mbappé again with a looping pass in the 55th, moments after veteran striker Alexis Sanchez missed a great chance to pull a goal back for Marseille.

The only negative for PSG on an emphatic night was losing central defender Presnel Kimpembe to injury in the 18th. He was stretchered off after falling unchallenged to the ground and lying on his face for several moments, although the nature of his injury was not immediately clear.

Defeat means Marseille is now only two points ahead of third-place Monaco and fourth-place Lens, which both have 50 points.

It could have been worse for Marseille had Monaco not lost 3-0 at home to Nice earlier in the Riviera derby.

Nigeria striker Terem Moffi scored twice in the first 25 minutes and midfielder Khéphren Thuram — son of France great Lilian Thuram — added the third just before halftime as Nice climbed to seventh spot.

In other matches, fifth-place Rennes won 1-0 at Nantes with a goal from Belgium winger Jérémy Doku, and Reims easily beat Toulouse 3-0 in a midtable scrap.

Relegation-threatened Auxerre won 1-0 at Lorient while fellow struggler Ajaccio enjoyed a 2-1 home win against 19th-place Troyes.

Also, Clermont drew 1-1 at home to Strasbourg. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

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CHINA'S GROWTH KEY DRIVER OF WORLD RECOVERY

One of the biggest fillips to the global economy this year will be the strong rebound in China's economy thanks to the country adjusting its COVID-19 response after three years of stringent restrictions as well as many policies the government has rolled out to support growth in the post-pandemic era.

China's economy is projected to expand 5.2 percent this year according to the International Monetary Fund — compared with only 3 percent last year — as mobility and economic activities pick up.

"That's good news for China and the world as the Chinese economy is now expected to contribute a quarter of global growth this year," the International Monetary Fund said recently.

The figure will be the highest among the world's major economies, compared with a 1.4 percent growth forecast for the United States and 0.7 percent for the eurozone.

The consumer service sector, which was hit the hardest by the pandemic, has already experienced an accelerated recovery during the Chinese New Year holiday thanks to the releasing of pent-up demand, which augurs well for the country's overall economic performance for the rest of the year.

More than 300 million domestic tourist trips were made during the holiday, an increase of 23.1 percent for the same period last year, and about 90 percent of the pre-pandemic level for the same period in 2019. Dine-in consumption at restaurants and eateries surged 15.4 percent year-on-year, with average restaurant spending up 10.8 percent, according to the Ministry of Commerce. Cinema box-office receipts also achieved the second-highest take on record during the holiday.

Other optimistic economic indicators include the official purchasing managers' index for manufacturing, which rose to 50.1 in January from 47 in December; and the official non-manufacturing PMI, which jumped to 54.4 in January from 41.6 in December. Both readings marked the first expansion in four months, suggesting activity at factories as well as in the services and construction sectors is gaining growth momentum.

The faster-than-expected recovery shows the resilience of China's economy, which benefits from the country's first-class infrastructure, huge domestic market, and quality workforce.

With the world economy dragged down by the spillover effects from the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the global fight against inflation, the recovery of the Chinese economy is a much-needed buoyancy aid. Goldman Sachs Research said in a recent report that China's "reopening — and the recovery of Chinese domestic demand — could raise global GDP by 1 percent by the end of 2023".

Amid all uncertainties the world economy faces, China will continue to play the role of a global growth engine and help stabilize the global industry and supply chains.

The foreign ministers of Japan and New Zealand agreed to speed up talks on an intelligence sharing pact as the two island nations vowed to strengthen security ties and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region amid shared concern over an increasingly assertive China.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta and her Japanese counterpart, Yashimasa Hayashi, also agreed during their talks in Tokyo to collaborate on priority issues for Pacific Island nations such as climate change, maritime security and infrastructure.

Hayashi said Japan, under its new National Security Strategy, is strengthening cooperation with like-minded countries to maintain and expand the "free and open" international order, and that cooperation with New Zealand is extremely important.

In December, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government adopted key security and defense upgrades, including a counterstrike capability that breaks with the post-World War II principle limiting Japan to self-defense, while doubling defense spending in five years.

Kishida told a parliamentary session yesterday that the Defense Ministry is purchasing 400 U.S.-made Tomahawk cruise missiles for deployment as early as 2026. The Tomahawks would be used on Aegis radar-equipped destroyers and would be capable of striking targets as far as 1,600 kilometers away.

