

## THE NUMBER OF VISITORS TO MACAU IN FEBRUARY INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY TO OVER 1.59 MILLION, A SURGE OF 143% YEAR-ON-YEAR

## **AVIATION: AIR MACAU TO INCREASE FREQUENCY OF SEVERAL FLIGHTS**

# XI TO MEET PUTIN AS BEIJING SEEKS BOLDER GLOBAL ROLE

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A standard linear barcode representing the number 23054271.

**German Chancellor Olaf Scholz** and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida this weekend held the first round of government consultations in Tokyo and agreed to strengthen economic and defense ties to better cope with China's growing influence and global security concerns. Kishida told a joint news conference after the talks that the sides agreed to strengthen supply chains in minerals, semiconductors, batteries and other strategic areas, in order to "counter economic coercion, state-led attempts to illegally acquire technology and non-market practices," apparently referring to China.

A photograph showing a group of individuals, some wearing dark uniforms and others in civilian clothing, gathered around a person lying on the ground. The setting appears to be an indoor or sheltered area with a green wall in the background.

**Pakistani** police stormed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's residence in the eastern city of Lahore and arrested 61 people amid tear gas and clashes between Khan's supporters and police, officials said. Senior police officer Suhail Sukhera, who led the operation in an upscale Lahore neighborhood, said police acted to remove a barricade erected by members of Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf party and his defiant supporters. He said they blocked the lanes around Khan's residence with concrete blocks, felled trees, tents and a parked truck.

**Ukraine** An unprecedented wartime deal that allowed grain to flow from Ukraine to countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where hunger is a growing threat and high food prices are pushing more people into poverty was extended just before its expiration date, officials said. The United Nations and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the extension, but neither confirmed how long it would last. The U.N., Turkey and Ukraine had pushed for 120 days, while Russia said it was willing to agree to 60 days.

# POPULATION CRISIS

**The city recorded its lowest birth rate in 38 years,  
death rate is at its highest since 1991.** ▪ P2



SPORTS

# KENYAN ATHLETES DOMINATE SANDS' 10K



## SHUTTLE BUSES TO HKIA RESTART TODAY

Shuttle buses connecting Macau and the Hong Kong International Airport via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau bridge will commence operation today, with three round trips per day. According to the notice, buses will depart Macau at 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., while departures from the airport will restart at 10:30 a.m., 12:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Currently, no check-in services are available at the bridge border post in Macau.

## FORMER GOVERNOR VIEIRA TO VISIT MACAU

The former governor of Macau, Rocha Vieira, is visiting Macau this weekend as he is slated to receive an honoris causa doctorate from the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST). As cited in a report by TDM, during his visit to Macau, he will meet local authorities including the Consul of Portugal and representatives of the Portuguese community. Vieira was the last Portuguese governor of Macau. Last year, the university conferred its 2021 Honorary Doctorate upon eight individuals in recognition of their outstanding achievements in their respective professions, which includes Vieira.

## UNLICENSED TOURIST GUIDES AT BORDER GATE

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has identified four individuals suspected of working as unlicensed tourist guides at the Border Gate. According to evidence collected by the authorities, there are "strong indications" that the four individuals from mainland China were working illegally as tourist guides in the city, as they had failed to provide a tourist guide card issued by local authorities. Individuals who work illegally as tourist guides in Macau may be punished with a fine of MOP20,000 to MOP30,000 patacas.

## RESTAURANT, RETAIL BUSINESSES GROW IN JANUARY

Restaurants and retail businesses in Macau grew in January from the same period of last year, the statistics service recorded. The latest report from the Statistics and Census Service indicated that the revenue of the interviewed restaurants and similar establishments increased by 45.8% year on year in January, driven by the relaxation of border control measures and the Chinese New Year holidays. Sales of the interviewed retailers went up by 35.3% year on year in January.



## STATS

# CITY RECORDS 38-YEAR-LOW BIRTH RATE IN 2022

### ANTHONY LAM

**I**N the last year's final quarter, the city recorded its lowest birth rate in 38 years at 6.4%, the government's Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) has announced.

During the quarter, 4,344 infants were born, a drop of 682 babies year-over-year.

The average age of first-time mothers increased slightly by 0.9

years to 31 years.

For some time now, the government has been offering fewer incentives for parents of newborns. As recently as 2019, then Chief Executive election candidate Ho Iat Seng called on the people of Macau to have more babies without relying on government incentives.

The head of the government said most couples had to "work hard in their careers so some of

them would rather have a pet than raise a child," adding the main economic pillars – the hotel and casino industries – had contributed to the situation.

The CE also blamed the divorce rate for discouraging fertility.

However, he did not believe further government incentives, such as tax waivers or additional social welfare, would mitigate the challenges.

In April 2022, when Ho at-

tended a parliamentary question and answer session, similar questions were raised.

At the time, he said the government could not help improve the situation. He also restated his opinion that the decision to have children is a personal matter and would not change much "with an apartment sponsored by the government."

Last year, China's population also shrank for the first time in decades as its birthrate plunged, adding to pressure on leaders to keep the economy growing despite an aging workforce and at a time of rising tension with the U.S.

Many wealthy countries are struggling with how to respond to aging populations, which can be a drag on economic growth as shrinking numbers of workers try to support growing numbers of elderly people.

Macau's population decreased to 672,800 in 2022. The city also saw its highest mortality rate since 1991 as it recorded 3,004 deaths in 2022.

Meanwhile, last year's final quarter also saw 550 fewer marriages year-on-year, with 2,727 registrations. Both men and women tended to marry for the first time at older ages on average; men at 30.9 years, women at 29.2 years. This equates to increases of 0.5 and 0.6 years respectively.

DSEC also recorded a drop of 209 divorce registrations, to 1,106 cases.

# SSM: Macau has 368 lactation rooms

**T**HE city has 368 lactation rooms, with 249 in government offices, 52 in non-profit organizations and 67 in private companies, the Health Bureau (SSM) has announced.

"To encourage all sectors of society to support breastfeeding, the Health Bureau has carried out a series of works, including the formulation and launch of the guidelines for breastfeeding room equipment and management standards in 2016, providing guidance for public and private institutions to set up and manage breastfeeding rooms," the SSM said.

Information about breastfeeding and lactation rooms is also regularly announced on the SSM's cellphone app and website. Talks and seminars to promote breastfeeding have also been held to encourage support, the SSM added.

A special SSM taskforce exists to "actively encourage and assist public and private entities to establish and improve lactation rooms, and to respond to the calls of the world alliance for breastfeeding action by organizing breastfeeding acclamation ceremonies." At these ceremonies, certificates of recognition are awarded

to operators of breastfeeding-friendly workplaces.

