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DRIVERS STRIKE OVER PLAN TO REMOVE PHILIPPINE AGING JEEPNEYS

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AP PHOTO



South Korea took a step toward improving ties with historical rival Japan by announcing a plan yesterday to raise domestic funds and avoid Japanese money to compensate Koreans who are still waiting to receive damages for slave labor during Tokyo's 35-year colonial rule. The plan reflects conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol's determination to mend frayed ties with Japan and solidify security cooperation. But the decision draw internal criticism.

Philippines Police have killed one suspect and arrested three others in the brazen shootings that killed a central Philippine provincial governor and eight others, including poor villagers seeking aid from the political leader, officials said. The killing of Negros Oriental Gov. Roel Degamo at his home on Saturday by at least six men armed was the deadliest in a series of attacks on politicians in recent weeks in the country.

AP PHOTO



Iran's supreme leader said yesterday that if a series of suspected poisonings at girls' schools are proven to be deliberate the culprits should be sentenced to death for committing an "unforgivable crime." It was the first time Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say on all matters of state, has spoken publicly about the suspected poisonings, which began late last year and have sickened hundreds of children.

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GAMING WORKERS DROP TO 52,174

A total of 52,174 full-time employees were recorded in the Gaming Sector by end 2022, a decrease of 2,665 year-on-year; among them, dealers totaled 23,721, down by 685. In addition, the number of service & sales workers went down by 932 to 3,967, data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows. In December 2022, average earnings (excluding bonuses) of the full-time employees in the Gaming Sector were MOP23,680, up 1.8% compared with June 2022 but down slightly by 0.1% year-on-year. Average earnings by dealers dropped by 1.1% to MOP19,800.

GAMING REBOUND ON TREND: JP MORGAN

Brokerage JP Morgan Securities (Asia Pacific) Ltd has estimated that the city's gaming revenues in March is "in line with [the first] two months of 2023 trends of MOP370 million." According to its checks, casinos are earning MOP360 million a day for the first five days of March. As cited in a report issued by GGRAsia, analysts say "the print represents a 40% to 45% recovery versus pre-Covid-19 levels for headline GGR, in turn suggesting mass GGR probably recovered to 60 to 70 percent of pre-Covid levels."

ASSOCIATIONS HOLD EVENT TO PROMOTE PATUÁ

A session dedicated to Patuá was recently held by the Language Exchange and Culture Promotion Association (LECPA) and Associação dos Jovens Macaenses (Youth Macanese Association - AJM). "Patuá: What Now?" was the first activity carried out by the two associations in 2023, as well as the first in-person event after the easing of pandemic restrictions. The session, conducted in Cantonese and Patuá, was intended to promote this critically endangered Portuguese-based creole of Macau to the wider young audience of Macau - including Macanese, Portuguese and Chinese.

LOCAL RESEARCH TEAM WINS SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY PRIZE

An efficient and adaptable wireless charging system developed by a research team at the University of Macau (UM) has received first prize of the Science and Technology Achievement Award in the 2022 Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Macao science and technology project review. The activity was co-organized by Shenzhen Computer Users Association, the Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Macao talent exchange and qualification recognition committee, and the Shenzhen committee for the evaluation of technological achievements in electronic information technology.

ACADEMIC DIRECTOR OF 'GENERATIONS' INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL RESIGNS

RENATO MARQUES

The academic director of Generations International School Macau, Rosa Bizarro, has stepped down from the post less than two months after the school project was announced, Portuguese language newspaper Hoje Macau has reported.

The idea for a new international curriculum school project to operate at Coloane's Seac Pai Van area in the neighborhood of a residential condominium was announced in early January this year, a project headed by Bizarro, a former professor at the Polytechnic University of Macau.

The school, formally operating under the Macau Sino-Luso International School Association (ACSLIM), a non-profit entity, established on November 2021, has presented a new trilingual educational project in Macau, offering an inclusive approach to education, distinct from the existing schools in Macau.

Although confirming her departure from the project to Hoje Macau, Bizarro refused to state the reasons her unexpected departure, which comes just as the school is preparing for the enrolment of the first group of



Rosa Bizarro

students who will commence the 2023-2024 school year in September this year.

According to ACSLIM, the association and consequently the new school mission aims at the promotion of Portuguese, Chinese, and English languages and cultures, as well as the promotion of Macau's cultural values and to engage with institutions that pursue educational, cultural, and sporting interests.

In a previous interview with the Portuguese media outlet in mid-January, Bizarro had said that the Generations School was to implement "an ambitious project, of great quality," branding the pedagogical project as "very innovative and intended to have immediate and future outcomes."

The professor, with a comprehensive background in language teaching as well as a scholar of intercultural ma-

tters, has also hinted that her appointment to the post of academic director was precisely due to those aspects that she wanted to see put into practice at the school.

A later report by the Portuguese language newspaper Ponto Final on the school noted that Generations School would be the most expensive non-higher education institution in Macau, charging an annual fee of around 126,000 patacas per kindergarten student. Those in primary will be charged 138,000 patacas.

The school is part of the larger projects promoted by the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) that includes two different schools, both offering an "international style" curriculum and located side-by-side.

As for the second school institution, the DSEDJ announced late last week the commissioning of this to the Pui Ching Middle School with a formal announcement to be made in the government official gazette next week.

Unlike Generations, the new Pui Ching School project will only accept admissions for the 2024-2025 school year.

Film festival celebrates local productions

The Macau Films & Videos Panorama 2022 (MFVP 2022) will open Mar. 17 at the Oriental Foundation, and will screen 32 local films, including 26 feature films.

Organized by the Audio-Visual Cut Association and subsidized by the Macao Cultural Development Fund, the film festival will run from Mar. 17 to 19 and from 24 to 26.

In addition, mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan Film Festival have been invited to re-

commend outstanding works from their regions to Macau audiences.

There are three parts to this year's MFVP: "Made in Macao", "HOT PICKS from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan" and "Selection of Recommended Works by Local Universities".

The organizer mentioned that 26 local works will be screened. Of these 26 films, 10 have been produced by the Macao Cultural Centre's "Local View Power" film shooting subsidy program, 12 have been



selected from the local open call and four have been recommended by four tertiary institutions

in Macau, namely the University of Macau, the Macau Polytechnic University, the Macau

University of Science and Technology, as well as the University of Saint Joseph. **AL**

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Appeal court rules casinos are not 'exclusive concessions'

ANTHONY LAM

THE Court of Final Appeal (TUI) has ruled that local casino companies are not under "exclusive operations" and their employees do not enjoy civil servant status.

The judgement was made in response to at least two previous "conflicting" rulings – as pointed out by the top court – which had deemed the nature of casino operation rights in two opposite directions.

Two separate croupiers have at different times been charged with Civil Service Embezzlement, with them conducting gambling fraud and theft of casino chips, respectively. The first croupier was convicted of the crime, while the latter has had the charge amended by the lower court to Abuse of Trust.

With appeals filed for both cases, for the first appellant, the middle court ruled that the casino license had been issued to three companies, meaning that the complainant was not the sole operator of casinos in Macau. The middle court found this reality not fitting the definition of "exclusive operations" and thus casino operators' employees were not civil servants or at least should not be classified as such.

