



MGTO TAKES ITS ROADSHOW TO HUIZHOU WITH GAMING OPS THAT PROMOTED NON-GAMING ELEMENTS, OFFERED WEDDING PHOTO PACKAGES

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STATS: PHONE SCAMS IN JAN-FEB HAVE TRIPLED YEAR-ON-YEAR

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SILICON VALLEY: FROM WINE COUNTRY TO LONDON, BANK'S FAILURE SHAKES WORLDWIDE

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AP PHOTO



Afghanistan A bomb exploded this weekend during an award ceremony for journalists in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif, killing at least one person and wounding eight, including children, officials said. The blast went off at the Tabian Farhang center in Mazar-e-Sharif, the capital of Balkh province, as journalists gathered for the award ceremony, said Mohammad Asif Waziri, a local police spokesman.

AP PHOTO



Czech Republic Thousands of people rallied against the government Saturday, protesting high inflation and demanding an end to the country's military support for Ukraine. A new political group, PRO, organized the rally at Prague's Wenceslas Square as an anti-poverty event. As participants called on the coalition government to resign, party leader Jindrich Rajchl said they want "a government to care first of all about the interests of the Czech citizens."

AP PHOTO



UK Thousands of protesters marched through London to the British prime minister's residence to support health care workers who have held a series of strikes over pay and conditions in the state-funded National Health Service. Almost 40,000 junior doctors, who form the backbone of hospital care, are due to walk out across England for three days starting today. NHS England said the doctors' strike would be even more disruptive than recent walkouts by nurses and ambulance staff.

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'NEW ERA'

Xi Jinping secured historic third term as president by the NPC, emerged as China's most dominant leader in decades; appoints Li Qiang as premier

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XINHUA

GRAND PRIX GOV'T WORKING TOWARDS BRINGING BACK FIA EVENTS

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RENATO MARQUES

POLICE SUSPECT HOMICIDE AFTER WOMAN WAS FOUND DEAD IN A HOTEL: PJ

A 46-year-old woman was found dead in a hotel located in the central district of the city yesterday, the Judiciary Police reported. The preliminary investigation by the police showed that there were many unusual wounds on the head of the deceased. A serious crime had occurred at the scene, the police reported. For the time being, the case is being treated as a suspected homicide.

TOURIST HIT BY BUS IN SAN MA LO

A traffic accident occurred in Avenida da Almeida Ribeiro, involving a Hong Kong man who was suspected to have been hit by a bus. The tourist, in his 70s, suffered from head injuries and was sent to the public hospital. According to authorities, the bus was making its way from San Ma Lo road to Ponte 16, and hit the victim when it reached the junction road. The female driver, in her 60s, passed a breathalyzer test. The cause of the accident is still under investigation.

GOV'T ESTABLISHES PLATFORM TO BOOST DATABASE OF TALENTS ABROAD

The Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) and the Talent Development Committee have established a linkage mechanism, the aim of which is to have students from Macau who are enrolled in higher education abroad register and update their information, so as to further enrich the "talent database" and attract and promote the return of talent. According to DSEDJ, starting from October last year to March 9, invitation emails were sent to beneficiaries of the school supplies subsidy for college students and students benefiting from college bursaries to encourage them to register their profiles.

TAIPA-BARRA LRT TRIAL COMMENCES

A trial of the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) section between Taipa and Barra has commenced. The construction of Barra LRT station was completed in February after being delayed for over a year. Barra LRT station, located near the Barra transportation hub, can extend LRT service from Taipa to the Macau peninsula. This construction project, which was awarded nearly MOP1.2 billion, cited weather and the pandemic are the reasons for the delay. The pandemic caused 74 days of delay from 2020 to mid-2022.

TOURISM

MGTO TAKES ROADSHOW TO HUIZHOU, OFFERS WEDDING PHOTO PACKAGES

RENATO MARQUES

OVER the past weekend, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has brought the "Experience Macau without limits" Greater Bay Area (GBA) Roadshow to the Central Plaza of China Central Place in Huizhou.

This was the fifth stop of the caravan roadshow that aims to promote Macau's "Tourism +" elements and attract residents from the cities that compose the GBA to Macau as a form of local tourism economy recovery, which has been affected by three years of border closures.

According to a report of the event from MGTO, one of their promotions during the weekend at Huizhou invited the audience to make a short video of the roadshow and upload it on the social media platform Tiktok with specific hashtags. Those who did so were entitled to participate in the lucky draw to win a one-day free Macau wedding pho-



tography package.

At the opening, the deputy director of MGTO, Cheng Wai Tong noted that as soon as the borders between Macau, the mainland, and Hong Kong resumed normal activity the MGTO resumed its roadshow

series at the GBA cities to promote Macau as a tourism destination as well as the latest travel discount information.

Cheng invited Huizhou residents to visit Macau in person, with their friends and families, and to stay for a few days. He

also invited people to pay close attention to the further event and promotions to take place in Macau throughout the year and to consider visiting the region more than once.

The roadshow caravan featured elements such as festive events, gourmet food, sports, wedding photography, and leisure travel, among others, expecting to convince more visitors from Huizhou to visit Macau soon.

As usually happens, the six gaming concessionaires were also represented in the roadshow with individual promotion booths aiming to promote non-gaming elements of their operations.

MGTO also said to cooperate with airlines, e-commerce platforms, and online travel agencies to distribute air tickets and hotel accommodation discounts to tourists in several phases throughout the year. Among them, hotel coupons are being issued to mainland tourists through the platforms of trip.com, Meituan, and Qunar. During the roadshow, those who are eligible to use Macau hotel 50% off coupons to purchase Macau tourism products received a Macau Pass Card with a value of 50 patacas.

The roadshow will continue to its last four stops with promotion to be held shortly in Shenzhen, Dongguan, Foshan, and Zhaoqing.

EDUCATION

DSEDJ and APIM agree to support Macanese students in Portugal



RENATO MARQUES

THE Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) and the Macao Academy Education Fund Society (APIM) have signed an agreement that aims to continue to support the studies of Macanese students in Portugal to train bilingual staff, the DSEDJ noted in a press statement.

The agreement was signed by the APIM president Tong Chi Kin and the di-

rector of DSEDJ, Kong Chi Meng last Thursday.

The agreement aims to jointly promote the training of qualified Portuguese-speaking staff members in Macau by both parties, and focus on supporting studies by Macanese students in Portugal.

APIM has been committed, over the years, to support the training of Portuguese-speaking talents in Macau, having extensive experience in orga-

nizing students to pursue their studies in Portugal. In the future, APIM will provide non-refundable financial support to these students in organizing, training, and supporting their learning in Portugal.

This project is an important part of the on-going training of new staff members in several fields who can work in both Chinese and Portuguese languages and who are highly sought after by the government.

At the agreement signing, Kong said that DSEDJ hopes, through this cooperation, to continue to encourage Macanese students to pursue their studies in Portugal to train more highly qualified bilingual personnel.

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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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For subscription and general issues:

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SPORTS

Macau GP confirms interest in return of three FIA events

RENATO MARQUES

THE Macau Grand Prix Organizing Committee (MGPOC) is working towards bringing back all three FIA events, including the GT World Cup and the WTCR race, the president of Sports Bureau (ID) and coordinator of MGPOC, Pun Weng Kun, told the media yesterday on the sidelines of the 2023 Women Sports Festival which took place at Tap Seac Multi-sport Pavilion.