"The SAR government continues to encourage private enterprise to create breastfeeding-friendly places by means of en-

couragement, guidance and commendation, so that women can benefit from appropriate breastfeeding spaces," the SSM boasted.

It also said the gover-

nment had established a cross-departmental taskforce to formulate policies to help women's status in the city. The taskforce comprises 11 governmental entities. AL

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**SPORTS**

# Kenyan squad dominates 10K

RENATO MARQUES

**K**ENYAN athletes dominated the 2023 Sands China Macau International 10K that took to Macau's roads early yesterday morning.

The Kenyan runners not only won in both male and female groups but also filled the podium for the male group. They only took first and second place in the female rankings because only two Kenyan women were competing.

In the male group, Edwin Cheruiyot Soi broke the local 10K track record, finishing in 29 minutes and 16 seconds, six seconds faster than his compatriot Mathew Samperu. Joseph Ngare took third place on the podium with a time of 30 minutes and 33 seconds.

With these finishing times, the three Kenyans also placed in the top spot of each category and age group of the running event.

Of these athletes, Soi was invited by the Sports Bureau (ID), while Samperu and Ngare registered for the local race on their own initiative.



Edwin Cheruiyot Soi

There was a disappointing performance from the mainland athletes invited by the organizers. Only Ren Guang Yue placed in the top 5 with the time of 31 minutes and 28 seconds. Zhong Zhi Ping, at 38 minutes and 13 seconds, placed 51st overall behind many local athletes who

were not specifically invited by the ID.

The best local runner in the male group of the 10K race was Wong Chin Wa, finishing 19th overall with a time of 33 minutes, 59 seconds and 66 milliseconds.

After crossing the line, Soi said he was happy with his perfor-

mance and win in his first time in Macau. Like several other athletes, he highlighted the track's difficulty, especially climbing from the Avenida Panorâmica do Lago Sai Van to the Sai Van Bridge.

Two Kenyan women of note were Winrose Chepkorir, who crossed the line first with a time

of 34 minutes, 22 seconds, and Lucy Ndambuki who finished a little over a minute later. Hungarian Zsófia Kovács followed, finishing third at 35 minutes and 43 seconds.

Chepkorir also pulverized the previous 2021 record of 37 minutes and 24 seconds, taking home USD15,000 (MOP121,280) in prize money on top of USD10,000 (MOP80,853) from the overall win.

The first of the local women was Hoi Long, crossing the line with the time of 38 minutes and 22 seconds, placing seventh overall and second in her category group.

As in the male group, mainland females athletes invited by the ID fell short of expectations, with the best placed being Wang Dong Mei in ninth position overall, with a time of 40 minutes and 9 seconds.

The last position from the invititational category was Zheng Yu Lian, who crossed the line in the 131st position with a time of 57 minutes and 41 seconds.

In the shorter race (5 km), victory went to IP Weng Tou from Macau in the male group (17 minutes, 33 seconds) and Kong Kuan Wai, also from Macau, in the female group (21 minutes, 45 seconds).

**TOURISM**

# Visitors surge in February, overnight stays shorten

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE number of visitors to Macau last month surged significantly, information from the Statistics and Census Service has indicated.

Arrivals in February totaled 1,593,743, a surge of 143.1% year-on-year and also an increase month-on-month of 14% compared with January this year.

Although both the overnight visitors (843,402) and same-day visitors (750,341) soared respectively by 201.8% and 99.5% year-on-year, the average length of stay has shortened by 0.2-day year-on-year to 1.3 days.

Overnight visitors stayed for a shorter period (2.2 days), a drop of 1.1 days, while same-day visitors stayed longer (0.3 days) – a rise of 0.2 days.

In the first two months of this year, arrivals expanded by 121.6% year-on-year to 2,991,491; overnight visitors (1,659,601) and same-day visitors (1,331,890) jumped by 217% and 61.2% respectively. The average length of stay of visitors remained steady year-on-year at 1.4 days, with that of overnight visitors (2.4 days) decreasing by 0.9 days, whereas



that of same-day visitors (0.3 days) rose 0.2 days.

Mainland visitors continue to top the visitors' source list, growing 64.8% year-on-year to 1,003,999, with those traveling under the Individual Visit Scheme (634,538) surging 222.9%.

Among these, the visitors from the nine cities in the Greater Bay Area increased 43.7% year-on-year to 552,094, 27.9% of whom came from Zhuhai (154,210) and 21% came from Guangzhou (115,876). Visitors from Hong Kong (523,271) and Taiwan

(22,411) skyrocketed by 1,163.7% and 372.6% year-on-year respectively as a consequence of the border reopening.

Most visitors continue to arrive via land borders, with 50.1% arriving through the checkpoint of Border Gate (642,521), 32.5% coming via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge (416,899), and 12.5% via the Hengqin port (160,889). In addition, arrivals by sea and by air leaped by 1,107.4% and 121.6% year-on-year to 199,523 and 112,160 respectively.

**AVIATION**

# AIR MACAU TO INCREASE FREQUENCY OF SEVERAL FLIGHTS

**A**IR Macau is set to gradually increase the frequency of international routes by March 26, including routes to Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan.

Aside from additional flights, the local carrier will also open new routes to Singapore and Bangkok's Don Mueang Airport, aiming to further expand depending on the market demand.

Air Macau said it has successively sent delegations to many countries to meet aviation industry authorities to accelerate the layout of international routes from Macau to Northeast and Southeast Asia and to expand the international market.

Air Macau will increase flight frequency and open new routes. These changes will include increasing its Japan route to

eight flights per week, its Seoul route to four flights per week, its Thailand route to nine flights per week, and its Taiwan route to 14 flights per week.

Company data has shown the number of weekly reservations in international regions is about 7,000, and continues to grow with a weekly growth rate of about 20%.

The Macau International Airport Co. Ltd. (CAM) is confident in achieving positive revenue this year following the end of the city's zero-Covid policies, as it gradually recovers from heavy losses as a result of the pandemic.

The local firm has pledged to cooperate with the SAR government to promote market recovery and the expansion of passenger and cargo transportation businesses. IV



## SARS' LEADERS SUPPORT FORMATION OF CPC'S HONG KONG, MACAU WORK OFFICE

Chief Executives John Lee and Ho Iat Seng expressed firm support for the formation of the Hong Kong and Macau work office of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee. A Hong Kong and Macau work office of the CPC Central Committee will be formed on the basis of the existing Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office of the State Council, according to a plan on reforming Party and state institutions released by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council. Ho expressed his gratitude to the central authorities for the importance they have attached to 'One country, two systems' practices in the two SARs.

## INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE SUMMIT TO KICK OFF IN GUANGZHOU

The 2023 intangible cultural heritage brand summit will be held from March 23 to 25 in southern China's Guangzhou, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT) announced. During the three-day event, exhibitions will showcase the protection, inheritance, and development of intangible cultural heritage brands and relevant achievements. Holding the summit in Guangzhou will encourage more intangible heritage brands from Hong Kong and Macau to participate, thus jointly promoting the protection of intangible cultural heritage in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau, and cultivating cultural brands in the Greater Bay Area, said Li Xiaosong, an official with the MCT.

# MGTO PROMOTES MACAU TO MALAYSIAN AND SINGAPORE MARKETS

### RENATO MARQUES

**A** Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) delegation has attended the 52nd Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) Fair in Kuala Lumpur from March 17 to 19.

The MGTO delegation's purpose was to connect with the industry, especially Malaysian operators, to promote Macau to international destinations where direct flights to Macau have already resumed.

This month, the MGTO attended the international travel fair in Malaysia as well as a travel trade networking meeting organized by the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS) for destination branding in both countries.

By restarting several local activities, the MGTO aims to



raise Macau's profile via multiple channels to tap into the potential of source markets in several Southeast Asian countries.

At the fair, the MGTO presented a series of promotional videos in a loop on digital screens at the exhibition and organized eight destination presentation sessions, introducing Macau's latest travel

tips to public visitors.

Each session will also feature a Q&A game with prizes and lucky draws with giveaways including a three-day highlight tour and hotel vacation package for families of four, two-night hotel stays, buffet coupons for two, skywalk tickets, souvenirs and more.

According to organizers,

the MATTA Fair attracted an estimated 250,000 visitors this year.

In 2019, Macau welcomed 206,277 visitors from Malaysia, the seventh-largest source market.

NATAS coordinates various activities including two annual travel fairs for consumers, seminars, workshops, and familiarization tours for members at different times throughout the year.

On March 30, the MGTO will join NATAS' general membership meeting to rebuild connections with tour operators in Singapore. At the meeting, MGTO will update trade participants with Macau's latest tourism information such as border and travel measures, means of transportation, tourist attractions, and events, along with an introduction to the concept of integration across "Tourism+".

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## HERITAGE

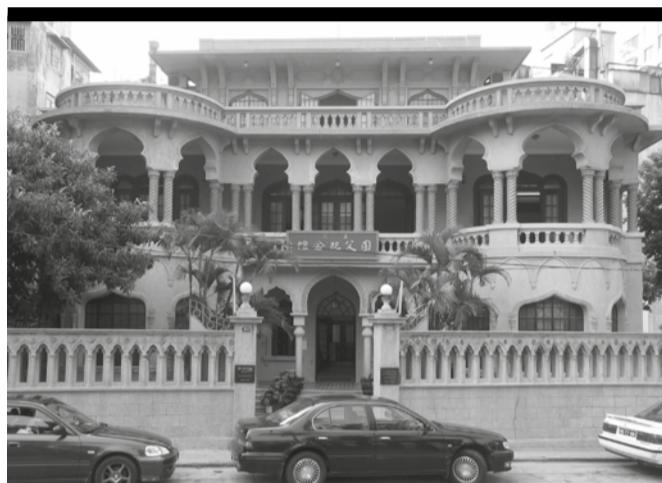
# Six immovable properties to be classified: Public consultation open

STAFF REPORTER

THE public consultation on the fourth batch of the proposed immovable property classification began yesterday and will run for 60 days. There are six properties to be classified in this batch, including Lingnan and Portuguese style buildings.

A press conference was held yesterday to introduce the classification, attended by Leong Wai Man, the president of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), Choi Kin Long, head of the Department of Cultural Heritage of IC, and Choi Cheng Cheng, chief consultant and senior technician.

The properties to be classified include Chiu's House, the previous dormitories



for civil servants and the equivalent for general post office employees, the family residence of Sun-Yat Sen, the former site of a slaughterhouse in Barra, and the former site of a health station branch in Coloane.

In the press conference, Leong said that IC is continuing the census on immo-

vable properties and collecting data for the classification. There are 158 classified immovable properties in Macau currently.

Among the six properties to be classified in this batch, only the place of residence of Sun Yat-sen's family is held by private equity. Leong said the owner should pay for the

maintenance of the properties regardless of the result of the classification. She also mentioned there is a subsidy from IC to encourage maintenance on privately owned properties.

According to Law No. 11/2013, Cultural Heritage Protection Law, the immovable property classification procedure will be launched when the properties can reflect local cultural features and are in an urgent or endangered condition of preservation; also, sufficient materials and data are necessary to meet the classification criteria.

The public consultation period will run until May 14, and there will also be public consultation sessions for the public at the Macao Cultural Center and Macao Museum of Art.

## FAI CHI KEI RECORDS THREE FIRES IN TWO DAYS

OVER the past weekend, the Fai Chi Kei district has seen three fires, with two being investigated as arson, the security forces have announced.

Two of the fires occurred on March 17, while the third occurred yesterday.

At around 3 a.m. on March 17, plastic bags outside a pub on Avenida Marginal do Lam Mau were found on fire. The fire bureau referred the case to the Judiciary Police (PJ) due to its suspicious criminal nature.

The plastic bags, according to the PJ, were wrapped around some power boxes outside the pub, but fire fighters found no sign of the power boxes short-circuiting.

In another case at about 5 p.m. on the same day, explosions and a consequent fire affected power boxes

on the ground floor of a residential building in Fai Chi Kei.

About a dozen residents evacuated themselves to the ground floor, while others were forced to stay home or relocate to the rooftop. Two residents were sent to the hospital after inhaling smoke.

Traffic was affected due to road closures.

The third case, which has been categorized as arson, occurred around noon yesterday. A courier pick-up locker on Rua da Ribeira do Patane caught fire.

The fire had already been extinguished by the time fire fighters' arrived, but the fire fighters found evidence of a locker space damaged by smoke and fire, which led them to suspect that the case had a criminal nature.

The locker owner reported a repair cost of MOP2,000. AL

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AP FILE PHOTO



## DIPLOMACY

## XI TO MEET PUTIN AS BEIJING SEEKS BOLDER GLOBAL ROLE

KARL RITTER, KYIV

**C**HINESE President Xi Jinping plans to visit Moscow next week, offering a major diplomatic boost to Russian President Vladimir Putin just before the International Criminal Court announced it wants to put the Russian leader on trial for alleged war crimes.

Xi's visit was the latest sign of Beijing's emboldened diplomatic ambitions, and came amid sharpening East-West tensions over the war in Ukraine, now in its 13th month.

The U.S. last week said it would oppose any effort by China at the meeting to propose a ceasefire in Ukraine as the "ratification of Russian conquest."

China has sought to project itself as neutral in the conflict. Beijing has denounced Western sanctions against Moscow, and accused NATO and the United States of provoking Putin's military action.