As for the second appellant, the middle court found the base court had made an erroneous decision in identifying casino operators as not being under ex-

RENATO MARQUES



clusive operations. The middle court has thus continued to press the charge of Civil Service Embezzlement.

The crime of Civil Service Embezzlement can only be charged against civil servants or employees of companies with "exclusive operations", such as water and power suppliers.

With diverging interpretation on similar scenarios, the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) sought a uniform interpretation from the appeal court, which in legal terms is referred to as extraordinary appeal.

Before its consideration process, the top court pinpointed the topic of debate as whether or not casino operation companies should be understood as "exclusive operators" and whether their employees ought to be accorded

civil servant status.

The court deemed that pursuant to Law 6/82/M with amendments by Law 10/86/M, there are two types of concessions, namely monopoly or oligopoly, as well as special permits. Casino operation rights, meanwhile, fall in the latter type, the court ruled.

The court further interpreted that whether pursuant to the Gambling Law No 16/2001 or No 7/2022, casino licenses are tendered by the government to local companies, despite the two laws having different provisions on the type of concession.

It also referred to legal interpretations made by the middle court and academics on "exclusive operations" to suggest that with more than one operator, the situation should not be understood as "exclusive operations."

If the concept of "exclusive operations" is restricted to activities reserved to or requiring approval from the government, legal interpretations on the same law will be contradictory.

Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong's introduction to Law No 7/2022 at its first reading at the parliament was also cited to prove that a reason behind the amendment of the law was to eliminate the concept of "exclusive operations" from the Gambling Law.

As such, the top court ruled that casino operations should not be understood as "exclusive operations," while casino staff do not enjoy civil servant status.

The city's casino market is an oligopoly due to the fact that only six companies are allowed to operate the service in Macau.

CEBU PACIFIC TO RECOMMENCE FLIGHTS FROM MACAU TO MANILA

Low-cost carrier Cebu Pacific will resume flights to and from Manila and Macau from March 28, providing another option for passengers to travel to the Philippines. Earlier this month, Air Asia also recommenced similar flights. The flight will operate three times a week: Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. According to the Macau International Airport Co. Ltd (CAM), several airlines have made flight resumption plans as new carriers will launch air services to Bangkok, Haikou and Singapore starting next month, with airlines planning to open new routes to Jeju, Phnom Penh and the Maldives to Macau this year.

64-YEAR-OLD DRIVER DIES IN CAR ACCIDENT

A man involved in a car accident in Avenida da Amizade died after being sent to Hospital Conde S. Januário. The Public Security Police Force (FSM) is investigating the incident. The 64-year-old man, a driver, was found in a private car believed to have crashed into the gate of the parking lot of Artyzen Grand Lapa at 9 a.m. yesterday. He was not breathing and had no heartbeat when the firemen arrived on the scene, but had no obvious crash injuries.

DSEDT PROMOTES 'PATENT RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS' TRAINING

The Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDT) is promoting a training course on "Patent Research and Analysis." According to a statement, the purpose of the session is to promote the development of local scientific and technological innovation, and enable local scientific researchers to master the knowledge of patent search methods, analysis of its results, and research practice. The session will take place on March 15 from 9:30 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. at the DSEDT, and will include the participation of experts from the China National Intellectual Property Administration. The session will be conducted in Mandarin and those interested should register via DSEDT's official website.

TWO SESSIONS

Chan Meng Kam wants Macau to replace sea port with Gaolan facility

RENATO MARQUES

FORMER lawmaker Chan Meng Kam has presented a proposal to grant Macau the right to lease the Gaolan Port in Zhuhai as a temporary facility, establishing in it a free port zone for Macau in Zhuhai, Chinese media outlet Macao Daily News has reported.

Chan is a member of the Macau Executive Council, and a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

Chan's proposal wou-



ld have an impact on the current use of Macau Port located at Ka Ho, since it aims to stop operations at the port, and instead move all activities to the Zhuhai Gaolan Port Eco-

nomic Zone.

According to the proposal, the operation of the port, under Macau jurisdiction, would operate similarly to the current model, also allowing the Uni-

versity of Macau to operate its campus at Henqin as an autonomous area.

The idea, if it moves forward, would transform the Gaolan Port into a free port zone with very low or no customs fees for some products, a model that Chan would like to see also extended to the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Henqin.

The Gaolan Port is located at Gaolan Island, in the Jinwan district of Zhuhai Southwest of Macau at a distance of just 11 nautical miles (20.4 km) from Macau and 45 nautical miles

(83.3 km) from Hong Kong. The southernmost berth is only 1 nautical mile away from a major international shipping lane.

According to data made available by the Zhuhai authorities, the import-export value of Gaolan Port has reached RMB17.72 billion (MOP20.67 billion) in the first quarter of 2021, an increase of 43.7% from the same period in 2020 and 9.2% from 2019.

It is seen as a main piece of the project of transforming Zhuhai into a comprehensive transport hub on the west bank of the Pearl River Delta.

CRIME

ALLEGED MURDERER OF ABBY CHOI TRIED TO ESCAPE TO MACAU

STAFF REPORTER

HONG Kong authorities have granted bail to a man suspected of having assisted the alleged murderer of socialite model Abby Choi to escape Macau.

According to The Standard, Lam Shun, a 41-year-old man, tried to help the ex-husband of Choi, Alex Kwong Kong-chu to escape from Hong Kong to Macau by boat.

Kwong promised Lam a reward of HKD300,000 to help him escape Hong Kong, since he was wanted in connection with the gruesome killing of the 28-year-old model.

The report said that he was not required to enter a plea this morning and the magistrate adjourned his case to May 8. He was granted a HKD50,000 cash bail and was banned from leaving Hong Kong. He must also report to police twice every week.

Ex-husband Alex Kwong, his



father Kwong Kau and his brother Anthony Kwong were charged with murder, after police found Choi's remains in a house rented by Kwong Kau in a suburban part of Hong Kong near the border with mainland China. Alex Kwong's mother, Jenny Li, faces one count of perverting

the course of justice. All four were detained without bail.

Court documents show that Lam was on the staff of a yacht company, and had arranged a yacht for the escape of Kwong to Macau, with the intent to impede the apprehension or prosecution of Kwong.

PRIVATE DEPOSITS GROWING WHILE LOANS ARE DROPPING

THE deposits of residents of Macau have recorded a month-on-month increase of 0.7% in January this year compared with December 2022, according to figures from the Monetary Authority of Macao.

In January the deposits of locals totaled MOP702.3 billion helped also by the deposits by non-residents, which rose by 2% to MOP328.1 billion.

On the other hand, deposits from the public sector dropped as much as 6% to just MOP228.1 billion, resulting in a drop in general of deposits in the banking sector by 0.3% from a month earlier to MOP1,258.5 billion.

Posting a decline as well were loans with those granted to the private sector decreasing by 0.9% month-on-month to

MOP567.1 billion.