To the media, Pun said that for the 70th edition of the Macau Grand Prix, which is due to take place in November this year, organizers want the program to include the return of the three major international races and not just the Formula 3 race.

Pun admitted that negotiations over the F3 are advancing. He said that the MGPOC is working towards reestablishing the other two races, while also keeping some junior races in the program, such as the Chinese Formula 4 race, which have been run at the past three editions instead of the F3.

RENATO MARQUES



Pun's comments confirmed the possibility aired by the Times one month ago (February 7) when, in a report quoting the Discovery Sports Events head, François Ribeiro, it was hinted that the WTCR category, although extinct, could continue to run, potentially until 2025, as a separate event or a one-off annual event.

The cancellation of the series was related to a major restructuring that replaced the racing cate-

gory with the FIA ETCR, a similar format event but running fully electric vehicles instead.

At the time and although Ribeiro did not reveal that the potential "one-off annual event" could be related to the Macau GP, the Times learned from well-informed sources in the touring car racing world that such a possibility was on the cards.

In the meantime, the TCR series has already presented a new

championship aiming to continue to run the old TCR cars, named – TCR World Tour – which the organizers say aims to "gain access to the TCR World Final."

The new competition will include a total of 20 races including TCR Europe (2 x 55 km), TCR Italy (2 x 55 km), TCR South America (2 x 30 minutes + 1 lap), TCR Australia (3 x 30 minutes), TCR Australia – Bathurst (3 x 21 laps), and TCR Asia Challenge (2 x 55 km).

Note that when was first presented, last year, the TCR Asia Challenge was run precisely during the 69th edition of the Macau GP.

Addressing the other events for the potential two weekends celebratory edition, Pun said that it is hoped that the event this year will involve more young drivers.

MAJOR TENNIS, GOLF EVENTS ON 'BIG SIX' PROPOSALS

At the same event, Pun also revealed that among some of the proposals from the six gaming concessionaires to host sports events this year in Macau are some "large-scale" tennis and golfing events.

Not wishing to disclose too many details, Pun only noted that these are some of the proposals submitted to the ID by the gaming concessionaires according to the new regulations that mandate that the casino operators must host non-gaming activities throughout the year to support economic diversification and the so-called "Tourism + Sports."

Pun said that he hopes that such events can produce positive effects on that front and that people can use to look to Macau as a major sports event location.

As the Times also reported, early last month the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong had said at the Legislative Assembly that the "big six" had until March to submit their annual proposals for sports events.

Ho congratulates Xi on his third term in office

ANTHONY LAM

IN response to Xi Jinping's appointment for a third term in as leader, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng has issued a congratulatory statement.

Over the weekend, Xi was appointed for a new term as the President of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

After the news broke, the head of the local government expressed "his congratulation on behalf of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) government."

"The MSAR will continue to support President Xi as head of state and Chairman of the Central Military Commission," Ho stated in the statement. "His re-election was the choice of history and of all Chinese people, including those in Macau."

The Chief Executive said



President Xi Jinping meets with CE Ho Iat Seng, 2019

that with the support of, and guidance from, the Central Government with President Xi at its core, the MSAR would fully carry out the strategies and required steps outlined during the 20th CPC National Congress and the "Two Sessions".

"The MSAR Government would spare no effort in

comprehensively and accurately adhering to, in a steadfast manner, the 'One country, two systems' principle as well as 'Macau people governing Macau', the principle of a high degree of autonomy, and the fundamental principle of 'patriots governing Macau,' he added.

GOV'T LEAVES LABOR LAWS UNCHANGED FOLLOWING REVIEW

RENATO MARQUES

THE local government has announced the conclusion of a review of two labor-related laws according to the regular revision calendar, the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) announced in a press statement.

One of the laws is related to the maximum compensation in case of a worker's dismissal, the other refers to the compensation for damages resulting from workplace accidents and occupational diseases.

In both cases, the DSAL concluded that the laws are "reflective of reality" and the amounts contemplated are up-to-date.

This result is that none of the laws will be amended until the next review.

The DSAL added that the maximum amount of MOP21,000 for basic



monthly remuneration, implemented between April 21 2019 and April 20 2021, is appropriate when taking into account the current situation.

The bureau said that the analysis of the two laws took into account factors such as the general situation of Macau in recent years, the business environment, the evolution of the job market, and the situation

of compensation for accidents at work, as well as the opinion expressed by both the employers and workers, deciding to continue to apply the laws as they are to "achieve a balance between the rights and interests of both parties."

A new period of implementation will follow in which similar reviews will continue to take place, DSAL noted.

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ANTHONY LAM

CRIME

Police: Phone scams in Jan-Feb tripled y-o-y

THREE to four times more telephone scams have been recorded in the first two months of this year than the same period last year, Sit Chong Meng, director of the Judiciary Police (PJ), said over the weekend.

Sit made the disclosure on the sidelines of a crime mitigation event, at which he had announced in his speech that these crimes had soared in number during the said period, accounting to over MOP17.6 million in losses.

He described the scenario as "concerning and regrettable."

In the first two months, 39 such scams have been recorded, in which 17 university students fell victims. Their total reported loss amounted to MOP2.5 million.

The police department head recapped the strategy of "Prevent, Retrieve, Strike", saying that negotiations have been constant with various industries, particularly the banking sector, to address the crimes.

Referring to the payment suspension mechanism – co-introduced by the police and the banking sector – Sit said that it has become increasingly effective. Since its introduction in 2017,

AUSTIN DISTEL



the mechanism has prevented the loss of MOP8 million in 46 fraud cases.

In addition, a suspicion remittance negotiation measure that was introduced in 2019 has so far

prevented MOP12 million in losses across 80 cases. The measure relies on bank tellers advising

customers to think twice when the latter requests remittances to non-Macau bank accounts.

A further step following this last is the prompt persuasion message. Sit explained that remittance over mobile app has become more popular but there is no bank teller on the app.

Therefore, the banking sector has induced prompt messages to the app. When a user tries to transfer MOP30,000 or more to non-Macau accounts, a prompt message will appear to remind the user about phone scams.

From October last year until now, the digital measure has been used on remittances amounts of MOP17 million.

Seminar sessions on scam mitigation have also been staged at local higher education institutions, Sit added.

Recently, data from the government showed that the Covid-19 pandemic and related border restrictions that kept Macau from the world caused a sharp decrease in crimes reported over the last three years and, particularly, in 2022 when the total number of crimes reported dropped some 13.9%.

During the pandemic and when border restrictions were in force, the crime figures were lower than in 2019 when it reached 14,178 in total.

Transport bureau requests bus ops to improve vehicle maintenance

ANTHONY LAM

THE Transport Bureau (DSAT) has emphasized that the report in response to a recent bus fire had been sought from the concerned bus company.

The comment was made in response to lawmaker Ella Lei's written inquiry regarding the bus fire that happened in January. No injuries were sustained in the event, which involved the car-top battery emitting smoke.