Throughout the conflict, China has said the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected. It remains unclear, however, whether it sympathizes with Moscow's claims to seized Ukrainian territory.

Russian troops remain bogged down in a battle of attrition, focused now on those areas in Ukrai-

ne's eastern Donbas region.

Xi's visit would mark his first meeting with Putin since September, when they met on the sidelines of a regional summit in Uzbekistan. Before that, Putin attended the opening of the 2022 Beijing Winter Games and met with Xi shortly before sending troops into Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that Putin and Xi would have a one-on-one meeting over an informal dinner today. Broader talks involving officials from both countries on a range of subjects are scheduled for tomorrow.

Putin's foreign policy adviser, Yuri Ushakov, suggested the talks could yield new approaches to the fighting in Ukraine. "I'm sure that our leader and the Chinese leader will exchange their assessments of the situation" there, he said. "We shall see what ideas will emerge after that."

Kyiv doesn't just want Russia to pull back from areas taken since its February 2022 full-scale invasion. Zelenskyy has demanded that Russia also withdraw from the peninsula of Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014 in a move denounced by most of the world as illegal.

But Putin has shown no intention of relinquishing the Kremlin's gains. Instead, he stressed Friday

the importance of holding Crimea.

"Obviously, security issues take top priority for Crimea and Sevastopol now," he said, referring to Crimea's largest city. "We will do everything needed to fend off any threats."

On Thursday, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang reached out to his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, saying Beijing was concerned about the war spinning out of control and urging talks on a political solution with Moscow.

China has "always upheld an objective and fair stance on the Ukraine issue, has committed itself to promoting peace and advancing negotiations, and calls on the international community to create conditions for peace talks," Qin said.

Kuleba later tweeted that he and Qin "discussed the significance of the principle of territorial integrity."

"I underscored the importance of (Zelenskyy's) peace formula for ending the aggression and restoring just peace in Ukraine," wrote Kuleba, who spoke the same day with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

China last month called for a cease-fire and peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow. Zelenskyy welcomed Beijing's involvement but the overture

appeared to go no further.

Beijing's apparent deeper dive into Ukraine issues follows its success last week in brokering talks between Iran and its chief Middle Eastern rival, Saudi Arabia. Those two countries agreed to restore their diplomatic ties after years of tensions.

The agreement cast China in a leading role in Middle Eastern politics, a part previously reserved for longtime global heavyweights like the U.S.

On the back of that, Xi called for China to play a bigger role in managing global affairs.

Washington has marshaled Western military and diplomatic efforts against Putin.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said Britain would welcome any genuine effort by

China aimed at "restoring sovereignty to Ukraine."

"Any peace deal which is not predicated on Ukraine's sovereignty and self-determination is not a peace deal at all," Sunak's spokesman Jamie Davies said.

Natalia Butyrskaya, a Ukrainian political analyst, said Beijing's potential peacemaking role could be clouded by its stance on territorial integrity.

U.S.-Russia tensions were further escalated this week with the destruction of a U.S. drone over the Black Sea on Tuesday after an encounter with Russian fighter jets, although that also prompted the first conversations since October between the countries' defense and military chiefs.

Putin invited Xi to visit Russia during a video conference call the two held in late December. The visit, Putin said, could "demonstrate to the whole world the strength of the Russian-Chinese ties" and "become the main political event of the year in bilateral relations."

Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Friday that Xi and Putin will discuss "bilateral relations and major international and regional issues of common concern...."

"Currently, the world is entering a new period of turbulence and reform with the accelerated evolution of changes of the century," he added. As permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and important major countries, the significance and impact of the China-Russia relations go far beyond the bilateral sphere."

The arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court at The Hague accused Putin of involvement in abductions of children from Ukraine to Russia. It also issued a warrant for his commissioner for children's right, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova.

The court has no police force of its own to enforce warrants, and the Kremlin has said it doesn't recognize the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. MDT/AP

## WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ICC ARREST WARRANT ISSUED FOR PUTIN?

**I**N the immediate term, the ICC's warrant for Putin and one of his aides is unlikely to have a major impact on the meeting or China's position toward Russia. Neither China nor Russia — nor the United States or Ukraine — has ratified the ICC's founding treaty. The U.S., beginning with the Clinton administration, has refused to join the court, fearing that its broad mandate could result in the prosecution of American troops or officials.

That means that none of the four countries formally recognizes the court's jurisdiction or is bound by its orders, although Ukraine has

consented to allowing some ICC probes of crimes on its territory and the U.S. has cooperated with ICC investigations.

In addition, it is highly unlikely that Putin would travel to a country that would be bound by obligations to the ICC. If he did, it is questionable whether that country would actually arrest him. There is precedent for those previously indicted, notably former Sudanese President Omar Bashir, to have visited ICC members without being detained.

However, Putin's international status may take a hit unless the charges are withdrawn or he is acquitted.

AP PHOTO



# West spotlights North Korea rights abuses; China opposes

**EDITH M. LEDERER,**  
UNITED NATIONS

**T**HE United States, its Western allies and experts shone a spotlight on the dire human rights situation and increasing repression in North Korea at a U.N. meeting last week that China and Russia denounced as a politicized move likely to further escalate tensions on the Korean peninsula.

China blocked the U.S. from broadcasting the informal Security Council meeting globally on the internet, a decision criticized by U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

Webcasting requires agreement by all 15 council members. But the U.S. envoy said Beijing's effort was in vain because the meeting will be made public, and the U.S. and many others will continue to speak out against Pyongyang's human rights abuses and threats to international peace.

James Turpin, a senior official in the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the ongoing tensions on the Korean peninsula pose a threat to regional and international peace and security, and "these tensions cannot be separated from the dire human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Ko-

rea," the North's official name.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, North Korea has been isolated. The United Nations has no international staff in the country and Turpin said this "coincides with an increase in the repression of civil and political rights."

He pointed to stronger government measures to prevent people from getting access to information from the outside world, an extreme level of surveillance, people's homes being subjected to random search for material not authorized by the state, and punishments for anyone trying to exercise basic rights including freedom of expression, religion and peaceful assembly.

Elizabeth Salmon, the U.N. special investigator on human rights in North Korea, also stressed "the interdependence of international peace and security and human rights," saying peace and denuclearization can't be addressed without considering the current human rights violations.

She told the meeting that the limited information available shows the suffering of the North Korean people has increased and their already limited liberties have declined. Access to food, medicine and health care remains a priority concern, "peo-

ple have frozen to death during the cold spells in January," and some didn't have money to heat their homes while others were forced to live on the streets because they sold their homes as a last resort.

Xing Jisheng, a counsellor at China's U.N. Mission, criticized the U.S. for discussing human rights in the Security Council whose mandate is ensuring international peace and security, saying it "is not constructive in any way." Instead of easing tension, he said, "it may rather intensify the conflict, and therefore it's an irresponsible move."