Although the offset was generated by a slight increase in external loans (+0.6%) to MOP705.8 billion, total loans to the private sector still edged down by 0.1% from a month earlier to MOP1,272.9 billion.

In end-January, the loan-to-deposit ratio for the resident sector remained at 60.9% from the previous month. Meanwhile, the ratio for both the resident and non-resident sectors increased from 101.0% at end-2022 to 101.1%.

The one-month and three-month current assets to liabilities ratios stood at 62.3% and 54.5% respectively.

The non-performing loan ratio increased from 1.5% at end-2022 to 1.6% in January. **RM**



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Smuggling cases on the rise: Customs

STAFF REPORTER

ACCORDING to Macau Customs, the number of illegal trafficking cases involving Macau single-plate vehicles is increasing, particularly cases of mass trafficking of food products across the Hengqin Port. Deployments and strategies have been adjusted, and cooperation between Macau and Hengqin customs strengthened to prevent these crimes. Drivers who break the law will be investigated for criminal or administrative liabilities, and permissions to cross borders of the vehicles involved will also be suspended.

17 cases of single-plate vehicles trafficking seafood, frozen food, electronic goods, and component parts across Hengqin Port have already been caught by Macau Customs in the first two months of this year, and the 17 drivers involved have been prosecuted.

Hengqin Customs also apprehended many drivers of cross-border passenger services for illegal carriage.

As of February, 15 single-plate



te vehicles have been suspended from crossing the border. According to the Foreign Trade Law, a fine of MOP100,000 will be imposed in these cases, and the seized goods will be declared by the Macau SAR.

A vehicle border pass can be suspended for a maximum of six months if there is sufficient evidence that the vehicle is used in violation of the provisions of the Foreign Trade Law or other laws, according to the administrative regulation of the Supervision of Vehicles Entering and Exiting the

Land Border of the Macau Special Administrative Region.

Any drivers or owners who use Macau vehicles for illegal purposes such as carrying animals, plants, and related products that are prohibited from entry will be not be permitted to apply for their vehicles to cross borders, and the vehicles will also be restricted from entering Hengqin.

Macau Customs warns people against exploiting cross-border vehicles for illegal purposes and encourages citizens to report such activities.

GOV'T TO RELAX TO E-TAXI REQUIREMENTS

STAFF REPORTER

THE Macau SAR government plans to abolish the requirement for horsepower, torsion, and gradeability of the taxi system in order to promote electric taxis.

Cost-effective designs for taxis may increase, but they lack incentive to push the industry toward electric taxis, said Leng Sai Wai, the councilor of the Macao Automobile Traders and Workers Association. He suggests designating areas to charge electric taxis and extending the taxi service to Hengqin, where more charging devices are available, to cope with the insufficient amount of charging stations and the possible new requirements for electric taxis

after many taxi licenses expire.

According to Daniel Cheng, councilor of the Macau Motor Traders Association, the government should consider reducing the charging fees to decrease their influence on sales of electric vehicles. Also, he mentioned that the cost to switch to an electric taxi is around MOP300,000, and they take a long time to charge. Although types of electric taxis will increase in the future, the reduction of their service hours due to charging makes them less attractive.

The first batch of electric taxis was put into operation in 2018. Following that, there were complaints about the high maintenance costs and the scarcity of charging piles.



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NPC | TWO SESSIONS

NEW FORM OF DEMOCRACY DEVELOPS AS CHINA POWERS AHEAD ON NEW JOURNEY

XINHUA COMMENTARY

WITH a cabinet institutional reform plan, a new state leadership lineup, and policies concerning social fairness and justice for over 1.4 billion people on the agenda, all eyes are on China's annual key political event, the "two sessions."

The coming days will witness how these major decisions are made through a democratic process, ensuring transparency, accountability and representation for all.

The annual meetings of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) bring together thousands of national legislators and political advisors.

Their main objective is to align the interests and aspirations of the Chinese people with the development of the Party and the nation. With thousands of attendees, these meetings serve as a platform for meaningful discussion and collaboration, as participants work together to shape the future of China.

Representing and addressing the diverse concerns of a country as large as China is no small feat. However, what is truly commendable is the country's ability to foster consensus through effective communication and consultation.

Unlike some Western countries where chaos and tensions caused by wrangling between political parties, polarization, or racial issues are common, the two sessions in China present a different picture.

People attending this key political event witness a peaceful and unified gathering where diverse voices are heard and respected. Here, consensus is sought and common ground is reached through constructive dialogue, rather than being divided by partisan politics. The two sessions serve as a shining example of China's commitment to promoting unity, harmony and progress for its people.

As the Chinese leadership steers the nation through unforeseen circumstances and uncertainties in its development trajectory, the strength and vitality of China's socialist democracy have become increasingly apparent.

In the midst of current events and ongoing developments, this year's two sessions hold particular significance.

It is the first such event held since the Communist Party of China (CPC) unveiled its blueprint for building a modern socialist China in all respects for the following



five years and beyond at its 20th National Congress last October.

National legislators and political advisors will review the work of the central government, national legislature, supreme court, and top procuratorate. They will also deliberate on a draft amendment to the Legislation Law and engage in in-depth discussions to ensure that Chinese modernization sets sail with a detailed plan.

The CPC has led the Chinese people in finding a new form of democracy that suits China's national conditions, one that Chinese President Xi Jinping has described as "the whole-process people's democracy."

China's whole-process people's democracy includes election, consultation, decision-making, management and oversight. It distinguishes itself from the Western model of democracy which is often plagued by money politics, elite rule and political polarization.

The newly elected 2,977 deputies to the 14th NPC, who serve a five-year term, come from diverse backgrounds. Nearly 17 percent are workers and farmers, including 56 migrant workers from rural areas; 15 percent are from ethnic minorities, representing all of China's 55 ethnic minority groups; more than a quarter are women; and 21.3 percent are technical personnel.

It is rare to see a high rate of representation of rural, blue-collar and ethnic minority individuals in the highest level of state power in Western countries such as the United States. This is because the democratic system in these countries tends to favor the elite capture of power rather than the well-

-being of the general population.

Among the 2.62 million deputies to people's congresses at the county and township levels, who were directly elected by over 1 billion voters on a one-person-one-vote basis, the proportion of workers, farmers, technicians and women is even higher.

Deputies to the 13th NPC have voted on a range of crucial decisions and policies that have far-reaching significance: they have adopted constitutional amendments and the country's first-ever Civil Code, and approved the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025).

The CPPCC National Committee has held more than 70 consultative forums for specialists over the past five years, focusing on key issues including promoting the implementation of new childbirth policies. This has provided important references for the decision-making of the central authorities.

TACKLING PRESSING PROBLEMS

Over the past five years, the NPC deputies and national political advisors have filed over 70,000 suggestions and proposals covering various areas such as people's livelihoods, social governance, modern economic systems, and green development.

On the basis of their advice, China's cabinet has introduced over 7,800 policy measures.

For instance, Li Li, an NPC deputy who works in central China's Hubei Province, put forth a suggestion for measures to resolve the difficulties faced by the elderly in going outside due to a lack of elevators in their apartment buildings. It has prompted the allo-

cation of a huge amount of funds from the central budget to subsidize the renovation of old residential buildings nationwide, with 69,000 elevators newly installed.