Leaders are holding talks on European Union proposals aimed at ending a long series of political crises and setting the two on the path to better relations and ultimately mutual recognition. Tensions have simmered between Serbia and its former territory since Kosovo unilaterally broke away in 2008; a move recognized by many Western countries but opposed by Serbia, with the backing of Russia and China.

JAPAN AIR FORCE MEMBER SUES GOVERNMENT IN SEXUAL HARASSMENT

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

A Japanese air force serviceperson filed a lawsuit against the government yesterday, saying it had failed to protect her from verbal sexual harassment from a male colleague and then systematically covered up the problem for more than a decade.

The plaintiff, who was only identified as a current member of the Air Self Defense Force, faced verbal sexual abuse starting as soon as she was assigned to Naha air base on the southern island of Okinawa in 2010, her lawyers said.

The plaintiff is seeking about 11.7 million yen (\$85,800) in damages from the government for failing to protect her from the harassment and failing to create a better working environment, and for not countering the criticism she received for speaking out, causing her to suffer for more than 10 years, lawyer Daisuke Tabuchi told reporters.

The lawyers said the perpetrator also made similar comments to other female air force members, but they didn't openly complain to avoid friction. They said they want to call into question the tendency of the male-dominated military to neglect and cover up sexual harassment.

The Defense Ministry said it had no immediate comment on the lawsuit.

The harassment from the plaintiff's colleague included frequent comments about her body and public questions about her sex life, her lawyers said.

She sought help from her supervisors and an SDF sexual harassment consultation department, but subsequent awareness training put her on the spot, giving her a reputation as a trouble-



Lawyers of a Japanese air force serviceperson who filed a lawsuit against the government with the Tokyo District Court, yesterday

maker rather than a victim, they said.

After six years' endurance, she filed an earlier lawsuit against the perpetrator in 2016 at Naha District Court, which dismissed the case the following year even though it acknowledged his sexual harassment. It said he could not be held responsible as an individual public servant and that the government should bear responsibility. The decision was upheld by a high court.

The plaintiff also filed a criminal complaint with the military police in 2019, but prosecutors eventually dropped the case, according to the lawyers.

They said she has developed stress and insomnia, and has suffered career setbacks in an alleged organizational revenge for her having spoken up.

Sexual misconduct complaints are often disregarded in Japan, and victims tend to face criticism for speaking up.

Lawyers say Japan's military has lagged behind private companies in dealing with harassment.

"The Self Defense Force has faced staff shortages and is desperately recruiting members, and

yet problems like these are left unchecked," said Yukiko Takei, another lawyer for the plaintiff. "We must say governance at the Japanese military is not properly functioning."

yesterday's lawsuit comes weeks after another SDF sexual harassment victim, former army soldier Rina Gono, filed a civil lawsuit against five alleged perpetrators and the government over sexual abuse she suffered.

She went public with her experience last year, demanding that the Defense Ministry re-investigate her case, in which she said she was repeatedly assaulted by several servicemen, causing her to give up her military career. The army dropped her case after she initially filed a complaint in 2021, saying there was insufficient evidence.

Preliminary results of a ministry-wide harassment investigation launched in response to Gono's case found 1,414 complaints, the ministry said in December. About 84% involved abuse of power, while sexual harassment accounted for 116 cases, or 7.7%, the ministry said.

MDT/AP



Serbia and Kosovo leaders are holding talks on European Union proposals aimed at ending a long series of political crises and setting the two on the path to better relations and ultimately mutual recognition. Tensions have simmered between Serbia and its former territory since Kosovo unilaterally broke away in 2008; a move recognized by many Western countries but opposed by Serbia, with the backing of Russia and China.



Switzerland U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres yesterday stressed the importance of legal challenges against "climate-wrecking corporations" like fossil-fuel producers, ratcheting up his call for the fight against climate change — this time before the U.N.'s top human rights body. Guterres opened the latest session of the Human Rights Council, in Geneva, part of an address that decried summary executions, torture and sexual violence in places like Ukraine; antisemitism, anti-Muslim bigotry and the persecution of Christians; inequality and threats to free expression, among other issues.



France French President Emmanuel Macron will unveil today [Macau time] his country's changing economic and military strategy in Africa for the coming years, as France's influence substantially declines on the continent. Macron is expected to call for a more balanced partnership with African nations, in a speech at the Elysee presidential palace before he begins an ambitious Africa trip on Wednesday to Gabon, Angola, the Republic of Congo and Congo.