"Using U.N. WebTV for live broadcast is a waste of U.N. resources," Xing added, saying if countries are really concerned about the

situation on the Korean peninsula and well-being of the people they should work to relaunch dialogue, de-escalate tensions, and support lifting sanctions that affect the livelihood of North Koreans and the country's deteriorating humanitarian situation.

Stepan Kuzmenkov, a senior counsellor at Russia's U.N. Mission, echoed China's opposition to having the Security Council discuss human rights and said there were no grounds for convening the meeting "which has a clear anti-North Korean bent."

He accused the U.S. of using human rights "to se-

ttle scores with the governments not to their liking" and condemned what he called "streams of disinformation" about North Korea disseminated by the U.S. and its allies "on the pretext that they're trying to protect human rights."

"What we see is that the United States, South Korea and Japan are engaging in aggressive, militaristic activities, thereby whipping up tensions in northeastern Asia, putting the security of countries in the region at risk," Kuzmenov said. "The Americans are ignoring initiatives which would help ease tensions as well as the substantive and constructive signals (North Korean leader) Kim Jong Un is sending, which could bring about possible de-escalation."

America's Thomas-Greenfield countered that "the regime's widespread human rights abuses and its threats to our collective security could not be clearer."

North Korea's ballistic missile and weapons of mass destruction programs threaten international peace and security and are "inextricably linked to the regime's human rights abuses," she said.

"In the DPRK, the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction always, always trumps human rights and humanitarian needs of its people," Thomas-Greenfield said. **MDT/AP**

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# Silicon Valley Bank collapse concerns founders of color

**I**n the hours after some of Silicon Valley Bank's biggest customers started pulling out their money, a WhatsApp group of startup founders who are immigrants of color ballooned to more than 1,000 members.

Questions flowed as the bank's financial status worsened. Some desperately sought advice: Could they open an account at a larger bank without a Social Security Number? Others questioned whether they had to physically be at a bank to open an account, because they're visiting parents overseas.

One clear theme emerged: a deep concern about the broader impact on startups led by people of color.

While Wall Street struggles to contain the banking crisis after the swift demise of SVB — the nation's 16th largest bank and the biggest to fail since the 2008 financial meltdown — industry experts predict it could become even harder for people of color to secure funding or a financial home supporting their startups.

SVB had opened its doors to such entrepreneurs, offering opportunities to form crucial relationships in the technology and financial communities that had been out of reach within larger financial institutions. But smaller players have fewer means of surviving a collapse, reflecting the perilous journey minority entrepreneurs face while attempting to navigate industries historically rife with racism.

"All these folks that have very special circumstances based on their identity, it's not something that they can just change about themselves and that makes them unbankable by the top four (large banks)," said Asya Bradley, a board member of numerous startups who has watched the WhatsApp group grapple with SVB's demise.

Bradley said some investors have implored startups to switch to larger financial institutions to stymie future financial risks, but that's not an easy transition.

"The reason why we're going to regional and community banks is because these (large) banks don't want our business," Bradley said.

Banking expert Aaron Klein, a senior fellow in Eco-

AP PHOTO



nomic Studies at the Brookings Institution, said SVB's collapse could exacerbate racial disparities.

"That's going to be more challenging for people who don't fit the traditional credit box, including minorities," Klein said. "A financial system that prefers the existing holders of wealth will perpetuate the legacy of past discrimination."

Tiffany Dufu was gutted when she couldn't access her SVB account and, in turn, could not pay her employees.

Dufu raised \$5 million as CEO of The Cru, a New York-based career coaching platform and community for women. It was a rare feat for businesses founded by Black women, which get less than 1% of the billions of dollars in venture capital funding doled out yearly to startups. She banked with SVB because it was known for its close ties to the tech community and investors.

"In order to have raised that money, I pitched nearly 200 investors over the past few years," said Dufu, who has since regained access to her funds and moved to Bank of America. "It's very hard to put yourself out there and time after time — you get told this isn't a good fit. So, the money in the bank account was very precious."

A February Crunchbase News analysis determined funding for Black-founded startups slowed by more than

50% last year after they received a record \$5.1 billion in venture capital in 2021. Overall venture funding dropped from about \$337 billion to roughly \$214 billion, while Black founders were hit disproportionately hard, dropping to just \$2.3 billion, or 1.1% of the total.

Entrepreneur Amy Hilliard, a professor at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, knows how difficult it is to secure financing. It took three years to secure a loan for her cake manufacturing company, and she had to sell her home to get it started.

Banking is based on relationships and when a bank like SVB goes under, "those relationships go away, too," said Hilliard, who is African American.

Some conservative critics asserted SVB's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion were to blame, but banking experts say those claims were false. The bank slid into insolvency because its larger customers pulled deposits rather than borrow at higher interest rates and the bank's balance sheets were overexposed, forcing it to sell bonds at a loss to cover the withdrawals.

"If we're focused on climate or communities of color or racial equity, that has nothing to do with what happened with Silicon Valley Bank," said Valerie Red-Horse Mohl, co-founder of Known Holdings, a Black, Indigenous, Asian

American-founded investment banking platform focused on the sustainable growth of minority-managed funds.

Red-Horse Mohl — who has raised, structured and managed over \$3 billion in capital for tribal nations — said most larger banks are led by white men and majority-white boards, and "even when they do DEI programs, it's not a really deep sort of shifting of capital."

Smaller financial institutions, however, have worked to build relationships with people of color. "We cannot lose our regional and community banks," she said. "It would be a travesty."

Historically, smaller and minority-owned banks have addressed funding gaps that larger banks ignored or even created, following exclusionary laws and policies as they turned away customers because of the color of their skin.

But the ripple effects from SVB's collapse are being felt among these banks as well, said Nicole Elam, president and CEO of the National Bankers Association, a 96-year-old trade association representing more than 175 minority-owned banks.

Some have seen customers withdraw funds and move to larger banks out of fear, even though most minority-owned banks have a more traditional customer base, with secured loans and minimal risky investments, she said. MDT/AP

## this day in history

1966 FOOTBALL'S WORLD CUP STOLEN



The football World Cup has been stolen while on exhibition at Central Hall in Westminster, London.

The £30,000 solid gold Jules Rimet trophy disappeared while a church service was taking place in another part of the building.

Thieves removed the cup from the "Sport with Stamps" display at the Stampex exhibition, but stamps worth £3m were left behind.

At least two guards were in the hall at the time of the theft. Alsa-Guard, the security firm at the exhibition, was not available for comment.

Delegates from current cup-holders Brazil left the cup in custody of the Federation of International Football Association (Fifa) last week.

The trophy was to be the centre-piece of the World Cup tournament being hosted by Britain later this year.