Democracy in China is an integration of the CPC leadership, the running of the country by the people and law-based governance, which is guaranteed by the effective implementation of democratic centralism, the fundamental organizational principle of the CPC and the principle of China's state institutions as stipulated by the country's Constitution.

Under the system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation led by the CPC, the CPC and non-communist parties work in cooperation with each other for the advancement of socialism, striving to improve people's standard of living. The relationship maintains political stability and social harmony and ensures efficient policy-making and implementation.

DELIVERING EFFECTIVE OUTCOMES

The ultimate goal of democracy is to ensure happiness for the people.

In China, democracy is not reduced to empty slogans. Instead, it prioritizes addressing the most pressing issues faced by the people and meeting their aspirations for a happy life. These include better access to education, greater job security, more decent incomes, improved social security, enhanced medical and health services, more comfortable living conditions, and a cleaner and more beautiful environment.

High-quality democracy in China has enabled the country

to achieve rapid economic development and long-term social stability despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

China has remained the world's second-largest economy with its GDP expanding at an average annual rate of 5.2 percent in the past five years, much higher than the global average.

China's life expectancy has reached 78.2 years and its per capita disposable annual income has more than doubled in the past decade. Over 13 million urban jobs have been created annually on average during the same period.

There is no one-size-fits-all model of democracy, nor is there a single correct form for others to emulate. Democracy should not be privatized, labeled, or politicized.

China's socialist democracy is brimming with vitality as it reflects the will of the people, accords with the country's realities, and enjoys the support of the Chinese people.

China will never blindly copy other models of democracy, but rather make informed decisions based on its unique cultural, social and political context.

Facts have demonstrated that preaching the idea of "human rights above sovereignty" and imposing democratic models on other nations have not yielded stability or prosperity. On the contrary, such approaches have led countries into chaos and disastrous crises.

Now is perhaps the perfect time to champion an open and inclusive philosophy that puts people at the forefront, respects diverse models of democracy, and allows to live and let live. XINHUA

PHILIPPINE transport groups launched a nationwide strike yesterday to protest a government program drivers fear would phase out traditional jeepneys, which have become a cultural icon, and other aging public transport vehicles.

Officials, however, braced with contingencies and deployed government vehicles to take stranded passengers in some areas. Other groups refused to join the weeklong strike that could keep more than 40,000 passenger jeepneys and vans off the streets in the Manila metropolis alone.

Protesting drivers and supporters held a noisy rally in suburban Quezon city in the capital region, then proceeded in a convoy to a government transport regulatory office to press their protest.

"We're calling on the public to support the transport strike in any way possible," said Renato Reyes of the left-wing political alliance Bayan, which was backing the strike. "The inconvenience of the transport stoppage is temporary, but the loss of livelihood of drivers and operators would be long-term."

At almost noon, Transport Secretary Jaime Bautista said no major transport disruption had been monitored. Other officials said government vehicles were deployed to carry commuters in some areas but did not immediately provide more details.

Morning rush-hour traffic was heavy as usual in major roads in Manila and nearby cities.

"There is no disruption except in a handful of routes in the na-

PHILIPPINES

Drivers strike over plan to remove aging jeepneys



An activist holds a sign on top of a passenger jeepney during a transport strike in Quezon city yesterday

tional capital region," President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s office said by noon, citing reports from law enforcers.

Bautista warned that protesting drivers who would resort to violence and coercion to stop passenger vehicles not joining the

strike would face criminal charges.

Vice President Sara Duterte, who also serves as education

secretary, drew criticisms after saying the strike is a communist rebel-inspired action that may inconvenience students.

The government transport modernization program, first launched in 2017, aims to replace dangerously dilapidated and old passenger jeepneys and vans with modern vehicles, which have safety features and conform with carbon emissions standards. Vehicle owners have to join transport cooperatives and corporations by year's end for better transport management.

Opponents say most poor drivers could not afford to purchase new passenger jeepneys even with promised government financial aid.

"It's OK to have modernization for those who have money," jeepney driver Benito Garcia told The Associated Press. "But for us jeepney drivers and operators, we cannot afford."

Others said the program would mean the demise of the gaudily decorated and brightly colored jeepneys, which have been regarded as Manila's "King of the Road" and a showcase of Philippine culture on wheels.

The diesel-powered jeepneys evolved from U.S. military jeeps that American forces left behind after World War II. The vehicles were modified and then reproduced, many with second-hand truck chassis, and for decades were the most popular form of land transport among the working class, even though they cough out dark fumes that have been blamed for Manila's notoriously polluted air. **MDT/AP**

NEW ZEALAND

Trailblazing transgender lawmaker Georgina Beyer dies at 65

GEORGINA Beyer, a trailblazing New Zealand politician who in 1999 became the world's first openly transgender member of Parliament, died yesterday at the age of 65.

Friends of Beyer said she died peacefully in hospice care. They did not immediately give a cause of death, although Beyer had previously suffered from kidney failure and underwent a kidney transplant in 2017.

New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said he didn't know Beyer well personally but knew she had a large following within New Zealand and had made a lasting impression on the nation's parliament.

"I certainly think that Georgina has blazed a trail that has made it much easier for others to follow," Hipkins said.



New Zealand politician Georgina Beyer poses at the Parliament in Wellington, in Dec. 2006

Friend Malcolm Vaughan said he was still with Beyer, who he had known for decades, and didn't yet feel ready to talk about her life. He and husband Scott Kennedy instead put out a statement.

"Georgie was surrounded by her nearest and dearest 24/7 over the past week, she accepted what was happening, was cracking jokes and had a twinkle in her eye, right until the final moment," they wrote.

They said she was a national treasure, or "taonga" in Indigenous Mori.

"Farewell Georgie, your love, compassion and all that you have done for the rainbow and many other communities will live on for

ever," they wrote.

Beyer, who was Mori, worked as a sex worker and nightclub performer before turning to politics. In 1995 she was elected mayor of the small North Island town of Carterton. Four years later, she won national office for the liberal Labour Party and remained a lawmaker until 2007.

She helped pass the landmark 2003 Prostitution Reform Act, which decriminalized sex work.

In a speech to lawmakers at the time, she said the protections the new law offered might have spared her being dragged into the sex industry at the age of 16, and from sex workers being threatened and raped without being able to seek help from police.

"I think of all the people I have known in that

area who have suffered because of the hypocrisy of our society, which, on the one hand, can accept prostitution, while, on the other hand, wants to push it under the carpet and keep it in the twilight world that it exists in," she told lawmakers.

In 2004, she helped pass a law allowing same-sex civil unions. Nine years later, New Zealand passed a law allowing same-sex marriage.

Politicians from both sides of the aisle mourned her death yesterday. Nicola Willis, the deputy leader of the conservative National Party, recalled Beyer as brave and gracious.