The event concerned a bus that operated on battery power, which is normally referred to as an Electric Vehicle (EV).

In her inquiry, Lei emphasized that although the event had not caused injury, the government should make clear announcements on how public safety can be ensured and maintenance work be improved.

In response to the inquiry, DSAT director Lam Hin San emphasized that his bureau had immediately sought a report on the event from the bus company, while requesting the two local bus companies to improve upon areas such as vehicle maintenance and information dissemination.

The official also disclosed



that the bus companies were requested to continuously improve training for bus drivers on emergency management and to hold regular drills with the government.

In his reply, the official made no mention of whether bus companies had been or would be requested to choose buses that have higher reliability standards.

After the event, the bus company suspended the type of bus from service until they were deemed safe for use.

The lawmaker also asked if

there was any smart equipment to monitor bus conditions in real-time, as well as if the cyclical mode of maintenance could be altered to suit new trends. In response, Lam pointed out that smart monitoring is practiced, without replying to the question regarding mode of maintenance.

According to Lei, as of September 2022, the city has 955 buses serving 85 bus routes. Buses running on natural gas, electricity or on vehicle generated electricity accounted for nearly one-third of all buses.

COURT OVERTURNS CONVICTION FOR ATTEMPTED PURCHASE OF CASINO CHIPS WITH PROP MONEY

THE Court of Second Instance (TSI) has overturned a ruling by a lower court to punish the person who attempted to exchange counterfeit money for chips at a casino.

The TSI revealed that in 2020, the accused approached a casino cage trying to exchange a batch of counterfeit Hong Kong banknotes in denominations of HKD1,000, for chips. The cage staff refused the request upon realizing the money was counterfeit.

According to the court, the counterfeit money had "money for practice" printed in Chinese on them. Such banknotes are used in mainland China to train bank tellers.

The accused was charged with fraud of a relatively large sum, and was sentenced to a year in prison. This decision was overturned on appeal at the TSI.

The ground of appeal was under Clause 3, Article 22 of the Penal Code, which provides that when the criminal method is apparently unfeasible, or the subject of violation is nonexistent, the crime will be considered impractical or incomplete, and no punishment will be imposed.

The court emphasized that any literate adult should have realized the money was counterfeit. Based on this, the court found in favor of appeal and acquitted the appellant. **AL**



NPC

XI JINPING UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED CHINESE PRESIDENT, CENTRAL MILITARY COMMISSION CHAIRMAN

XINHUA REPORTERS, BEIJING

Xi Jinping was unanimously elected Chinese president last week at the ongoing session of China's national legislature, leading the country of 1.4 billion people onto a new journey toward modernization.

He was also elected chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by a unanimous vote.

A total of 2,952 deputies were present at the third plenary meeting of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) on Friday morning, to exercise their constitutional right to elect China's state leadership.

Xi Jinping, Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Han Zheng, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang and Li Xi attended the meeting.

The elections began at 9:27 a.m., after lawmakers adopted a method on election and appointment for the first session of the 14th NPC.

The voting was anonymous.

Thunderous applause broke out across the Great Hall of the People when the results of the elections were pronounced.

Xi, donning a dark suit with a burgundy tie, rose from his seat and bowed to the lawmakers.

Born in 1953, Xi joined the Communist Party of China (CPC) in January 1974, and became the Party branch secretary of the Liangjiahe Brigade in rural Shaanxi Province, later the same year.

He then embarked on a journey across China that saw him work in different provinces and municipalities and rise from the grassroots level to the helm of the Party and the state.

Xi was first elected general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and named chairman of the CPC Central Military Commission in November 2012. He was elected Chinese president and CMC chairman of the PRC in March 2013.



Xi Jinping is unanimously elected president of the People's Republic of China and chairman of the Central Military Commission of the PRC at the third plenary meeting of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing

"Over the past 10 years, we have overcome one obstacle after another, and created miracle upon miracle. Most importantly, the people are happier, feel safer than ever, and have a stronger sense of fulfillment under his leadership," said NPC deputy Chen Zhen, head of the Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

The CPC has established Xi Jinping's core position on the CPC Central Committee and in the Party as a whole and established the guiding role of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. The decision was made at the sixth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee in 2021.

Experts believe the decision has been further consolidated by the elections of Xi to be Chinese president and chairman of the PRC CMC.

The solemnity of Friday's assembly was underscored by a ceremony of Xi and other newly elected state leaders pledging allegiance to China's Constitution.

After a chorus of the national

anthem was sung by all present, Xi placed his left hand on a copy of the Constitution and held up his right fist.

"I pledge my allegiance to the Constitution of the PRC to safeguard the Constitution's authority, and fulfill my legal obligations, be loyal to the country and the people, be committed and honest in my duty, accept the people's supervision, and work for a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful," Xi said.

Under Xi's leadership, the world's second-largest economy is marching on a model of modernization that has not been seen before.

In the past decade, China's GDP has grown to 121 trillion yuan (about 17.37 trillion U.S. dollars) from 53.9 trillion yuan in 2012.

The Chinese economy has come to account for over 18 percent of the world economy over the past 10 years, and its contribution to the world's economic growth has averaged over 30 percent.

The country has eradicated absolute poverty and built the largest education, social security, and heal-

thcare systems in the world.

The average life expectancy of the Chinese has increased from 74.8 to 78.2 years over the past decade, and there have been historic, transformative, and comprehensive changes in ecological and environmental protection.

China has also joined the ranks of the world's innovators, and achieved an overwhelming victory and fully consolidated the gains in the fight against corruption.

The country's military has been through an all-around revolutionary restructuring, becoming a much more modern and capable fighting force.

China has also created a miracle in human history, in which a highly populous nation has successfully pulled through a pandemic while maintaining social stability and steady economic development.

Observers believe Friday's elections will inject greater certainty into China's modernization drive.

"The elections will ensure that there is a steady hand at the helm, which will serve China well, particularly in this new era of new challenges," said Josef Gregory Mahoney, a professor of politics at East China Normal University.

"President Xi has already led us out of poverty," said Peng Xiaying, a villager in Shenshan Village of Jiangxi Province. "Now we put our faith in him to bring an even better life for all."

Also on Friday, lawmakers elected Zhao Leji as chairman of the 14th NPC Standing Committee and Han Zheng as vice president of China.

A total of 14 vice chairpersons and a secretary-general were also elected for the 14th NPC Standing Committee.

They all pledged allegiance to the Constitution.

Before the elections, lawmakers also approved a plan on reforming State Council institutions.



NPC

LI QIANG ENDORSED AS CHINESE PREMIER

Li Qiang was endorsed as Chinese premier over the weekend at the ongoing first session of the 14th National People's Congress, the country's national legislature.

President Xi Jinping signed a presidential order to appoint him as premier. And then Li made a public pledge of allegiance to the Constitution.

Earlier, President Xi Jinping nominated him the candidate for premier.

An ethnic Han, Li Qiang was born in July 1959 and is from Ruian, Zhejiang Province. He began his first job in July 1976 and joined the Communist Party of China (CPC) in April 1983. He received a graduate education at the Central Party School and holds an executive MBA degree.