Vice-chairman of the Football Association Council, Jack Stewart, was reluctant to accept blame for the trophy's disappearance.

But he said: "We are responsible for it in the end because we are the organizing association."

Detectives and forensics experts are investigating the break-in and have appealed for anyone who was in Central Hall to contact Scotland Yard.

Police say a suspicious-looking man was seen in the building at the time of the theft. He is described as being in his early 30s, of average height with thin lips, greased black hair and a possible scar on his face.

The Jules Rimet trophy is named after a French lawyer who was a president of FIFA and initiated the World Cup competition in 1929.

Brazil have been holders of the Cup for the last eight years, after winning both the 1958 and 1962 competitions.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Several days of anxiety and frustration followed the Cup's theft.

Brazil said it was a sacrilege that would never have been committed in Brazil where even its thieves loved football too much.

But the trophy was eventually found by Pickles, a mongrel dog, out for a walk with his owner, on 27 March in south London.

Later that year it was England who won the World Cup, but in 1970 Brazil was allowed to keep the trophy for ever, after winning the competition for the third time.

The replacement trophy remains the prize for the World Cup to this day.

The Jules Rimet cup was stolen again in 1983 - in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It has never been recovered.

**YOUR STARS****ARIES**

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You're in the mood to spend money. The home environment will be unpredictable today. You need to spend some time pampering yourself.

**TAURUS**

Apr. 20-May. 20

Get back down to earth and to basics. You can gain valuable cultural knowledge through dealing with foreigners. You will be prone to carelessness that could result in accidents.

**GEMINI**

May. 21-Jun. 21

If you have treated them equitably, you might be able to count on their loyalty. Children might be on your mind. Don't hesitate to make special plans just for two.

**CANCER**

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Don't let other people meddle in your private affairs. Opportunities for love will develop while traveling or while attending religious functions. You won't have to look for the action.

**LEO**

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Get back to the comforts of cottage or home. Romance could be exciting if you are spontaneous. Nothing can be resolved if you don't want to talk about it.

**VIRGO**

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Drastic changes regarding your personal attitude are evident. Be careful of disclosing personal information. You may need the space, but you need the extra cash more.

**LIBRA**

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You can help a close friend find solutions to personal problems. Don't let your family put demands on you. Take time to visit someone who has been confined due to illness.

**SCORPIO**

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

You'll find love and you'll get into tiptop shape at the same time. Take a second look; difficulties with appliances, water, or electricity in your home may be evident.

**SAGITTARIUS**

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Focus on your domestic scene. Get together with friends or relatives. You need to concentrate on the areas where you can make a difference. You are best to be discreet.

**CAPRICORN**

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Don't offer to pay for others. Try not to be too harsh with loved ones; there will always be two sides to an issue. Any capricious behavior will confuse loved ones and your mood swings will result in loneliness.

**AQUARIUS**

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Problems with financial investments could make you nervous. Think before you act. Unforeseen circumstances will disrupt your daily routine. Take your time; do not make any decisions in haste.

**PISCES**

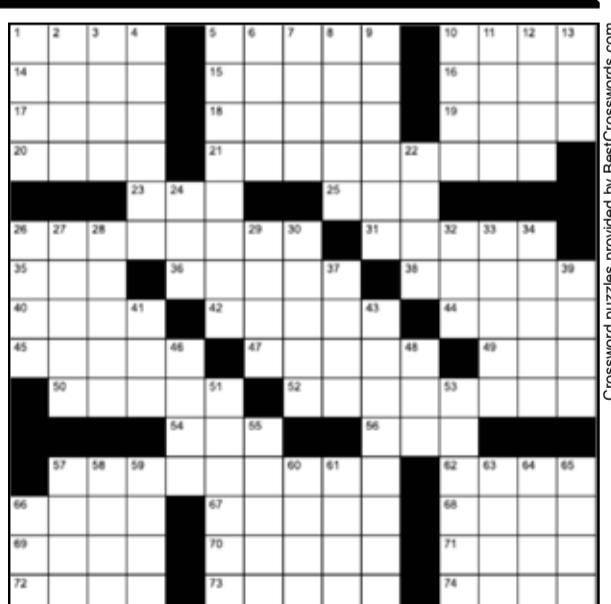
Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Sports, physical fitness programs, exercise in general will make you feel better and show some pretty quick results. Think twice before eating spicy foods; you may have problems with your stomach.

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Get an \_\_\_ effort; 5- Stone marker; 10- Swedish auto; 14- Aboriginal rite site; 15- High building; 16- The Beatles' "Back in the \_\_\_"; 17- Woodstock singer Joan; 18- Broadcasting; 19- Japanese soup; 20- Cockney greeting; 21- Christian festival; 23- Knock vigorously; 25- Actor Linden; 26- Sheriff; 31- Less common; 35- Nabokov novel; 36- Once more; 38- Languishes with longing; 40- It parallels a radius; 42- Dazzling display; 44- Sometimes you feel like \_\_\_\_\_. 45- Luminous; 47- Art supporter; 49- \_\_\_ Today; 50- Attack on all sides; 52- Pet birds; 54- Lunar plain; 56- HST's successor; 57- Feudal status; 62- Search; 66- Drop; 67- Aired again; 68- Brio; 69- Son of Isaac and Rebekah; 70- Top story; 71- Bright star; 72- Titanic's undoing; 73- Delicious; 74- A wedding cake may have three of these;