"We came from different political sides but she had the power to breach the divide," Willis wrote on Twitter. **MDT/AP**

PUTIN'S WAR

In liberated Ukraine city, civilians still pay price of war

SAMYA KULLAB, IZIUM

IN this war-scarred city in Ukraine's northeast, residents scrutinize every step for land mines. Behind closed doors, survivors wait in agony for the bodies of loved ones to be identified. The hunt for collaborators of the not-so-long ago Russian occupation poisons tightly-knit communities.

This is life in Iziium, a city on the Donets River in the Kharkiv region that was retaken by Ukrainian forces in September, but still suffers the legacy of six months of Russian occupation.

The brutality of the Russian invasion in this one-time strategic supply hub for Russian troops counts among the most horrific of the war, which entered its second year last month.

Ukrainian civilians were tortured, disappeared and were arbitrarily detained. Mass graves with hundreds of bodies have been discovered and entire neighborhoods were destroyed in the fighting.

Iziium is a gruesome reminder of the human cost of the war. Six months after it was liberated, residents say they continue to pay the price.

Large red signs warning "MINES" rest against a tree between a church and the city's main hospital, which is still functioning despite heavy Russian bombardment.

In this city, everyone has a mine story: Either they stepped on one and lost a limb or know someone who did. The mines are discovered daily, concealed along riverbanks, on roads, in fields, on the tops of roofs, in trees.

Of particular concern are anti-infantry high-explosive mines, known as petal mines. Small and inconspicuous, they are widespread in the city. Human Rights Watch has documented that Moscow has used at least eight types of anti-personnel mines, prohibited by the Geneva Conventions, throughout eastern Ukraine.

In a January report, the rights monitor also called on Kyiv to investigate



Land mine victim Oleksandr Rabenko

the Ukrainian military's apparent use of thousands of banned petal mines in Iziium.

"No one can say now the total percentage of territory in Kharkiv that is mined," said Oleksandr Filchakov, the region's chief prosecutor. "We are finding them everywhere."

Most residents are careful, keeping to known paths. But even then, they are not safe.

"We have an average of one person a week with wounds" from mines, Dr. Yuri Kuzentsov said. "I don't know when I will ever go to the river or the forest again, even if our lives are restored, because, as a medical professional, I have seen the consequences."

One patient stepped on mines twice: First in June when he lost part of his heel and the second time in October when he lost the entire foot.

Most of Kuzentsov's patients said they had been cautious.

"They were sure this would never happen to them," he said.

Oleksandr Rabenko, 66, stepped on a petal mine 200 meters from his house while walking down a familiar path to the river to fetch water.

His son, Eduard, had de-mined a narrow path with a shovel. Rabenko had walked down it several ti-

mes, up until Dec. 4, when he lost his right foot while clearing some sticks.

"I still don't know how it got there, maybe it was the snow melting, or the river carried it," he said. "I thought it was safe."

Rabenko still feels excruciating pain from the foot that is no longer there.

"The doctor said it will take months for my brain to grasp what happened," he said.

Halyna Zhyharova, 71, knows exactly what happened to her family of eight.

A bomb struck her son Oleksandr's home last March, killing 52 people sheltering inside the basement. They included eight of Zhyharova's relatives — her son and his entire family, including two daughters.

Seven relatives' bodies were exhumed in September in a severe state of decay. It took months to identify them, she said. Now she is waiting for just one more identification — of her granddaughter.

Of the 451 bodies exhumed in Iziium, including nearly 440 found in mass graves, 125 have still not been identified, said Serhii Bolvinov, the head of the Investigations Department of Kharkiv's National Police.

Some are so decomposed it's difficult to extract a DNA sample, he said. Other times, authorities are unable to find a DNA match among

relatives. The painstaking work can take months.

Zhyharova hopes her granddaughter's remains will be identified soon so she can finally lay her family to rest.

"I'll bury them, put gravestones," she said. "After that, what to do? Live on."

The scale of destruction in Iziium, with a prewar population of 50,000, is breathtaking. Ukrainian officials estimate 70% to 80% of residential buildings were destroyed. Many bear black scorch marks, punctured roofs and have boarded-up windows.

Slowly, residents are returning, horrified to discover their homes uninhabitable or their possessions stolen. They seethe with anger, knowing the Russian advance into Iziium was made possible by the help of local collaborators who supported Moscow.

"There were cases in the beginning of the war when collaborators led Russian armed forces units through secret routes and led them to the flanks and rears of our units," said Brig. Gen. Dmytro Krasnylykov, commander of the joint forces in the Kharkiv region. "This happened in Iziium."

"Many of our soldiers died because of this, and we were forced to leave Iziium for a while, and now we see what the city has turned into," he said. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1969 ISRAEL ELECTS FIRST FEMALE LEADER



Golda Meir, the "grand old woman of Israeli politics", is to become the first female prime minister of Israel.

The 70-year-old's candidature was officially accepted by the Labour Party in Tel Aviv after she received 287 votes from her own central committee. Forty-five MPs abstained.

On Sunday she will formally succeed her political friend and colleague Levi Eshkol, who died of a heart attack last week.

Mrs Meir, who has come out of retirement to take up the role, pledged to maintain national unity and called on the people who worked with Mr Eshkol to "continue in the same framework" in her government.

She added: "I have never failed to accept party decisions and I shall not refuse now.

"I have faced difficult problems in the past but nothing like the one I'm faced with now in leading the country."

With her party controlling the largest faction in parliament, Acting Prime Minister Yigal Allon and Defence Minister Moshe Dayan have agreed to step aside and reserve their own bids for power until later in the year.

Following their decision, she was the only nominee put forward before the central committee.

Mrs Meir, a former schoolteacher in America, previously served as Israeli foreign minister for 10 years before she retired following ill health.

Because of her age and condition, her appointment is regarded by many as a stop-gap, intended to maintain national unity before the Labour Party chooses a leader for the October general elections.

Many supporters within the party consider General Dayan to be a more suitable candidate.

Acting Prime Minister Mr Allon also has substantial backing within the party leadership.

Both are younger than Mrs Meir and considered national heroes.

Despite such opposition, General Dayan, who is expected to retain his post as defence minister, said he would be honoured to work with Mrs Meir.

Her government is expected to reflect the same parties and ministers who previously served under Mr Eshkol.

Details of her new cabinet will be announced in the next few days.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Following her appointment Golda Meir won a convincing vote of confidence when she presented an identical cabinet to parliament to that of her predecessor. Although many critics thought she would act as a stop gap, Mrs Meir went on to win Israel's general election in October 1969.

The Israeli prime minister governed using coalitions and to remain in office she had to ensure that she was publicly seen to support General Dayan despite the fact they were often at odds with each other.

For the next four years she remained in control but she was blamed for being caught off guard when war broke out between Israeli and Arab forces in 1973.

The Arabs eventually buckled under a sustained Israeli counter-attack but her reputation never recovered.

Mrs Meir won the general election in 1973 but continued to face stiff criticism.