Li is currently a member of the Standing Committee of the 20th CPC Central Committee Political Bureau, premier of the State Council and secretary of the Leading Party Members Group of the State Council. XINHUA

NPC

FAVORING CONTINUITY, CHINA REAPPOINTS PEOPLE'S BANK GOVERNOR

CHINA yesterday reappointed Yi Gang as head of the central bank in an effort to reassure entrepreneurs and financial markets by showing continuity at the top while other economic officials change during a period of uncertainty in the world's second-largest economy.

Yi, whose official title

is governor of the People's Bank of China, plays no role in making monetary policy, unlike his counterparts in other major economies. His official duties lie in "implementing monetary policy."

The central bank governor also acts as spokesperson for monetary policy, is the most prominent Chi-

nese figure in global finance and is in charge of reassuring bankers and investors at a time when China's economy is emerging from drastically slower growth.

At the March 5 opening of the annual session of China's parliament, the National People's Congress, China announced plans for a consumer-led revival

of the struggling economy, setting this year's growth target at "around 5%," according to Xinhua.

A longtime veteran of monetary policy departments, Yi was first appointed governor of the People's Bank of China in March 2018, taking over from the highly regarded Zhou Xiaochuan. AGENCIES



Yi Gang, governor of the People's Bank of China

JAPAN

Country marks 12 years since tsunami and nuclear disaster

MARI YAMAGUCHI

JAPAN marked the 12th anniversary of the massive earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster with a minute of silence, as concerns grew ahead of the planned release of the treated radioactive water from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant and the government's return to nuclear energy.

The 9.0 magnitude earthquake and tsunami that ravaged large parts of Japan's northeastern coast on March 11, 2011, left more than 22,000 people dead, including about 3,700 whose subsequent deaths were linked to the disaster.

A moment of silence was observed nationwide at 2:46 p.m., the moment the earthquake struck.

Some residents in the tsunami-hit northern prefectures of Iwate and Miyagi walked down to the coast to pray for their loved ones and the 2,519 whose remains were never found.

In Tomioka, one of the Fukushima towns where initial searches had to be abandoned due to radiation, firefighters and police use sticks and a hoe to rake through the coastline looking for the possible remains of the victims or their belongings.

At an elementary school in Sendai, in Miyagi prefecture north of Fukushima, participan-



People pause for a minute of silence to commemorate the 311 disaster, during an anniversary event at Hibiya Park in Tokyo

ts released hundreds of colorful balloons in memory of the lives lost.

In Tokyo, dozens of people gathered at an anniversary event in a downtown park, and anti-nuclear activists staged a rally.

The earthquake and tsunami that slammed into the coastal Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant destroyed its power and cooling functions, triggering meltdowns in three of its six reactors. They

spewed massive amounts of radiation that caused tens of thousands of residents to evacuate.

Over 160,000 people had left at one point, and about 30,000 are still unable to return due to long-term radiation effects or health concerns. Many of the evacuees have already resettled elsewhere, and most affected towns have seen significant population declines over the past decade.

At a ceremony, Fukushima Gov.

Masao Uchibori said decontamination and reconstruction had made progress, but "we still face many difficult problems." He said many people were still leaving and the prefecture was burdened with the plant cleanup and rumors about the effects of the upcoming release of the treated water.

The plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, and the government are making final preparations to re-

lease into the sea more than 1.3 million tons of treated radioactive water, beginning in coming months.

The government says the controlled release of the water after treatment to safe levels over several decades is safe, but many residents as well as neighbors China and South Korea and Pacific island nations are opposed to it. Fishing communities are particularly concerned about the reputation of local fish and their still recovering business.

In his speech last week, Uchibori urged the government to do utmost to prevent negative rumors about the water release from further damaging Fukushima's image.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida renewed his pledge to support the ongoing reconstruction efforts.

"The discharge of the treated water is a step that cannot be delayed," Kishida told reporters after the ceremony. He repeated an earlier pledge that "a release will not be carried out without understanding of the stakeholders."

Kishida's government has reversed a nuclear phase-out policy that was adopted following the 2011 disaster, and instead is pushing a plan to maximize the use of nuclear energy to address energy supply concerns triggered by Russia's war on Ukraine while meeting decarbonization requirements.

Uchibori's goal is to bolster the renewable energy supply to 100% of the Fukushima prefectural needs by 2040. He said last week that while the energy policy is the central government's mandate, he wants it to remember that Fukushima continues to suffer from the nuclear disaster. **MDT/AP**

INDONESIA

Merapi volcano spews hot clouds in new eruption

INDONESIA'S Mount Merapi erupted over the weekend with avalanches of searing gas clouds and lava, forcing authorities to halt tourism and mining activities on the slopes of the country's most active volcano.

Merapi, on the densely populated island of Java, unleashed clouds of hot ash and a mixture of rock, lava and gas that traveled up to 7 kilometers down its slopes. A column of hot clouds rose 100 meters into the air, said the National Disaster Management Agency's spokesperson Abdul Muhari.

The eruption throughout the day blocked out the sun and blanketed several villages with falling ash. No casualties have

been reported.

It was Merapi's biggest lava flow since authorities raised the alert level to the second-highest in November 2020, said Hanik Humaida, the head of Yogyakarta's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center.

She said residents living on Merapi's slopes were advised to stay 7 kilometers away from the crater's mouth and be aware of the danger posed by lava.

Tourism and mining activities were halted.

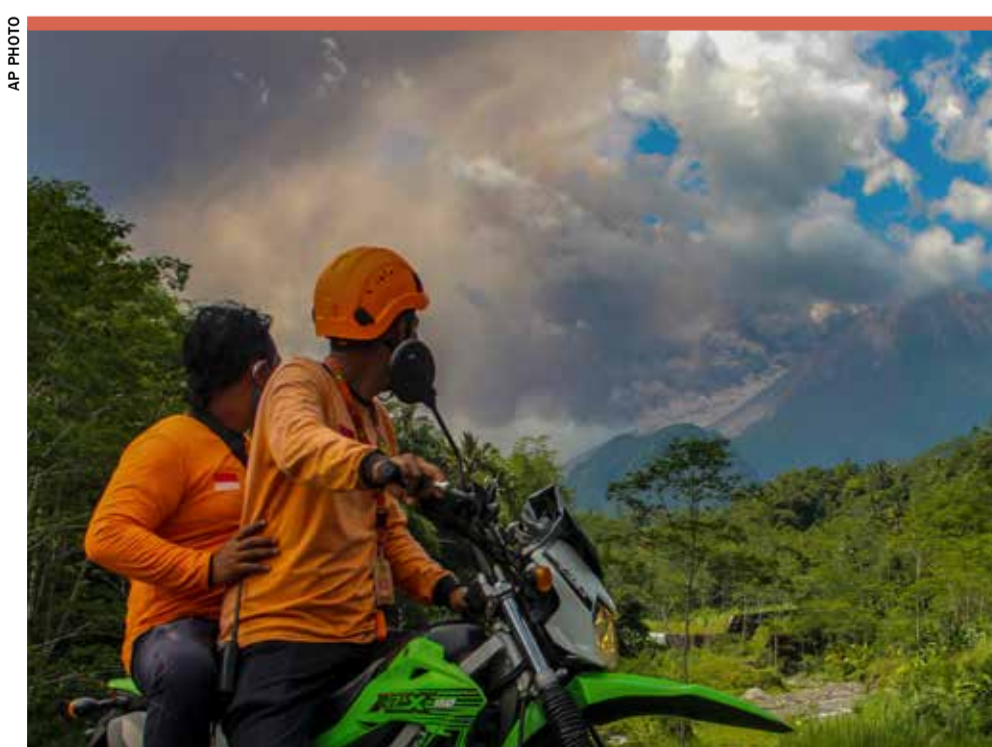
The 2,968-meter (9,737-foot) mountain is about 30 kilometers from Yogyakarta, an ancient center of Javanese culture and the seat of royal dynasties going back centuries. About a

quarter million people live within 10 kilometers of the volcano.