**DOWN** 1- French clergyman; 2- Young horse; 3- Hurler Hershiser; 4- Sharp instruments; 5- Strike; 6- Muscle quality; 7- Actor McGregor; 8- Film composer Stevens; 9- Debt that remains unpaid; 10- Japanese wrestling; 11- Garage sale sign; 12- Helper; Abbr.; 13- Pal in the 'hood; 22- Thunder unit; 24- Found it!; 26- Handle roughly; 27- Improvise; 28- Scope; 29- Chantilly product; 30- New Hampshire's state flower; 32- Narrow inlet; 33- Boredom; 34- Employ again; 37- Mission control gp.; 39- RR stops; 41- Signs of relief; 43- Inclination; 46- Dick Tracy's love; 48- Fellow; 51- Try to shred; 53- Take as an affront; 55- Prince Valiant's wife; 57- Urn; 58- Banned apple spray; 59- Garden pest; 60- Humanities; 61- Gallop or canter; 63- "The Time Machine" race; 64- Gutter location; 65- Knot in wood; 66- Short mo.;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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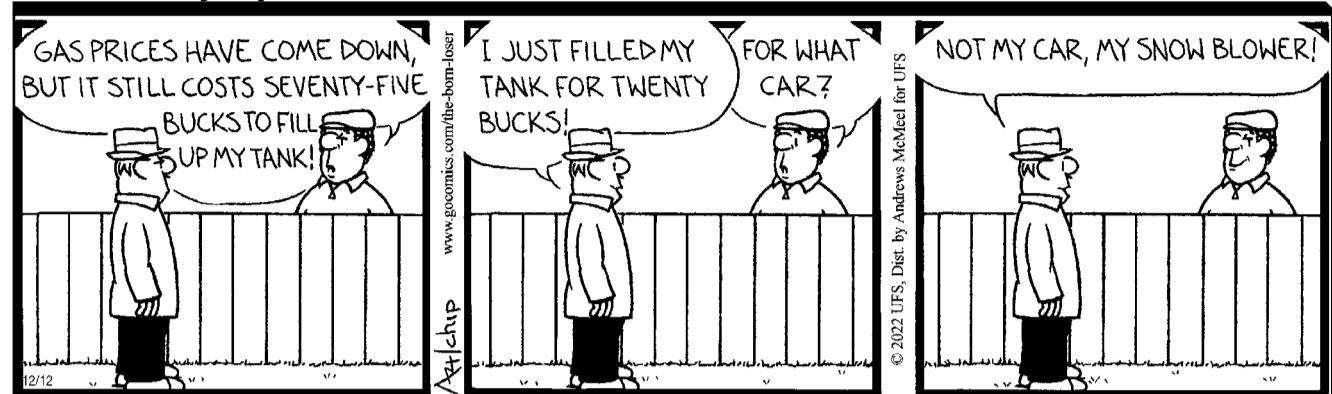
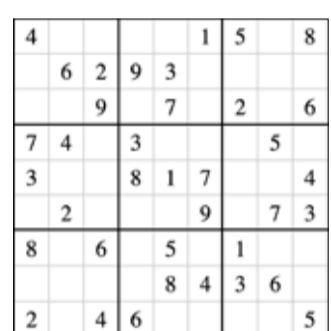
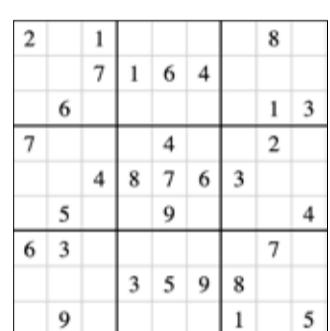
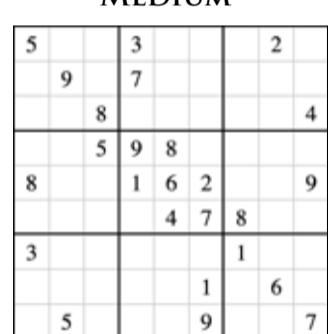
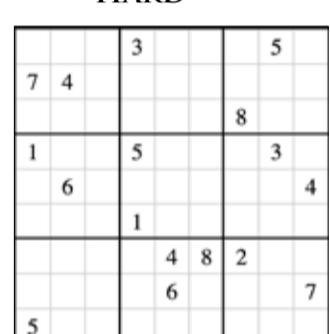
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Changchun	2	14	cloudy
Chengdu	12	17	overcast
Chongqing	14	21	cloudy
Fuzhou	13	25	cloudy
Guangzhou	20	26	overcast
Guiyang	7	20	cloudy
Haikou	21	31	cloudy
Hangzhou	8	18	overcast
Harbin	-1	14	fine
Hefei	5	17	rain
Nanjing	8	17	overcast
Shanghai	10	16	overcast
Taipei	17	20	cloudy
Wuhan	8	13	rain
Hong Kong	19	22	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-1	4	overcast
Frankfurt	6	14	rain
Paris	8	15	overcast
London	9	13	showers
New York	2	12	fine

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**M**IKAELE Shiffrin won her 21st career giant slalom at the World Cup Finals yesterday as the American standout ended the season with yet another record.

The victory moved Shiffrin past Vreni Schneider, a week after matching the Swiss skier's mark of 20 World Cup GS victories. The American has won seven of the last eight events and took the GS world title last month.

The overall record, between men and women, is held by Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark, who won 46 giant slaloms in the 1970s and 80s.

"I don't know, you guys tell me," Shiffrin said with a laugh when she was asked about possible next records in a course-side interview, conducted by her boyfriend and World Cup downhill champion, Aleksander Aamodt Kilde.

"Just keep moving right along," added Shiffrin, who secured the overall, slalom and GS titles this season and extended the all-time record for most career wins to 88.

After Kilde asked her about plans to improve for next season, Shiffrin quipped: "We can discuss that later, in private."

Shiffrin also set a personal best of 2,206 World Cup poin-

## SKI WORLD CUP

# American skier Shiffrin ends season with record 21st GS win

ts from 31 starts this season, two points more than her tally from 2018-19, when she competed in 26 races.

Only one skier secured more points in a single season: Slovenian great Tina Maze ended her 2012-13 campaign on 2,414.

Yesterday's result also marked Shiffrin's record 138th career World Cup podium, moving her one ahead of former teammate Lindsey Vonn's mark of 137.

But for Shiffrin, her personal favorite record came nine years ago.

"Honestly, I think probably being the youngest Olympic slalom champion. That was really the only record that I actually ever wanted, like really shot for," said Shiffrin, who was 18 when she won her first Olympic gold at the 2014 Sochi Games.

"It happened quite some time ago, and I'm still motivated today. I still had that ner-

vous feeling up there. I was so nervous at the start ... because you want to do well. And it doesn't matter about records, it's just you want to do well."

With the sun beaming down on the Avet course, Shiffrin held on to her first-run lead to edge Thea Louise Stjernesund by 0.06 seconds. The Norwegian earned her first career podium.

Canadian skier Valerie Gagnier was third, trailing Shiffrin by 0.20.

Three of the top seven ranked racers did not finish their first runs, as Petra Vlhova, who won Saturday's slalom, Federica Brignone and Olympic champion Sara Hector all missed a gate.

Two-time former world champion Tessa Worley placed 11th in what she said would be the last race of her career. The French GS specialist has won 16 races and three season titles, most recently last year. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



United States' Mikaela Shiffrin holds up the alpine ski, women's World Cup giant slalom discipline trophy, in Soldeu, Andorra, yesterday

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## OPINION

### China Daily

Li Yang, China Daily

### PRACTICAL PROMOTER OF PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST

The surprise announcement by Iran and Saudi Arabia that they had agreed to resume diplomatic relations after talks sponsored by China in Beijing last week has attracted attention to China's Special Envoy to the Middle East Zhai Jun's ongoing efforts shuttling between Palestine and Israel to facilitate a solution for issues between the two sides.

The rapprochement that Beijing has helped to broker between Teheran and Riyadh has lent his otherwise normal diplomatic efforts specific and pragmatic relevance.