As a result she resigned in April 1974. She died four years later.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 You'll meet new friends if you try new activities. Throw yourself into your work. Don't make promises that you can't possibly keep.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
 Partnerships could be tense. Don't push your luck. You will reap the benefits if you put money into upgrading your residence.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
 Entertainment could be pleasing if it is of an energetic nature. Travel will result in new romantic attractions. You will have to be sure not to burn the candle at both ends.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Pushy people must be kept at arm's length. You can get support from groups that you belong to if you're willing to step out on a limb and voice your opinions.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Emotional deception will cause friction on the home front. Your leadership qualities will come in handy. Believe in yourself and so will those who count.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Seminars will provide you with knowledge and amusement. Don't let jealous friends put you down, making you insecure about your capabilities.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 A change of attitude has probably disrupted your home environment. Problems with females you live or work with will try your patience and cause temper flare ups.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Concern yourself with legal matters and formulating contracts rather than finalizing your objectives. Educational courses will be stimulating and successful.

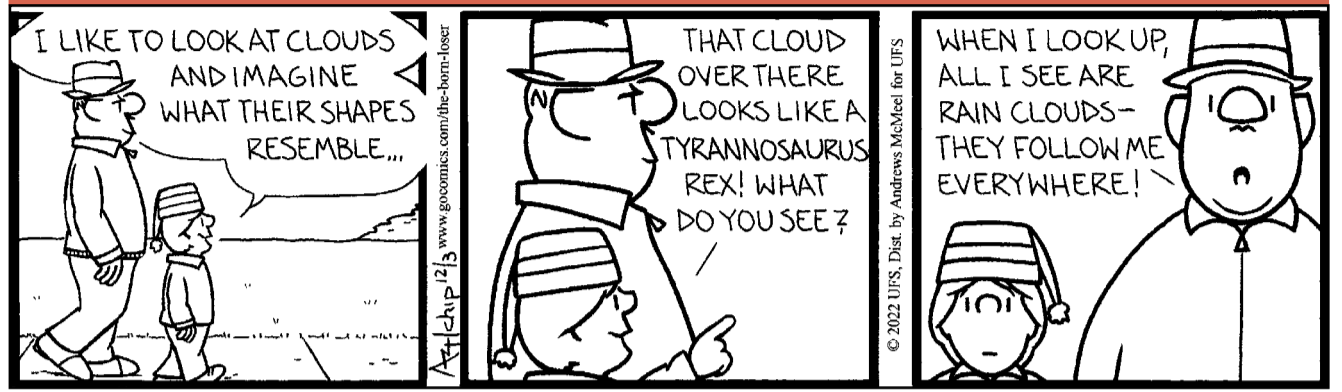
SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 The stamina you possess will be apparent in your approach to your hobbies and creative projects. Avoid any erratic behavior or it could cause isolation at home.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 You are best to work behind the scenes on projects that require detail or precision. You can put in some overtime and make extra cash.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Trips, educational pursuits, or projects that could lead to new outlooks should be on your agenda. Don't let your personal partner hold you back. Education may be the answer.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 If they don't like the plan, suggest that they contribute a little. Rather than making a scene, communicate quietly about the way you feel. Be cautious handling tools, machinery, or dangerous objects.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

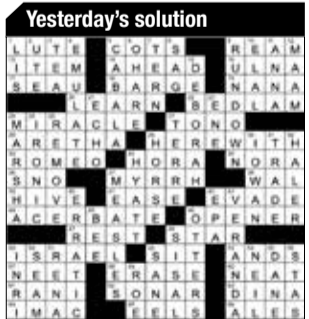
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	2	18	fine
Changchun	0	15	cloudy
Chengdu	13	21	cloudy
Chongqing	14	20	cloudy
Fuzhou	10	25	fine
Guangzhou	11	26	fine
Guiyang	12	16	overcast
Haikou	17	25	cloudy
Hangzhou	9	28	overcast
Harbin	1	11	fine
Hefei	8	27	cloudy
Nanjing	11	25	cloudy
Shanghai	10	22	cloudy
Taipei	11	19	fine
Wuhan	12	21	cloudy
Hong Kong	19	23	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	-12	-1	snow
Frankfurt	1	7	cloudy
Paris	4	9	cloudy
London	-1	5	rain
New York	-1	7	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1-Takes a load off; 5- Slippery swimmer; 8- Splotchy; 12- Raison d' ____; 13- Improvise; 15- Old Dodge model; 16- Kind of rock; 17- Ornamental coronet; 18- Poker declaration; 19- Inconsiderate; 22- Highest mountain in Crete; 23- Runner Sebastian; 24- Alpo alternative; 26- Places of contest; 29- Word of the hour?; 31- Schooner fill; 32- Small assemblage; 34- Inventor Howe; 36- Jumps on one leg; 38- Sip; 40- River of Spain; 41- Out of ____; 43- Coming down; 45- Put Down; 46- Guys; 48- Ski lodge; 50- Dirty; 51- Parisian pal; 52- Friend of Fidel; 54- Distort; 61- "Is sol" rebuttal; 63- Body of values; 64- Small plateau; 65- 1999 Ron Howard film; 66- Peter of Herman's Hermits; 67- Apartment; 68- Capone's nemesis; 69- Razor-billed bird; 70- Wet septet;

DOWN 1- Show to a table; 2- Restless desire; 3- Small combo; 4- Lead astray; 5- Prepare for publication; 6- Airline to Tel Aviv; 7- Italian bread?; 8- Starchy dish; 9- Incapable of being mixed; 10- Geraint's beloved; 11- Actress Merrill; 13- Deep down; 14- No-frills; 20- Chime; 21- Cut-price retail event; 25- Yard tunneler; 26- Above it all; 27- Stands for; 28- Flies high; 29- Sight-related; 30- Gold measurement; 31- Sighs of relief; 33- ____ Today; 35- Non-dairy milk; 37- WWII battle site; 39- Improve; 42- Meager; 44- Edible roots; 47- Extra-terrestrial being; 49- Chemical indicator; 52- Normandy city; 53- Screen; 55- Greek portico; 56- ____ En-lai; 57- Pen sound; 58- Actor Auberjonois; 59- Voice of America org.; 60- Diner sign; 62- Boob tubes;



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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AD



ECONOMY

CHINESE PLANNERS PROMISE 12 MILLION JOBS, ECONOMIC REBOUND

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

CHINESE economic officials expressed confidence yesterday they can meet this year's growth target of "around 5%" by generating 12 million new jobs and encouraging consumer spending following the end of anti-virus controls that kept millions of people at home.

The Cabinet planning officials announced no details of spending or other initiatives to

revive growth that slumped to 3% last year, the second-lowest in decades. But they said they plan an array of measures to meet goals announced Sunday by Premier Li Keqiang by raising incomes and encouraging innovation.

Efforts to revive the Chinese economy have global implications after weak retail, auto and housing sales depressed demand for imports. The country is the biggest export market for

its Asian neighbors and an important revenue source for Western companies.

"There are many policy tools in our toolbox," the deputy chairman of the National Reform and Development Commission, Li Chunlin, said at a news conference held during the meeting of China's legislature.

The premier's work report Sunday was brief and gave few details, suggesting the ruling Communist Party will wait until

a new premier and Cabinet ministers are appointed this month in a once-a-decade handover to announce tax, regulatory, subsidy and other changes.