Merapi is the most active of more than 120 active volcanoes in Indonesia and has repeatedly erupted with lava and gas clouds recently. Its last major eruption in 2010 killed 347 people and displaced 20,000 villagers.

Indonesia, an archipelago of 270 million people, is prone to earthquakes and volcanic activity because it sits along the "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe-shaped series of seismic fault lines around the Pacific Ocean.

An eruption in December 2021 of Mount Semeru, the highest volcano on Java island, left 48 people dead and 36 missing. **MDT/AP**



Mount Merapi releases volcanic materials during an eruption in Sleman

PUTIN'S WAR

Russian advance stalls in Ukraine's Bakhmut, think tank says

KARL RITTER, KYIV

RUSSIA'S advance seems to have stalled in Moscow's campaign to capture the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, a leading think tank said in an assessment of the longest ground battle of the war.

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said there were no confirmed advances by Russian forces in Bakhmut. Russian forces and units from the Kremlin-controlled paramilitary Wagner Group continued to launch ground attacks in the city, but there was no evidence that they were able to make any progress, ISW said late Saturday.

The report cited the spokesperson of the Ukrainian Armed Forces' Eastern Group, Serhii Cherevaty, who said that fighting in the Bakhmut area had been more intense this week than the previous one. According to Cherevaty, there were 23 clashes in the city over the previous 24 hours.

The ISW's report comes following claims of Russian progress earlier this week. The U.K. Defense Ministry said Saturday that paramilitary units from the Kremlin-controlled Wagner Group had seized most of eastern Bakhmut, with a river flowing through the city now marking the front line of the fighting. The assessment highlighted that Russia's assault will be difficult to sus-



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows smoke from recently dropped ordnance in southern Bakhmut, Ukraine

tain without more significant personnel losses.

The mining city of Bakhmut is located in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk province, one of four regions of Ukraine that Russian President Vladimir Putin illegally annexed last year. Russia's military opened the campaign to take control of Bakhmut in August, and both sides have experienced staggering casualties. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has vowed not to retreat.

In its latest report, the U.K. Defense Ministry said yesterday that the impact of the heavy casualties Russia is continuing to suffer in Ukraine varies dramatically across the country. The ministry's intelligence update said that the major cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg remain "relatively unscathed," particularly among members of Russia's elite. In contrast, in many of Russia's eastern regions, the death rate as a percentage of the population

is "30-40 times higher than in Moscow."

The report highlighted that ethnic minorities often take the biggest hit. In the southern Astrakhan region, for example, about "75% of casualties come from the minority Kazakh and Tartar populations."

Russia's mounting casualties are reflected in a loss of government control over the country's information sphere, ISW said. The think tank said that Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova confirmed "infighting in the Kremlin inner circle" and that the Kremlin has effectively ceded control over the country's information space, with Putin unable to readily regain control.

The ISW sees Zakharova's comments, made at a forum on the "practical and technological aspects of information and cognitive warfare in modern realities" in Moscow, as "noteworthy" and in line with the think tank's long

standing assessments about the "deteriorating Kremlin regime and information space control dynamics."

Elsewhere in Ukraine, Russian attacks over the previous day killed at least five people and wounded another seven across Ukraine's Donetsk and Kherson regions, local Ukrainian authorities reported yesterday.

Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said that two people were killed in the region, one in the city of Kostyantynivka and one in the village of Tonenke. Four further civilians were wounded.

Local officials in the southern Kherson province confirmed that Russian forces fired 29 times on Ukrainian-controlled territory in the region on Saturday, with residential areas of the regional capital, Kherson, coming under fire three times. Three people died in the province and a further three were wounded.

In Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv province, the Kharkiv, Chuhuiv and Kupiansk districts came under fire, but no civilian casualties were reported.

The head of Ukraine's southern Mykolaiv province Gov. Vitali Kim said yesterday morning that the town of Ochakiv, set at the mouth of the Dnieper River, came under artillery fire in the early hours of yesterday. Cars were set ablaze, while private houses and high-rise buildings sustained damage. No casualties were reported. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1996 MASSACRE IN DUNBLANE SCHOOL GYM



A lone gunman has gone on a shooting spree at a school in Dunblane, Scotland, killing 16 children and their teacher.

The killer sprayed shots at random around the school gym in an attack that lasted just three minutes, but caused carnage in a class of five and six year olds. He then turned the gun on himself.

Twelve other children were taken to hospital in Stirling, where one is reported to have later died of his injuries.

The killer has been named as Thomas Hamilton, 43, a local man, who had once - briefly - been a scout master before being sacked by the Scout Association.

The Queen has sent a message of sympathy to the people of Dunblane.

The Prime Minister, John Major, on a visit to Cairo, has spoken of his disbelief at what he called "this sick and evil act".

The attack happened just after 0930 GMT, as the Year One pupils were beginning an exercise class in the gym with their teacher, Gwen Mayor.

One pupil said: "We heard these gunshots from the gym and looked round and thought he must be firing at a target or something then he came out through a fire exit and started firing at our huts and we were all petrified."

William Wilson, chief constable of central Scotland, told a news conference his officers had been called to the school at 0938 GMT: "They found a scene of carnage, with 15 children dead, one teacher dead and one other dead."

Parents and carers began arriving at the school as news of the tragedy quickly spread around the town.

The Scottish Secretary, Michael Forsyth, who represents Dunblane said: "I find it difficult to express the feelings I know will be felt throughout Dunblane.

"This is a close-knit community where everyone knows everyone else and the impact of this horrible tragedy will be felt in every household."

The motive for the attack is still unclear.

Courtesy BBC News

SOCIAL MEDIA

Belgium bans TikTok from government phones after US, EU

BELGIUM is banning TikTok from government phones over worries about cybersecurity, privacy and misinformation, the country's prime minister said Friday, mirroring recent action by other authorities in Europe and the U.S.

The Chinese-owned video sharing app will be temporarily prohibited from devices owned or paid for by the Bel-

gium's federal government for at least six months, according to a post on Alexander de Croo's website.

TikTok said it is "disappointed at this suspension, which is based on basic misinformation about our company." The company said it's "readily available to meet with officials to address any concerns and set the record straight on misconceptions."

TikTok is owned by China's ByteDance, which moved its headquarters to Singapore in 2020. The company sought to distance itself from its Chinese roots, saying its parent company is incorporated outside of China and it's majority owned by global institutional investors.