In recent years, China has not only proposed a five-point initiative for achieving security and stability in the Middle East, a four-point proposal for the political settlement of the Syrian issue, and a three-point vision for the implementation of the two-state solution to the Palestinian question, but has also matched its words with deeds.

Given the sensitivity of these issues, many of China's pro-peace efforts to resolve them are understandably not suited to be publicized before concrete outcomes are confirmed, in a bid to create convenience and space for exchanges between disputing parties, and also to prevent some external powers from sabotaging the reconciliation process for their own narrow ends.

After World War II, due to its rich oil resources and strategic geopolitical significance, the Middle East has been made an arena for big power struggles, a root cause of the sufferings of local people and why the region still largely relies on oil money for development.

The end of the Iraq war in 2011 marked the beginning of the United States' withdrawal from the country as well as an overall diversion of its attention from the Middle East to the "Indo-Pacific". It left a mess behind, which Washington brazenly calls a "strategic vacuum" which it claims Beijing always casts a covetous eye at.

Yet, the robust development of China's relations with almost all countries in the region over the past decade, along with the tangible benefits local people have reaped from that, exposes the fallacy of the US' claim. China has proved itself to be a reliable partner and promoter of common development. Acting as another US-style manipulator to play one country against the other is not China's way.

That's why Special Envoy Zhai's ongoing endeavors are widely welcomed by the whole region, and China's mediation is highly appreciated by all stakeholders.

Dialogue and consultation among countries in the region aimed at solving their disputes should be supported. It is to be hoped that other influential nonregional countries can work together with China to contribute to the political settlement of their differences.

## NORTH KOREA LAUNCHES MISSILE INTO SEA AMID US-S.KOREA DRILLS

North Korea launched a short-range ballistic missile toward the sea yesterday, its neighbors said, ramping up testing activities in response to ongoing U.S.-South Korean military drills that it views as an invasion rehearsal.

The North's continuation of missile tests showed its determination not to back down despite the U.S.-South Korea exercises, which are the biggest of their kind in years. But many experts say the tests are also part of North Korea's bigger objective to expand its weapons arsenal, win global recognition as a nuclear state and get international sanctions lifted.

The missile launched from the North's northwestern Tongchang-ri area flew across the country before it landed in the waters off its east coast, according to South Korean and Japanese assessments. They said the missile traveled a distance of about 800 kilometers, a range that suggests the weapon could target South Korea.

The chief nuclear envoys from South Korea, Japan and the U.S. discussed the launch on the phone and strongly condemned it as a provocation that threatens peace on the Korean Peninsula and in the region.



### LEGAL TROUBLES

## TRUMP SAYS HE EXPECTS TO BE ARRESTED, CALLS FOR PROTEST

MICHELLE L. PRICE, JILL COLVIN & ERIC TUCKER, NEW YORK

**D**ONALD Trump claimed on Saturday that his arrest is imminent and issued an extraordinary call for his supporters to protest as a New York grand jury investigates hush money payments to women who alleged sexual encounters with the former president.

Even as Trump's lawyer and spokesperson said there had been no communication from prosecutors, Trump declared in a post on his social media platform that he expects to be taken into custody on Tuesday.

His message seemed designed to preempt a formal announcement from prosecutors and to galvanize outrage from his base of supporters in advance of widely anticipated charges. Within hours, his campaign was sending fundraising solicitations to his supporters, while influential Republicans in Congress and even some declared and potential rival candidates issued statements in his defense.

In a later post that went beyond simply exhorting loyalists to protest about his legal peril, the 2024 presidential candidate directed his overarching ire in all capital letters at the Biden administration and raised the

prospect of civil unrest: "IT'S TIME!!!" he wrote. "WE JUST CAN'T ALLOW THIS ANYMORE. THEY'RE KILLING OUR NATION AS WE SIT BACK & WATCH. WE MUST SAVE AMERICA! PROTEST, PROTEST, PROTEST!!!"

It all evoked, in foreboding ways, the rhetoric he used shortly before the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. After hearing from the then-president at a Washington rally that morning, his supporters marched to the Capitol and tried to stop the congressional certification of Democrat Joe Biden's White House victory, breaking through doors and windows of the building and leaving officers beaten and bloodied.

District Attorney Alvin Bragg is thought to be eyeing charges in the hush money investigation, and recently offered Trump a chance to testify before the grand jury. Local law enforcement officials are bracing for the public safety ramifications of an unprecedented prosecution of a former American president.

In an internal email following Trump's statements, Bragg said law enforcement would ensure that the 1,600 people who work in his office would remain safe, and that "any specific or credible threats" would be investigated.

"We do not tolerate attempts to intimidate our office or threaten the rule of law in New York," he wrote, and added: "In the meantime, as with all of our investigations, we will continue to apply the law evenly and fairly, and speak publicly only when appropriate."

There has been no public announcement of any time frame for the grand jury's secret work in the case. At least one additional witness is expected to testify, further indicating that no vote to indict has yet been taken, according to a person familiar with the investigation who was not authorized to publicly discuss the case and spoke on condition of anonymity.

That did not stop Trump from taking to his social media platform to say "illegal leaks" from Bragg's office indicate that "THE FAR & AWAY LEADING REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE & FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, WILL BE ARRESTED ON TUESDAY OF NEXT WEEK."

A Trump lawyer, Susan Necheles, said Trump's post was "based on the media reports," and a spokesperson said there had been "no notification" from Bragg's office, though the origin of Trump's Tuesday reference was unclear. MDT/AP



**France** Protesters have vandalized the Nice office of the president of the Republicans party in an apparent threat to get his right-wing party to vote to block President Emmanuel Macron's pension reform. Eric Ciotti tweeted a photo of his office in the French Riviera city with shattered windows, after a paving stone was thrown at it overnight into Sunday. The vandals also scrawled the words "the motion or the stone"—in reference to the motions of censure against the pension reform that will be voted on Monday in the National Assembly in Paris.



**Berlin** Publication of a major new United Nations report on climate change is being held up by a battle between rich and developing countries over emissions targets and financial aid to vulnerable nations. The report by hundreds of the world's top scientists was supposed to be approved by government delegations Friday at the end of a weeklong meeting in the Swiss town of Interlaken. The deadline was repeatedly extended as officials from big nations such as China, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, as well as the United Nations and the European Union haggled through the weekend over the wording of key phrases in the text.



**Israeli** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged the military's chief of staff yesterday to contain a wave of protest from within the ranks over a contentious government plan to overhaul the judiciary. Netanyahu's remarks come as Israel is embroiled in a major crisis that has sent tens of thousands of people into the streets protesting every week for the last two months. The divide over Netanyahu's plans to change the legal system has not spared the country's military, its most trusted institution, where many reservists have pledged not to show up for duty under what they see as impending regime change.