This year's job creation target is 12 million, up from last year's goal of 11 million and below the 12.1 million that was achieved, according to Li.

The NDRC chairman, Zhao Chenxin, said the priority is to "release consumption potential" and promote an "innovation-

-driven development strategy."

That is in line with ruling party plans to nurture self-sustaining growth based on consumer spending instead of exports and investment and to generate prosperity and global influence by making China a creator of valuable technologies.

The NDRC's Li warned that the global environment "is becoming more complex and severe," a probable reference to weak export demand due to Western interest rate increases to cool inflation and strained relations with Washington and other trading partners over technology, security and territorial disputes.

That will add to pressure on Chinese export industries that support millions of jobs, increasing the importance of self-sustaining business activity at home.

"Ability to consume comes from employment and income," so the government must "increase the income of urban and rural residents," Li said.

Li gave no details, but the ruling party has previously pressured e-commerce and other big companies to share more of their wealth with the public by raising wages and cutting charges for small vendors and other entrepreneurs.

The growth target is the lowest on record except for 2020, when the government dropped its goal at the start of the COVID pandemic.

"We view it as a relatively conservative but pragmatic proposal for delivering a healthy and organic economic recovery," said Nomura economists in a report. "China's economy is still set to face with multiple headwinds over the course of the year."

The higher unemployment might be harder to achieve, so "job creation is likely to be a focus of work this year," they wrote. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

The Parisian launches 'Tulip Garden' installations



With spring in full bloom, The Parisian Macao is transforming into a Tulip Garden, allowing guests to enjoy giant photogenic tulip installations.

Sands Resorts Macao signature restaurants will also be presenting floral-inspired delicacies and themed af-

ternoon tea, offering both visual and gastronomic delights until May 31, the gaming operator announced in a statement.

It features about 50 magnificent five-meter-tall tulip artworks around the Fontaine des Mers, each hand-

-painted by renowned Chinese artist Xuan Qing.

To echo the Tulip Garden at the Rotunda, a matrix of golden tulips is being showcased at Level 3 of Shoppes at Parisian. Guests can see a Floating Magic Tulip Garden along the 20-meter Avenue des Champs-Élysées.

These two tulip artworks have both been created by artist Xuan Qing. A graduate of the China Academy of Art and London's Chelsea College of Art and Design, she was a cooperative artist for LVMH Group and has had crossover collaborations with brands including LOEWE, Jeep, Chrysler and ELLE, among others.

Insurance firm donates MOP50,000 to local sports charity



A local insurance firm has run a cycling event over the past week (from Feb. 25 to Mar. 5) managing to raise MOP50,000 for the Macau Special Olympics (MSO).

In a statement, the organizer pointed out that during the

event, participants rode their Brompton bicycles and explored the "beautiful scenery of Cotai", in addition to having participated in various exciting activities and challenges to win grand prizes.

A total of 120 cycling enthu-

siasts participated in the two-week event, according to the statement.

HSBC Life, the organizer, made a donation to MSO through this event, in support of the MSO's continued enhancement of their athletic training for their members with intellectual disabilities. The MSO has also pledged to equip them to participate in the international sport competitions representing Macau, which will also help them integrate into society. Some iconic local faces also took part in the charity event, such as local off-road runner Vivi Cheung as well as gymnast and Animal Flow local pioneer Clark Cheung.

FOOTBALL | CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Benfica heavy favorite against Brugge

TALES AZZONI

Wednesday, 04:00
Benfica v Club Brugge
H 1.44, D 5, A 8.4

ODDSCHECKER.COM

THRRIVING and facing an opponent in crisis, Benfica couldn't be in a better position to keep its good run going in the Champions League.

The Portuguese side will defend a 2-0 lead from the first leg against Club Brugge at home today (Wednesday, 04:00). Benfica is looking to reach the quarterfinals of Europe's top club competition for a second straight season, a feat it last accomplished more than five decades ago. It was eliminated by eventual runner-up Liverpool in the final eight last year.

There aren't many teams in Europe in as good a form as Benfica, which is unbeaten in 12 games in all competitions. It has won 10 of those matches, including the last four and eight of the last nine. It didn't lose in the group stage of



AP PHOTO

the Champions League, winning its group ahead of powerhouses Paris Saint-Germain and Juventus. Benfica also comfortably leads the Portuguese league.

Brugge, meanwhile, has won only twice in 11 matches since English coach Scott Parker took over in December. It plunged deeper into crisis with a 3-0 loss at

relegation-threatened Oostende in the Belgian league on Friday, prompting fans to ask players for explanations and Parker to acknowledge that his job was in jeopardy.

"Now it's about showing character and stepping back," Parker said. "It's a huge challenge for everyone at the club. The players

will face even greater challenges in their lives and professional careers. The important thing now is to work very hard together and do everything we can to respond."

The Belgian champion was one of the surprises of the group stage, finishing second to Porto ahead of Bayer Leverkusen and Atletico Madrid. It made it to the

knockout round for the first time in 10 attempts.

The last 45 times a team won the first leg by two or more goals on the road, only once has it failed to advance — PSG against Manchester United in 2018-19.

Benfica, the 1961 and 1962 European champion, has been eliminated after winning the first leg only three times in 31 attempts. It last made it to the quarterfinals in consecutive seasons in 1967-68 and 1968-69.

The loss to Liverpool in the first leg of last season's quarterfinal was one of only three defeats for the Portuguese club in its last 24 European matches at home. It began this year's competition in the third qualifying round.

Coach Roger Schmidt is not like to take any risks with some of his players who are not fully fit, including Gonçalo Guedes, who is nursing a left knee injury. Also out injured will be Julian Draxler, Chiquinho and Mihailo Ristic.

The coach may promote the debut of two recently signed players — Casper Tengstedt and Andreas Schjelderup. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

The Conversation

Daniel Merino



HOW ACCESS TO CHATGPT-STYLE TECH IS ABOUT TO CHANGE OUR WORLD

ChatGPT burst onto the technology world, gaining 100 million users by the end of January 2023, just two months after its launch and bringing with it a looming sense of change.

The technology itself is fascinating, but part of what makes ChatGPT uniquely interesting is the fact that essentially overnight, most of the world gained access to a powerful generative artificial intelligence that they could use for their own purposes. In this episode of The Conversation Weekly, we speak with researchers who study computer science, technology and economics to explore how the rapid adoption of technologies has, for the most part, failed to change social and economic systems in the past – but why AI might be different, despite its weaknesses.

Spending just a few minutes playing with new, generative AI algorithms can show you just how powerful they are. You can open up Dall-E, type in a phrase like “dinosaur riding motorcycle across a bridge,” and seconds later, the algorithm will produce multiple images more or less depicting what you asked for. ChatGPT does much the same, just with text as its output.

These models are trained on huge amounts of data taken from the internet, and as Daniel Acuña, an associate professor of computer science at the University of Colorado, Boulder, in the U.S. explains, that can be a problem. “If we are feeding these models data from the past and data from today, they will learn some biases,” Acuña says. “They will relate words – let’s say about occupations – and find relationships between words and how they are used with certain genders or certain races.”