But the European Union's three main institutions and Denmark's defense ministry

have already ordered employees to remove the app from devices used for official business. Similar bans have been imposed in Canada and the U.S.

The tussle over TikTok is part of a wider global rivalry between China and the U.S. and its Western allies over technological and economic supremacy.

De Croo said Belgium's ban was based on warnings from the state security service and its cybersecurity center, which said the app could harvest user data and tweak algorithms to manipulate its news feed and content. **MDT/AP**

IN CONTEXT

A public inquiry into the Dunblane massacre found the killer Thomas Hamilton had been investigated by police following complaints about his behaviour around young boys.

Hamilton had licences for six guns leading to criticism of the police for not questioning what he used them for. But the inquiry concluded his actions on that day could not have been predicted. A massive campaign was launched after Dunblane for tighter gun controls.

The Snowdrop Campaign was successful in achieving a change in the law in 1997, making it illegal to buy or possess a handgun.

The Gun Control Network - which included relatives of those killed in the Hungerford disaster - has continued to campaign among other things for a national gun register.

In October 2002, a scheme to set up a central database of gun users was being delayed by technical problems. It is now due to come into operation in summer 2006.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Patience will be of utmost importance. Do not allow colleagues to hinder your ambitions. Any capricious behavior will confuse loved ones and your mood swings will result in loneliness.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Loved ones could feel left out and insecure. Use your quick wit to win points with friends. Take time to look at any outdated papers or possible investments.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 You will be overly generous with children today. Your ability to talk circles around your colleagues will help you forge ahead in the workforce. Things at home may be somewhat rocky.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Stubborn about making changes around your home. Attend to things that you should have done yesterday. Sudden changes in your financial situation are likely.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Don't expect the whole family to be overjoyed. Your fight for those less fortunate is not likely to end in sweet victory. You will learn valuable skills if you sign up for seminars today.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 You'll hurt your lover if you don't pay attention. You must refrain from overspending on entertainment. Your self confidence will attract members of the opposite sex.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 The great outdoors will allow you to teach youngsters some of the things you learned when growing up. You should put your efforts into creative projects.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Concentrate on home improvement. Small details will make a difference. Get busy on projects that improve your own image; you'll have the discipline to succeed.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Get together with friends and catch up on reading and letter writing. Be tolerant, but don't let any one take you for granted. Be careful not to come on too strongly.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Don't be too eager to give a piece of your mind or even your opinion today. Visit friends or relatives who have been confirmed. Romance may be better than you ever thought possible.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Overindulgence could lead to problems with digestion. You have your own family to consider as well. Go after your professional goals. You may find yourself caught in a triangle.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Arguments with employers or colleagues will be to your detriment. Your partner will be emotionally unable to cope. Situations in your personal life are moving a little fast lately.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-1	14	cloudy
Changchun	-9	3	fine
Chengdu	4	18	fine
Chongqing	8	20	cloudy
Fuzhou	11	17	overcast
Guangzhou	15	23	cloudy
Guiyang	4	16	cloudy
Haikou	19	22	rain
Hangzhou	4	15	cloudy
Harbin	-9	1	fine
Hefei	1	18	fine
Nanjing	5	16	fine
Shanghai	5	14	fine
Taipei	13	15	overcast
Wuhan	1	20	fine
Hong Kong	19	22	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	-6	-1	overcast
Frankfurt	9	17	rain
Paris	8	17	rain
London	3	13	rain
New York	3	7	heavy rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Some digits; 5- Foot part; 9- Wife of Osiris; 13- Actress Best; 14- Idolize; 15- Centrepiece of the human face; 16- Waiter's offering; 17- Private Pyle; 18- Can't stand; 19- Monetary unit of Tonga; 21- From ___ Z; 22- For one; 23- Compact by pounding; 25- Electric fish; 27- Anonymous; 31- Sixth planet; 35- At all; 36- Ciaol; 38- Black tea; 39- Fan sound; 40- Gnu cousin; 42- 1970 Jackson 5 hit; 43- Key; 46- Allot; 47- "Dilbert" intern; 48- Makes rhapsodic; 50- Young hares; 52- Drop of water expelled by the eye; 54- Rise sharply, as a bird would; 55- Lucie's father; 58- Flight formation; 60- Daze; 64- Enlarge, as a hole; 65- Point in question; 67- Square; 68- Vogue rival; 69- ___ Dame; 70- Incite; 71- Turns red, say; 72- Singer Stefani; 73- "Only Time" singer;

DOWN 1- Office fill-in; 2- Ancient theaters; 3- Sicilian resort; 4- Stroll; 5- Ruckus; 6- Type of tomato; 7- El Greco's birthplace; 8- People of courage; 9- Rashly; 10- Work up lather; 11- Ratio words; 12- Ooze; 14- Asexual reproductive cell; 20- Guy's partner; 24- Sacred song; 26- One circuit; 27- Impertinence; 28- Be of use to; 29- Conductor Zubin; 30- Madame de ___; 32- Edict of the czar; 33- Android; 34- Makes out; 37- Pays to play; 41- Follower; 44- Occasionally; 45- Bruce ___ was a famous kung-fu movie star; 47- Place in order; 49- Thrifty; 51- Van Gogh had one later in life; 53- Plant again; 55- Historic Scott; 56- Hard to hold; 57- Cut-price retail event; 59- Ferrara family; 61- Light gas; 62- Supercomputer name; 63- Icelandic epic; 66- Samovar;

Friday's solution

A	P	A	R	I	H	A	S	A	A	T	T	N	
M	E	T	E	S	A	L	A	D	P	E	R	U	
P	R	O	M	E	T	H	I	U	M	P	E	E	L
S	E	M	I	S	C	I	T	A	D	E	L		
A	A	S	T	E	D	E	R						
F	E	L	S	H	U	N	A	D	A	T	E		
T	H	I	C	K	E	N	A	C	E	T	A	T	E
N	E	A	R	E	R	E	N	T	R	I	C	A	D
A	S	B	E	T	A	L	T	O	U	P	S	Y	
P	S	I	C	A	R	I	E	N					
A	T	E	E	R	A	D	I	O	G	E	N	I	C
C	L	A	N	E	D	E	M	A	S	E	E	N	
T	O	R	T	R	E	B	A	R	T	A	N	E	

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PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
S. J. Hospital 28 313 731	
Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333	
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Airport 59 888 88	

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

STAN CHOE &
BOBBY CAINA CALVAN,
NEW YORK

SILICON VALLEY

FROM WINE COUNTRY TO LONDON, BANK'S FAILURE SHAKES WORLDWIDE

IT was called Silicon Valley Bank, but its collapse is causing shockwaves around the world.

From winemakers in California to startups across the Atlantic Ocean, companies are scrambling to figure out how to manage their finances after their bank suddenly shut down Friday. The meltdown means distress not only for businesses but also for all their workers whose paychecks may get tied up in the chaos.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said Saturday that he's talking with the White House to help "stabilize the situation as quickly as possible, to protect jobs, people's livelihoods, and the entire innovation ecosystem that has served as a tent pole for our economy."

U.S. customers with less than \$250,000 in the bank can count on insurance provided by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Regulators are trying to find a buyer for the bank in hopes custo-

AP PHOTO



mers with more than that can be made whole.