The problem of bias in AI is not new, but with increased access, more people are now using it, and as Acuña says, “I hope that whoever is using those models is aware of these issues.”

With any new technology there is always a risk of misuse, but these concerns are usually accompanied by hope that as people gain access to better tools, their lives will improve. That theory is exactly what Kentaro Toyama, a professor of community information at the University of Michigan, has studied for nearly two decades.

“What I ultimately discovered was that it is quite possible to get research results that were positive, where some kind of technology would enhance a situation in a government or school, or in a clinic,” explains Toyama. “But it was nearly impossible to take that technological idea and then have it have impact at wider scales.”

Ultimately, Toyama came to believe that “technology amplifies underlying human forces. And in our current world, those human forces are aligned in a way that the rich get richer and inequality keeps growing.” But he was open to the idea that if AI could be inserted into a system that was trying to improve equality, then it would be an excellent tool for that.

Technologies can change social and economic systems when access increases, according to Thierry Rayna, an economist who studies innovation and entrepreneurship. He has studied how widespread access to digital music, 3D printing, block chain and other technologies fundamentally change the relationship between producers and consumers. In each of these cases, “increasingly people have become prosumers, meaning they are actively involved in the production process.” Rayna predicts the same will be true with generative AI.

Rayna says that “In a situation where everybody’s producing stuff and people are consuming from other people, the main issue is that choice becomes absolutely overwhelming.” Once an economic system reaches this point, according to Rayna, platforms and influences become the wielders of power. But Rayna thinks that once people can not only use AI algorithms, but train their own, “It will probably be the first time in a long time that the platforms will actually be in danger.”

Fox News is on an unlikely collision course with two leading contenders for the Republican presidential nomination over the rights of journalists.

In defending itself against a massive defamation lawsuit over how it covered false claims surrounding the 2020 presidential election, the network is relying on a nearly 60-year-old Supreme Court ruling that makes it difficult to successfully sue media organizations for libel.

Former President Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, two favorites of many Fox News viewers, have advocated for the court to revisit the standard, which is considered the foundational case in American

defamation law.

“It is ironic that Fox is relying on a landmark case that was designed to help the news media play the watchdog role in a democracy and is under attack by Gov. DeSantis, Donald Trump and other figures who have been untethered in their attacks on journalists as enemies of the people,” said Jane Hall, a communication professor at American University.

Eye-catching evidence has emerged from court filings in recent weeks revealing a split screen between what Fox was portraying to its viewers about the false claims of election fraud and what hosts and executives were saying about them behind the scenes.

**LYNYRD SKYNYRD
 FOUNDING MEMBER GARY
 ROSSINGTON DEAD AT 71**

GARY Rossington, Lynyrd Skynyrd’s last surviving original member who also helped to found the group, died yesterday (Macau time) at the age of 71. No cause of death was given.

“It is with our deepest sympathy and sadness that we have to advise, that we lost our brother, friend, family member, songwriter and guitarist, Gary Rossington, today,” the band wrote on Facebook. “Gary is now with his Skynyrd brothers and family in heaven and playing it pretty, like he always does. Please keep Dale, Mary, Annie and the entire Rossington family in your prayers and respect the family’s privacy at this difficult time.”

Rossington cheated death more than once, Rolling Stone reported. He survived a car accident in 1976 in which he drove his Ford Torino into a tree, inspiring the band’s cautionary song “That Smell.” A year later, he emerged from the 1977 plane crash that killed singer Ronnie Van Zant, guitarist Steve Gaines, and backing vocalist Cassie Gaines, with two broken arms, a broken leg, and a punctured stomach and liver.

“It was a devastating thing,” he told Rolling Stone in 2006. “You can’t just talk about it real casual and not have feelings about it.”

In later years, Rossington underwent quintuple bypass surgery in 2003, suffered a heart attack in 2015, and had numerous subsequent heart surgeries, most recently leaving Lynyrd Skynyrd in July 2021 to recover from another procedure. At recent shows, Rossington would perform portions of the concert and sometimes sat out full gigs.

Rossington was born Dec. 4, 1951, in Jacksonville, Florida, and raised by his mother after his father died. Upon meeting drum-



AP FILE PHOTO

mer Bob Burns and bassist Larry Junstrom, Rossington and his new friends tried to juggle amid their love of baseball.

According to Rolling Stone, it was during a fateful Little League game, Ronnie Van Zant hit a line drive into the shoulder blades of opposing player Bob Burns and met his future bandmates. Rossington, Burns, Van Zant, and guitarist Allen Collins gathered that afternoon at Burns’ Jacksonville home to jam the Rolling Stone’s “Time Is on My Side.”

Adopting Lynyrd Skynyrd as the group’s name — both a reference to a similarly named sports coach at Rossington’s high school and to a character in the 1963 novelty hit “Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh” — the band re-

leased their debut album (Pronounced ‘Lh-’nérd ‘Skin-’nérd) in 1973. A collection of country-tinged blues-rock and Southern soul, the album included now-classics like “Tuesday’s Gone,” “Simple Man” and “Gimme Three Steps,” but it was the closing track, the nearly 10-minute “Free Bird,” that became the group’s calling card, due in no small part to Rossington’s evocative slide playing on his Gibson SG.

Rossington told Rolling Stone that he never considered Skynyrd to be a tragic band, despite all the band’s drama and death. “I don’t think of it as tragedy — I think of it as life,” he said upon the group’s Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction in 2006. “I think the good outweighs the bad.”



AP PHOTO

Pakistan A suicide bomber riding on a motorcycle rammed into a police truck in Pakistan’s restive southwest, killing at least 10 policemen and wounding 12 officers in one of the deadliest attacks on security forces in recent months, authorities said. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing, which took place on a bridge in the district of Sibi in Baluchistan province, but Baluch separatists and local militants have been blamed for previous such attacks.

Afghanistan A leading international rights group appealed for the U.N. Human Rights Council to address the ongoing, “relentless abuses” by Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers, including severe restrictions on women and freedom of speech. Despite initial promises for a more moderate stance, the Taliban have imposed harsh measures since taking power in August 2021 as U.S. and NATO forces were in the final weeks of their pullout from Afghanistan after 20 years of war.



AP PHOTO

Egypt A cargo vessel ran aground in the Suez Canal yesterday [Macau time], but traffic through the global waterway was not impacted, Egyptian authorities said. The Liberia-flagged MSC Istanbul, heading to Portugal from Malaysia, got stuck in a two-lane part of the Suez Canal, said Adm. Ossama Rabei, head of the Suez Canal Authority. He added that tugboats were deployed to help refloat the vessel.

Saudi Arabia said yesterday it deposited \$5 billion into the Turkish central bank, likely helping Ankara firm up its long-weakening currency, the lira, after last month’s massive earthquake that struck southeast Turkey and northern Syria. The kingdom made the announcement via a statement on the state-run Saudi Press Agency, describing it as “a testament to the close cooperation and historical ties that exist between the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Turkey and its brotherly people.”

MDT/AP