That includes custo-

mers like Circle, a big player in the cryptocurrency industry. It said it

has about \$3.3 billion of the roughly \$40 billion in reserves for its USDC coin at SVB. That caused USD Coin's value, which tries to stay firmly at \$1, to briefly plunge below 87 cents Saturday. It later rose back above 97 cents, according to CoinDesk.

Across the Atlantic, startup companies woke up Saturday to find SVB's U.K. business will stop making payments or accepting deposits. The Bank of England said late Friday that it will put Silicon Valley Bank UK in its insolvency procedure, which will pay out eligible depositors up to 170,000 British pounds (\$204,544) for joint accounts "as quickly as possible."

"We know that there are a large number of startups and investors in the ecosystem who have significant exposure to SVB UK and will be very concerned," Dom Hallas, executive director of Coadec, which represents British startups, said on Twitter. He cited "concern and panic."

The Bank of England said SVB UK's assets would be sold to pay creditors.

It's not just startups feeling the pain. The bank's collapse is having

an effect on another important California industry: fine wines. It's been an influential lender to vineyards since the 1990s.

"This is a huge disappointment," said winemaker Jasmine Hirsch, the general manager of Hirsch Vineyards in California's Sonoma County.

Hirsch said she expects her business will be fine. But she's worried about the broader effects for smaller vintners looking for lines of credit to plant new vines.

"They really understand the wine business," Hirsch said. "The disappearance of this bank, as one of the most important lenders, is absolutely going to have an effect on the wine industry, especially in an environment where interest rates have gone up."

In Seattle, Shelf Engine CEO Stefan Kalb found himself immersed in emergency meetings devoted to figuring how to meet payroll instead of focusing on his startup company's business of helping grocers manage their food orders.

"It's been a brutal day. We literally have every single penny in Silicon Valley Bank," Kalb said Friday, pegging the deposit amount that's now tied

up at millions of dollars.

He is filing a claim for the \$250,000 limit, but that won't be enough to keep paying Shelf Engine's 40 employees for long. That could force him into a decision about whether to begin furloughing employees until the mess is cleaned up.


"I'm just hoping the bank gets sold during the weekend," Kalb said.


Tara Fung, co-founder and CEO of tech startup Co:Create that helps launch digital loyalty and rewards programs, said her firm uses multiple banks besides Silicon Valley Bank so was able to switch over its payroll and vendor payments to another bank Friday.

Fung said her firm chose the bank as a partner because it is the "gold standard for tech firms and banking partnerships," and she was upset that some people seemed to be gloating about its failure and unfairly tying it to doubts about cryptocurrency ventures.

San Francisco-based employee performance management company Confirm.com was among the Silicon Valley Bank depositors that rushed to pull their money out before regulators seized the bank. **MDT/AP**

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FOOTBALL

Napoli returns to Champions League set for historic season

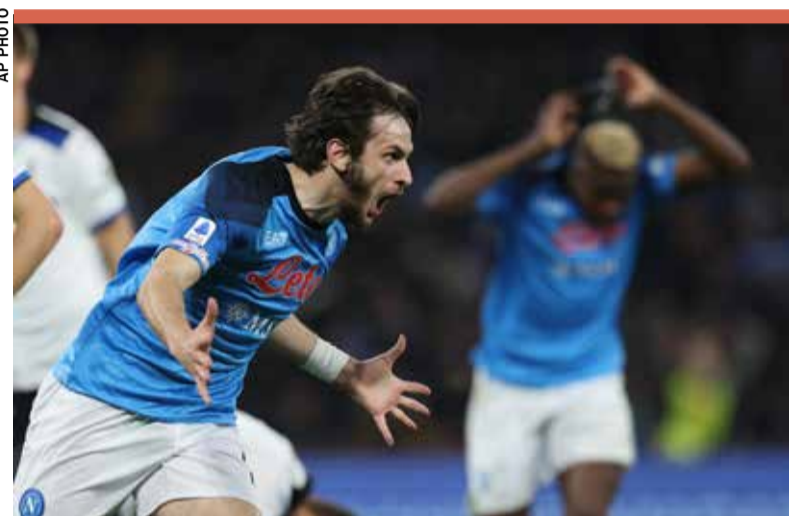
NAPOLI returns to Champions League action this week well on track to have the standout season in European soccer and in the club's entire history.

The quarterfinals of Europe's marquee club competition finally beckon for Napoli, which has a 2-0 lead from the first leg before hosting Eintracht Frankfurt in the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona on Wednesday.

Only three of the 12 teams left in the competition top their domestic leagues — Napoli, Bayern Munich and Benfica — and the 18-point lead in Serie A is by far the most dominant.

Real Madrid hosting Liverpool with a 5-2 lead is the glamor game of the four second legs remaining in the round of 16, though only Madrid of that storied pair has so much as a chance of a domestic league title.

Napoli is a lock to be Italian champion for just the third time in its history, the first since 1990,



Napoli's Khvicha Kvaratskhelia celebrates scoring during the Serie A soccer match between Napoli and Atalanta at Diego Armando Maradona stadium in Naples, Italy, Saturday

and the first time without having Maradona in the team.

Still, even with the Argentina icon, Napoli twice failed to get past the second round of the old European Cup after those 1987 and 1990 titles in Serie A.

Napoli also never advanced past the round of 16 stage in the

Champions League era that began in 1992. That looks set to change Wednesday.

It is also a big step for Napoli's veteran coach Luciano Spalletti, who has not taken a team to the Champions League quarterfinals since 2008 with Roma. This is Spalletti's seventh try since then,

though his first with Napoli after falling short with Roma, Zenit St. Petersburg and Inter Milan.

Inter, which has not been to the quarterfinals since going out at that stage as the defending champion in 2011, takes a 1-0 lead to Porto in a finely balanced game Tuesday.

Manchester City host Leipzig on Tuesday with the teams tied at 1-1.

NAPOLI RESTED

A uniquely congested European season split in two by a break for the World Cup promised surprises and Napoli perhaps has benefited from having star players rested.

Prolific strikers Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia were not involved in Qatar because their national teams Nigeria and Georgia, respectively, did not qualify.

Eintracht's star striker Randal Kolo Muani did go to the World Cup, almost winning the final for

France with a last-minute chance, but will not play this week. Kolo Muani is suspended because of his red-card tackle in the first leg.

Also missing in Naples could be the German club's fans who local authorities want to ban from the city following clashes in Frankfurt three weeks ago.

Eintracht won a court injunction Saturday against the ban though further legal action is expected before Wednesday.

MADRID FAVORED

The defending champion surely will not waste a three-goal lead against Liverpool in its own stadium.

It is unlikely, though Madrid was eliminated as the title holder four years ago when taking a three-goal beating in the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium in the round of 16. That was against a rampaging Ajax, which won 4-1 to overturn a 2-1 first-leg loss.

Liverpool won that 2019 title but no team ever overcame a three-goal deficit in the second leg away from home in the Champions League.

Liverpool perhaps could do it if the team that crushed Manchester United with six second-half goals in the Premier League a week ago shows up in Madrid. Probably not with the version that lost 1-0 at Bournemouth on Saturday. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

GOVERNMENT SET TO PURSUE HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT AND COMMON INTERESTS

The central government has done a good job over the past five years in keeping the economy and employment growing within a rational range. It has done so in the face of the strong headwinds of the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenging domestic and international factors. Those efforts have laid a solid foundation for the work to be done over the next five years, a key period in which to advance the country's high-quality development and gnaw some "hard bones" of reforms, which are necessary to realize the modernization of the country.

Although some have left their seats and there are some fresh faces joining the top table of government, they are experienced professionals and veteran policymakers who will help guide the nation toward its goal of modernization. With the assistance of advanced technology and a more rationalized and streamlined government structure, as indicated by the State institutional reform plan approved by the country's top legislature on Friday, they are tasked with tackling the challenges and difficulties head-on and overcoming them.

It should be borne in mind that China is still a large, developing country, and it remains in the primary stage of socialism with prominent imbalances and inadequacies in its development that need to be addressed. Therefore, the government should uphold the people's expectations of a better life as the orientation for their work. Heeding the people's views and endeavoring to gain a full understanding of their needs, the government must spare no effort to make the most of what it has to solve the pressing difficulties and problems that concern people the most, while maintaining a good balance between short- and long-term objectives.

Although the about 5 percent growth target set for this year is regarded "modest" given the economy's rebound momentum and potential, the government should by no means let down its guard, as consumption remains weak, a large number of jobs need to be created, the population is rapidly aging, the private sector needs reinvigorating, the financial risks from local government debt must be defused, and the relentless international technology blockade and rising geopolitical tensions need to be coped with.

If well handled, not only will China's development be of a high-quality but the country will be better able to contribute to the common development of the world. The stress now is on qualitative not quantitative growth and shouldering the country's responsibilities as a major participant in world affairs to uphold multilateralism, globalization and fair and just global governance.

For the government to deliver, it is important to act on the general principle of pursuing progress, promote reform and high-standard opening-up, while ensuring stability. In the reshuffle of government personnel, those continuing to hold their previous posts, particularly those in the economic and financial sectors, can ensure policy continuity, while those assuming new posts are expected to bring fresh ideas and apply what they have learned in their past work experience to enhance the practicality, pertinence and adaptability of policies.

Having accumulated their work experience over the past decade when the new thought on governance was being initiated, the senior officials are not only witnesses to the process but also participants. That means they should have the experience and knowledge to effectively implement the new development thought and more actively enrich it in practice, making them an important generation of policymakers linking the past with the future.

UK HAS NEW DUKE OF EDINBURGH AS KING GIVES HIS BROTHER TITLE

THE BUZZ

King Charles III has made his youngest brother the Duke of Edinburgh, passing on a title held by their late father, Prince Philip.

Buckingham Palace said the title was conferred on Prince Edward on Friday, his 59th birthday.

Edward is the youngest of the four children of Philip and the late Queen Elizabeth II. His wife Sophie will now be known as the

Duchess of Edinburgh, and their 15-year-old son James becomes Earl of Wessex, the title Edward previously held.

Prince Philip was made Duke of Edinburgh when he married the then Princess Elizabeth in 1947, and he held the title until his death in 2021 at the age of 99. It had been Philip's wish that Edward should get the dukedom after he and the queen had both died.



AP PHOTO



OIL GIANT SAUDI ARAMCO MAKES A HISTORIC USD161B PROFIT IN 2022

JON GAMBRELL, DUBAI

Oil giant Saudi Aramco reported yesterday earning \$161 billion last year, claiming the highest-ever recorded annual profit by a publicly listed company and drawing immediate criticism from activists.

The monster profit by the firm, known formally as the Saudi Arabian Oil Co., came off the back of energy prices rising after Russia launched its war on Ukraine in February 2022, with sanctions limiting the sale of Moscow's oil and natural gas in Western markets.

Aramco also hopes to increase its production to take advantage of market demand as China reenters the global market after lifting its coronavirus restrictions. That could raise the billions needed to pay for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's plans to develop futuristic cityscapes to pivot Saudi Arabia away from oil.

However, those plans come despite growing international concerns over the burning of fossil fuels accelerating climate change. Meanwhile, higher energy prices already have strained relations between

Riyadh and Washington, as well as driven up inflation worldwide.

"Given that we anticipate oil and gas will remain essential for the foreseeable future, the risks of underinvestment in our industry are real — including contributing to higher energy prices," Saudi Aramco CEO and President Amin H. Nasser said in a statement.

Profits rose 46.5% when compared to the company's 2021 results of \$110 billion. It earned \$49 billion in 2020 when the world faced the worst of the coronavirus pandemic lockdown, travel disruptions and oil prices briefly going negative.

Aramco put its crude production at around 11.5 million barrels a day in 2022 and said it hoped to reach 13 million barrels a day by 2027.

To boost that production, it plans to spend as much as \$55 billion this year on capital projects.

Aramco also declared a dividend of \$19.5 billion for the fourth quarter of 2022, to be paid in the first quarter of this year.

Aramco's results, viewed as a bellwether for the global energy market, mirror

the huge profits seen at those of U.K. energy giant BP America's Exxon Mobil, Shell and others in 2022. But the sheer size of the \$161 billion profit overshadowed even its own previous results, as well as records by Apple, Vodafone and the U.S. Federal National Mortgage Association, or Fannie Mae.

Benchmark Brent crude oil now trades around \$82 a barrel, though prices had reached over \$120 a barrel back in June. Aramco, whose fortunes hinge on global energy prices, announced a record \$42.4 billion profit in the third quarter of 2022 off the back of that price spike.

Those high prices have further strained ties between the kingdom and the United States, traditionally a security guarantor among the Gulf Arab states amid tensions with Iran. Before the midterm elections in November, the kingdom said the Biden administration sought to delay a decision by OPEC and allies including Russia to cut production that could have kept gasoline prices lower for voters — making public the typically behind-the-scenes negotiations common in the region. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Italian coast guard and navy vessels during the weekend ferried hundreds of rescued migrants toward shore, while elsewhere in the Mediterranean Sea thousands of migrants overflowed from a shelter on a tiny tourist island. The influx of sea arrivals came in the face of a crackdown by Italy's right-wing government on people smugglers announced only two days earlier. The coast guard said in a statement that overcrowding on two vessels and adverse sea and weather conditions had complicated rescue operations that began Friday in the Ionian Sea off Calabria.

AP PHOTO



France Opponents of French President Emmanuel Macron's plan to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 staged a new round of protests Saturday to push the government to withdraw the unpopular plan. Determination remained high, but crowds were far smaller than in past protests. The nationwide marches, the second round of protests in four days and the seventh since January, were bolstered by ongoing strikes in key sectors, from energy to transport and garbage workers. Uncollected trash piled up in Paris and other cities.

Mozambique Record-breaking Cyclone Freddy made its second landfall in Mozambique Saturday night, pounding the southern African nation with heavy rains and disrupting transport and telecommunications services. French weather agency Météo-France warned of "destructive and devastating" winds and "dangerous seas and heavy rains" that could lead to landslides. It said Freddy will go further inland through the weekend, generating heavy rains in Mozambique and southern Malawi, with rain also likely in Zimbabwe and Zambia.